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Q1 / 2026

QUARTERLY EDITION

CURRENT AFFAIRS

JANUARY / FEBRUARY / MARCH



THE QUARTER, EXPLAINED.

22 in-depth chapters · 50 Prelims questions
Photographs · Visual explainers · Mains practice

NEWS CUTOFF 31 MARCH 2026

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EDITORIAL

Read the event. Understand the issue.

A quarterly companion for Prelims, Mains and clearer thinking.

A good current-affairs note should answer more than “what happened?”. It should explain the problem behind the announcement, the institutions involved and the choices that remain. This edition brings January, February and March together so that related developments can be studied as one connected story.

INSIDE THE ISSUE

22 analytical chapters, 22 comparison tables, 22 mechanism diagrams, 50 original Prelims questions with explanations, 22 Mains prompts with answer outlines, and two original ethics cases.

First reading: build the foundation

Start with the photograph, dated development and plain-language opening. Read the concept page slowly. The worked examples are illustrative teaching examples, not reported events.

Second reading: practise judgement

Use the analysis page to identify benefits, constraints and implementation choices. The mechanism diagram helps reconstruct an argument without memorising a paragraph.

Final revision: test the distinctions

Use the timeline, comparison tables and exam traps before attempting the practice set. Return to the linked chapter when an answer reveals a conceptual gap.

SCOPE AND DATING

This is a retrospective, subject-wise selection of 22 major themes from 1 January to 31 March 2026, not a day-by-day archive of every event. Prepared on 12 November 2026 using dated primary material. Later developments are excluded from the quarter’s narrative. GS links are editorial study links; practice questions are not official UPSC questions.

News summaries are source-linked. Explanations, examples, questions and policy assessments are editorial teaching material. Government projections are described as targets or expectations, not verified outcomes. Photographs are real, credited event or archival images; captions identify their context.

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QUARTER AT A GLANCE

The dates that organise the story

Chronology identifies the announcement date, not proof of implementation.

JANUARY

07 JAN	**Census preparation** — Houselisting window notified for April-September 2026.
12 JAN	**PSLV-C62** — Mission encounter with an anomaly near PS3; analysis initiated.
17 JAN	**High seas governance** — BBNJ agreement enters into force.
21 JAN	**Finance and social security** — SIDBI capital infusion and APY continuation approved.
27 JAN	**India-EU summit** — FTA negotiations concluded; broader partnership outcomes.
29 JAN	**Economic Survey** — Growth assessment and outlook released.
30 JAN	**Menstrual health** — Supreme Court judgment links school conditions with rights.
31 JAN	**Wetlands** — Patna Bird Sanctuary and Chhari-Dhand additions announced.

MARCH

03-09 MAR	**West Asia response** — Indian official statements address citizens, energy and trade.
05 MAR	**Census tools** — Digital preparation explained; two phases distinguished.
18 MAR	**Industry and energy** — BHAVYA and small-hydro schemes approved.
18 MAR	**Culture and livelihoods** — Bharat Tribes Fest inaugurated in New Delhi.
25 MAR	**Climate and connectivity** — Updated 2031-35 NDC and Modified UDAN approved.
28 MAR	**Festival extension** — Extension to 5 April announced; April outcomes outside this issue.

QUARTER AT A GLANCE

February: policy and institutional change

Chronology identifies the announcement date, not proof of implementation.

FEBRUARY

01 FEB	**Union Budget** — Fiscal and investment proposals; Bharat-VISTAAR proposed.
06 FEB	**India-US trade** — Interim-trade framework announced.
13-14 FEB	**Urban and enterprise finance** — Urban Fund decision and release; Startup FoF 2.0 approved.
17 FEB	**India-France** — Partnership upgrade and Year of Innovation launch.
18-19 FEB	**AI summit** — New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact.
20-24 FEB	**US tariff sequence** — Court ruling and proclamation; surcharge effective 24 February.
27 FEB	**GDP measurement** — 2022-23 base-year national-accounts series released.
28 FEB	**Public health / West Asia** — HPV campaign launch; latest regional conflict phase begins.

KEEP THE STAGES SEPARATE

Proposal → approval → operational rules → delivery → measured outcome. These are distinct stages. The chapter notes identify which stage the quarter’s evidence supports.

A useful question for every headline

What changed during this quarter, and what still depended on future action? Ask that question about the Budget, trade negotiations, climate targets and infrastructure schemes. It prevents an announced intention from quietly becoming an invented achievement in an answer.

SOURCE TRAIL

The timeline uses the source IDs attached to the relevant chapters. All links are collected in the source register. For fast revision, use the dates here; for interpretation, return to the full chapter.

01 / ECONOMY / FEBRUARY

Budget 2026-27: the quality of public spending

A smaller deficit can coexist with investment. The difficult question is what the spending achieves.



North Block, New Delhi, 2012. Archival photograph of the fiscal-policy setting; not the 2026 Budget presentation. Mukulfaiz / CC BY-SA 3.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The Union Budget presented on 1 February set the fiscal deficit at 4.3% of GDP for 2026-27, against 4.4% in the revised estimate for 2025-26. Total expenditure was estimated at ₹53.5 lakh crore. A separate Budget release placed public capital expenditure at ₹12.2 lakh crore, compared with ₹11.2 lakh crore in the previous year's Budget Estimate. These are budget estimates and policy intentions, not a statement of money already spent.

Imagine two districts receiving the same road allocation. One builds a disconnected stretch; the other removes a bottleneck between farms and a functioning market. The accounting entry may look similar, but the economic gain is different. This is the central Budget question for an aspirant: how do public resources become productive assets, useful services and better living standards?

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: government budgeting; growth and development

Source notes: S01, S02 | Full register at the back.

01 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Budget 2026-27: the quality of public spending

Read the accounts before judging the policy

A fiscal deficit is total expenditure minus revenue receipts and non-debt capital receipts. It indicates the government's borrowing requirement, rather than the trade deficit or the losses of public enterprises. Revenue expenditure usually supports current services, transfers and interest payments. Capital expenditure generally creates assets or reduces liabilities. The distinction helps organise the accounts, but it is not a ranking of social value. Paying a trained nurse is current spending; constructing an unused hospital is capital spending. Both the composition and the usefulness of expenditure matter.

Why investment can support growth

A well-chosen transport project lowers the time and uncertainty involved in moving goods. Firms can then serve a larger market and hold fewer precautionary stocks. Public investment may also encourage private investment when businesses expect reliable power, logistics and demand. This is often called crowding in. The opposite is possible when public borrowing makes finance expensive or when poorly selected projects absorb scarce land and skilled workers. The effect depends on spare capacity, financing conditions, project readiness and the quality of execution.

Stocks, flows and the GDP denominator

The annual deficit is a flow; outstanding debt is a stock accumulated over time. A lower deficit does not automatically mean debt has fallen in rupees. Debt relative to GDP can decline when the economy's nominal income grows faster than the debt stock. Nominal GDP includes price changes as well as real output growth. Therefore, a favourable debt ratio needs to be read alongside interest costs, revenue strength and the reliability of the growth assumptions. A ratio can improve without resolving every pressure on the budget.

Measure	What to ask
Budget Estimate (BE)	What is planned for the coming year?
Revised Estimate (RE)	How has the current-year expectation changed?
Actual expenditure	What was finally spent and audited?

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Illustrative arithmetic: if expenditure is 100 units and revenue plus non-debt capital receipts total 80, the fiscal deficit is 20. Borrowing fills the financing gap; it does not count as a receipt that makes the deficit disappear. If interest payments are 6, the primary deficit is 14. These numbers explain the concepts and are not Budget estimates.

Source notes: S01, S02 | Full register at the back.

01 / ECONOMY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The case for a credible medium-term path

Predictable fiscal policy gives ministries, states and investors a clearer basis for planning. It can also preserve room to respond to a recession, a disaster or an external energy shock. Yet credibility should not mean mechanically cutting every programme when receipts disappoint. A government should distinguish projects that can safely be delayed from essential maintenance, nutrition and frontline services. The better test is whether adjustment protects productive capacity and vulnerable households while keeping debt service manageable.

The implementation problem

An allocation must pass through project design, land and environmental processes, procurement, construction and maintenance. Weakness at any stage can leave funds unspent or produce an asset that works below capacity. Independent appraisal and realistic completion schedules reduce the temptation to announce too many projects at once. Public reporting should track service outcomes: travel time saved, reliable electricity supplied or classrooms actually used. Expenditure dashboards are useful, but they cannot substitute for checking whether the asset works.

A balanced Mains argument

Avoid treating fiscal discipline and welfare as permanent opposites. A reliable tax base, better targeting where appropriate and reduction of waste can support both. Equally, do not assume every subsidy is wasteful or every capital project productive. Ask who benefits, what problem the spending addresses and what the alternative use of the money would be. A strong answer connects fiscal sustainability with the state's capacity to deliver health, education, infrastructure and protection against shocks.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



> **PRELIMS TRAP**
>
> Capital expenditure is not automatically efficient; a lower deficit ratio does not necessarily reduce nominal debt.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

“The quality of fiscal consolidation matters as much as its pace.” Discuss in the context of public investment. (250 words)

Answer route: Begin with the deficit-investment tension. Explain crowding in and debt sustainability, then examine execution, maintenance and social-sector needs. Conclude with outcome-based appraisal and a credible, flexible medium-term fiscal path.

Source notes: S01, S02 | Full register at the back.

02 / ECONOMY / JANUARY + FEBRUARY

Growth numbers: what changed with the GDP series?

Separate an economic change from a change in how the economy is measured.



THE ISSUE BEHIND THE NEWS

An economy changes faster than a household shopping list. New services appear, firms reorganise production and the relative importance of industries shifts. National accounts must periodically catch up. Rebasing is therefore essential, but it creates a reading problem: an apparent improvement in a headline number may partly reflect a better measuring instrument.

Solar-powered farm infrastructure in Tamil Nadu, 2010. Archival context for development and clean energy. PWRDF / CC BY 2.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The Economic Survey released on 29 January discussed a 7.4% real GDP growth estimate for 2025-26 and projected 6.8-7.2% for 2026-27. On 27 February, MoSPI released a new national-accounts series with 2022-23 as the base year, replacing 2011-12. The new-series estimate for 2025-26 was 7.6%. The two estimates belong to different statistical vintages and should not be treated as a simple before-and-after acceleration in the economy.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: growth; national income; economic measurement

Source notes: S03, S04, S05 | Full register at the back.

02 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Growth numbers: what changed with the GDP series?

GDP, GVA and value added

GDP measures the value of final goods and services produced within an economy over a period. Counting only final output, or equivalently adding value at successive production stages, avoids counting the same input repeatedly. Gross value added describes what producers add after subtracting intermediate consumption. At the aggregate level, GDP at market prices equals GVA at basic prices plus product taxes minus product subsidies. This helps explain why GDP and GVA growth can differ even though both describe the same broad economy.

Current prices and constant prices

Nominal output is valued at current prices. Real output attempts to remove the effect of price changes, making it more useful for comparing production over time. A new base year updates the reference structure and can be accompanied by improved sources and methods. It does not simply multiply every earlier number by a fixed factor. Before comparing growth rates, check the price basis, base year, reference period and release stage. An advance estimate, a later estimate and a revised estimate need not be identical.

Growth is not a complete welfare measure

GDP is an important measure of production, but it does not tell us how income is distributed or whether work is secure. Unpaid household care is not fully captured as market production. Pollution can accompany rising output, while spending to repair environmental damage may itself add to measured activity. Per capita income adjusts for population size but still hides inequality. A sensible assessment therefore combines national income with employment quality, real wages, health, learning and environmental indicators.

Number	Correct reading
7.4% in the January Survey	Earlier estimate, before the new series
7.6% in the February release	Estimate under the new 2022-23 series
6.8-7.2% Survey outlook	Forecast range for 2026-27, not an outcome

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Suppose a bakery sells bread worth ₹1,000 using flour and other intermediate inputs worth ₹600. Its value added is ₹400. Adding the full value of flour once again to final bread sales would double-count part of production. This simplified example leaves taxes, subsidies and inventories aside to isolate the idea.

Source notes: S03, S04, S05 | Full register at the back.

02 / ECONOMY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Why a back series matters

Researchers need a consistent historical series to judge whether growth has accelerated or slowed over a long period. Joining an old-series level to a new-series level can create a misleading jump. Until comparable historical data are available, the correct response is to acknowledge the break in comparability and use the official explanatory notes. For a UPSC answer, this restraint is a strength: it demonstrates that the candidate understands the number, rather than merely remembering it.

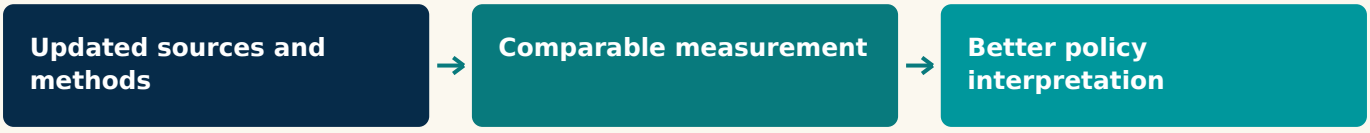
Interpreting the Economic Survey

The Survey provides an assessment and an outlook; the Budget sets out the government's fiscal proposals. A forecast is conditional on assumptions about investment, demand, trade and external conditions. It is not a guarantee of the next year's growth. When reading a forecast range, ask which risks might move the result towards either end. An energy-price shock, for instance, can raise business costs and squeeze household purchasing power even if domestic investment remains relatively resilient.

What should follow statistical reform?

Better measurement should improve policy choices. If new data reveal that a sector is larger or more productive than previously understood, the government can revisit infrastructure and skills priorities. Statistical credibility also depends on clear documentation, predictable release schedules and explanations accessible to non-specialists. Revisions are normal in national accounting; unexplained revisions damage trust. The appropriate demand is transparency and consistency, not a promise that an early estimate will never change.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



> PRELIMS TRAP
>
> A new base year does not by itself prove that households became richer between two release dates.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Why is periodic revision of national accounts necessary? Discuss the limits of GDP as a measure of development. (250 words)

Answer route: Explain structural change and measurement first. Distinguish nominal/real and GDP/GVA. Discuss comparability, unpaid work, inequality and environmental costs; finish with a dashboard of complementary indicators.

Source notes: S03, S04, S05 | Full register at the back.

03 / ECONOMY / JANUARY + FEBRUARY

Financing enterprise: SIDBI and Startup Fund of Funds

A bank-capital infusion and a venture fund solve different financing problems.



Textile manufacturing in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, 2022. Archival industry photograph; not a BHAVYA project. Ravi Dwivedi / CC BY-SA 4.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 21 January the Cabinet approved a ₹5,000 crore equity infusion into SIDBI, phased over three financial years. On 14 February it approved Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 with a ₹10,000 crore corpus. These announcements operate through different channels: strengthening a development financial institution's capital and supporting startup investment through a fund-of-funds structure. Neither announcement means that every eligible enterprise receives a direct government grant.

A small workshop with confirmed orders may struggle to obtain working capital. A research startup may have no sales yet and need years to test a product. Both face a finance gap, but the same loan product cannot sensibly serve both. Public policy must match the instrument to the enterprise's cash flow, uncertainty and stage of development.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: industry; MSMEs; investment models

Source notes: S06, S07 | Full register at the back.

03 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Financing enterprise: SIDBI and Startup Fund of Funds

Credit and equity carry different claims

Debt must normally be serviced according to a schedule. It suits an enterprise with reasonably predictable cash flows, but becomes difficult when revenue is distant or highly uncertain. Equity shares ownership and the risk of loss; returns depend on the firm's eventual value rather than a fixed interest payment. A grant does not create the same repayment or ownership claim, although it can carry conditions. Mixing these categories produces weak answers about enterprise finance and government support.

Why capital matters to a lender

A financial institution uses its capital as a cushion against losses. A larger capital base can support an expansion of lending, subject to prudential requirements, funding availability and credit quality. This is why an equity infusion is different from asking a lender to make a specified amount of subsidised loans. Capital does not remove the need to appraise borrowers. If new lending is poorly selected, the institution can lose the very capacity the infusion was intended to strengthen.

What a fund of funds does

A fund of funds invests through other investment funds rather than selecting every underlying startup itself. Intermediary fund managers can contribute sector knowledge, due diligence and follow-on support. The structure can attract private investors, but it also creates another layer of incentives and fees. Its success should be judged by additional finance reaching suitable firms, the quality of governance and long-term enterprise development, rather than by the headline corpus alone.

Instrument	Core function
SIDBI equity infusion	Strengthens the institution’s capital base
Fund of funds	Invests through intermediary investment funds
Direct grant	Supports an activity without the same debt/equity claim

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Consider two hypothetical firms. A furniture unit needs three months of working capital against orders; a medical-device startup needs two years of testing before sales. The first may suit well-appraised credit. The second may need patient equity and testing support. This is an analytical example, not a promise of eligibility under either announcement.

Source notes: S06, S07 | Full register at the back.

03 / ECONOMY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The case for public participation

Young firms may lack collateral or a long credit history even when their ideas are promising. Private investors may also hesitate to finance technologies with long development periods and uncertain commercial markets. Public participation can share some of this risk and help build a wider investment ecosystem. The strongest justification is additionality: the support enables useful activity that would otherwise be underfinanced. Merely replacing money that private investors would have supplied anyway offers a weaker public return.

Where the design can fail

Cheap finance cannot compensate indefinitely for an unviable product, unreliable electricity or delayed payments from buyers. A geographically concentrated investment network may also overlook capable firms outside large cities. Selection should guard against political influence and repeated funding of weak ventures. At the same time, demanding that every innovation investment succeed would encourage excessive caution. The correct standard is disciplined portfolio management, transparent selection and learning from failure, not zero commercial risk.

An enterprise policy beyond finance

For a small manufacturer, a timely payment can matter as much as a new loan. For a technology startup, testing facilities and an early customer may be decisive. Public procurement, standards laboratories, mentoring and access to skilled workers should therefore complement finance. A useful evaluation compares supported firms with similar unsupported firms, while accounting for selection differences. Employment, productivity and survival are more informative than counting sanctions or registrations alone.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

A corpus is not the same as investment already disbursed, and institutional equity is not a loan waiver.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Public finance for enterprise must address different stages of business development. Explain. (150 words)

Answer route: Use the contrast between working capital and uncertain innovation. Explain debt, equity and intermediary investment; add additionality, governance and complementary reforms.

Source notes: S06, S07 | Full register at the back.

04 / SOCIAL PROTECTION / JANUARY

Atal Pension Yojana: the challenge of income in old age

Enrolment matters, but contribution continuity and purchasing power matter too.



THE ISSUE BEHIND THE NEWS

A worker may earn enough during the harvest or festival season and very little in the following months. Saving regularly for an old age several decades away is difficult in that situation. The problem is not simply a lack of financial knowledge. It is also irregular income, emergencies and the absence of a stable employer-linked retirement arrangement.

Farm work in East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, 2010. Archival context; the person is not identified as a scheme beneficiary. kiran kumar / Kiran Kumar G / CC BY-SA 2.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The Cabinet on 21 January approved continuation of Atal Pension Yojana up to 2030-31, together with support for promotional, developmental and gap-funding activities. Launched in 2015, APY is a contributory pension arrangement that provides a guaranteed minimum monthly pension in specified slabs from ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 after age 60. Continuation of the scheme should be distinguished from a change in the pension slabs.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: welfare schemes; vulnerable sections | GS III: inclusive growth

Source notes: S08 | Full register at the back.

04 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Atal Pension Yojana: the challenge of income in old age

A pension is a long-term commitment

A contributory pension builds an entitlement through payments during working life. It differs from a tax-financed assistance pension for people who meet specified vulnerability conditions. Insurance, savings and pensions overlap in purpose but are not interchangeable: insurance pools a defined risk, savings provide an owned balance and a pension is designed to support income in old age. A household may need all three. Treating one small pension product as a complete social-security system understates the wider problem.

Coverage has more than one meaning

Opening an account is the first step. Effective coverage also requires continued contributions, understandable records, accessible grievance handling and eventual receipt of benefits. A large enrolment figure can coexist with irregular participation. Monitoring should therefore distinguish active accounts from cumulative enrolments and examine why contributions lapse. The answer may be low income, migration, banking friction or poor communication. Each cause needs a different remedy; a publicity campaign alone cannot solve them all.

The inflation question

A fixed nominal amount buys fewer goods when prices rise. Guaranteed does not automatically mean inflation-indexed. For retirement policy, adequacy must be assessed against future living costs and other household resources. This is especially important for people with little land, savings or family support. A small pension can still provide valuable predictable income, but its purpose and limits should be explained honestly. Financial inclusion should improve informed choice, not simply increase the number of accounts opened.

Stage	Better monitoring question
Entry	Did the worker understand the commitment?
Working life	Are contributions continuing without avoidable friction?
Retirement	Is the benefit accessible and adequate alongside other support?

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Illustrative purchasing-power exercise: if a fixed pension is ₹5,000 and prices rise by 5% in one year, it buys roughly what ₹4,762 bought before the increase. This is arithmetic to explain inflation risk; it is not a forecast of inflation or a personal pension recommendation.

Source notes: S08 | Full register at the back.

04 / SOCIAL PROTECTION / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Making participation practical

Contribution systems should be easy to understand and usable by workers with uneven earnings. Clear reminders, error correction and help with bank-account problems can prevent avoidable lapses. Counselling should use examples of long-term contributions and likely retirement needs, without promising investment outcomes outside the scheme's terms. A worker should understand the arrangement before committing scarce money. Accessibility also means serving people who are uncomfortable with an app or depend on assisted banking.

Women, informal work and unequal security

Unpaid care, interrupted employment and lower independent earnings can weaken women's ability to accumulate retirement resources. Informal workers also differ widely: a self-employed trader, a migrant labourer and a home-based worker face different risks. Policy should identify these barriers rather than assume that a single enrolment drive reaches everyone equally. Linking pension outreach with reliable public health and social assistance can reduce the pressure to withdraw from long-term saving whenever a household faces an emergency.

What fiscal sustainability requires

A pension promise extends beyond an annual budget cycle. Government support, guarantees and administrative costs need to be planned over time. Sustainability and adequacy should be considered together: an affordable promise that provides negligible protection is inadequate, while an unsustainable promise creates uncertainty for future beneficiaries. The appropriate approach combines realistic assumptions, transparent liabilities, periodic evaluation and a broader floor of social protection for people unable to contribute regularly.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER

Understandable enrolment → **Contribution continuity** → **Usable retirement income**

PRELIMS TRAP

Continuation to 2030-31 is not a declaration that every pension payment is indexed to inflation.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Assess the challenges of extending pension security to workers in the informal economy. (250 words)

Answer route: Organise the answer around coverage, continuity, adequacy and sustainability. Connect irregular earnings and gender barriers with assisted delivery and a wider social-protection floor.

Source notes: S08 | Full register at the back.

05 / URBAN GOVERNANCE / FEBRUARY

Urban Challenge Fund: making city finance work

Borrowing can build infrastructure; it cannot replace a city’s capacity to govern.



Marine Drive skyline, Mumbai, 2016. Archival urban-development context. A.Savin / FAL.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

A Cabinet decision taken on 13 February and announced on 14 February approved the Urban Challenge Fund with ₹1 lakh crore in central assistance. The central share is to cover 25% of project cost, subject to at least 50% being raised from market sources. Municipal bonds, bank lending and public-private partnerships feature in the financing design. The projected ₹4 lakh crore investment is an intended mobilisation, not completed expenditure.

A city's new water-treatment plant may look attractive to an investor only if somebody can credibly pay for it over decades. Residents, however, judge the project by safe, reliable and affordable water. Urban finance must bring these perspectives together. A bankable project and an inclusive public service should reinforce each other, but they do not do so automatically.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: local government | GS III: infrastructure; urbanisation

Source notes: S09 | Full register at the back.

05 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Urban Challenge Fund: making city finance work

Why cities need more than construction grants

Urban infrastructure has a large upfront cost and a long service life. Paying the whole cost from a single year's revenue can be difficult. Borrowing spreads payment over time, potentially aligning it with the people who use the asset. But debt must be repaid. Property-tax administration, user charges where appropriate, intergovernmental transfers and other legitimate revenues determine repayment capacity. A loan is a financing source; it is not a permanent revenue source that removes the underlying fiscal constraint.

What investors actually assess

A municipal borrower needs reliable accounts, predictable revenues, legal authority to borrow and a credible project. Investors also consider existing liabilities and the risk that promised tariffs or transfers will not materialise. Credit enhancement can reduce perceived risk, but somebody ultimately bears that risk. A guarantee is therefore a contingent public obligation, not free money. Transparent disclosure of guarantees and realistic revenue forecasts are essential to prevent today's infrastructure decision from becoming tomorrow's hidden fiscal stress.

The role of local democracy

Infrastructure decisions affect land use, neighbourhood access and the distribution of costs. Elected local bodies should be able to debate priorities and explain trade-offs to residents. Technical agencies and private partners can supply expertise, but fragmented responsibility makes accountability difficult. If one body builds a sewer, another owns the road and a third controls treatment, coordination failures are likely. Financing reform must therefore be accompanied by clear institutional responsibility and capable municipal staff.

Question	Why it matters
Who repays?	Borrowing needs a durable revenue stream
Who receives service?	Bankability must be tested against inclusion
Who maintains it?	Asset life depends on recurrent spending

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

For an illustrative ₹100 crore project satisfying the stated financing conditions, central assistance would cover ₹25 crore and market finance would need to provide at least ₹50 crore. The remaining ₹25 crore could come from eligible other sources. The example explains shares; it does not approve a particular project or guarantee its revenue.

Source notes: S09 | Full register at the back.

05 / URBAN GOVERNANCE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The inclusion test

Projects with easy revenue streams may attract finance more readily than essential services in low-income settlements. A city should not abandon the latter because willingness or ability to pay is limited. Explicit subsidies, carefully designed cross-subsidies and service obligations can protect access while keeping accounts honest. In an answer, distinguish inability to pay from unwillingness to pay. Affordable basic service and disciplined collection from those able to pay are compatible policy goals.

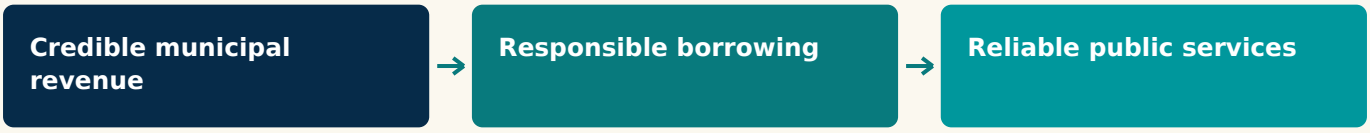
The smaller-city problem

Large cities often have deeper revenue bases and stronger technical teams. Smaller municipalities may struggle even to prepare a credible project report. Competitive selection can improve quality, but it can also repeatedly favour places already equipped to compete. Shared technical support, standardised disclosure and assistance with accounting can widen participation. The objective should be to develop municipal capability, not create a permanent dependence on outside consultants for every project decision.

Measure the service, not just the money raised

Successful borrowing is an intermediate step. For a water project, relevant outcomes include continuity, quality, leakage and affordability. For transport, they include reliability, accessibility and travel time. Maintenance budgets should be protected before deterioration makes repairs expensive. Public dashboards should show these service measures alongside financial obligations. That combination makes it possible for citizens to judge whether a city has acquired a useful asset or merely a larger repayment schedule.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Market finance is broader than privatisation, and a guarantee does not eliminate the underlying risk.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Can market-based urban infrastructure finance strengthen local government? Examine the conditions. (250 words)

Answer route: Explain the financing gap and potential discipline of borrowing. Balance these with municipal capacity, affordability, contingent liabilities and democratic oversight. End with service outcomes and transparent accounts.

Source notes: S09 | Full register at the back.

06 / INDUSTRY / MARCH

BHAVYA: industrial parks and the missing connections

Ready land is useful only when firms can reach workers, suppliers and markets.



Textile manufacturing in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, 2022. Archival industry photograph; not a BHAVYA project. Ravi Dwivedi / CC BY-SA 4.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 18 March, the Cabinet approved the Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA), with an outlay of ₹33,660 crore for 100 plug-and-play industrial parks. The initiative envisages collaboration with states and private participants within the industrial-corridor development framework. An approved programme and a target number of parks should not be described as completed industrial capacity or jobs already created.

A factory does not become competitive merely because its plot has a boundary wall. It needs reliable power, water, transport, workers, suppliers and predictable administration. Industrial parks can bring these requirements together. Their real value is the time and uncertainty they remove from starting and running a productive business.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: industrial policy; infrastructure; employment

Source notes: S10 | Full register at the back.

06 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

BHAVYA: industrial parks and the missing connections

What plug-and-play should mean

In industrial policy, plug-and-play refers to facilities that allow enterprises to begin operations with fewer delays in securing basic infrastructure and services. It does not mean exemption from every legal requirement. A prepared site may reduce the cost of arranging utilities, internal roads and common facilities separately. The important question is which services are actually ready, at what price and with what reliability. A park that advertises readiness but lacks a working water or power connection transfers hidden costs back to firms.

Why clusters can raise productivity

When related firms locate near one another, suppliers find a larger market, workers can develop specialised skills and knowledge travels more easily. Shared testing laboratories or waste-treatment facilities may become affordable. These agglomeration benefits explain why firms often cluster rather than spread evenly across every district. But proximity alone is insufficient. A cluster needs economic connections: a testing laboratory that firms cannot access, or a training centre teaching the wrong skills, adds little value.

Infrastructure and coordination failure

A supplier may hesitate to invest until large customers arrive. Large customers may hesitate until suppliers and logistics exist. A coordinated park can help overcome this waiting problem. Public action is strongest when it provides common infrastructure and clear rules rather than attempting to choose every successful business. The design should leave space for firms to adapt, enter and exit. Long-term competitiveness cannot depend only on a temporary subsidy that disappears once the initial investment is made.

Headline	Evidence needed
100 parks targeted	Sites developed and services operational
Investment proposed	Capital actually committed and deployed
Jobs expected	Sustained employment, wages and working conditions

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Suppose a park offers cheap land but the nearest freight terminal is unreliable. A competing site has higher land prices but dependable transport and a skilled labour pool. A firm may rationally choose the second site because total operating costs matter more than one subsidised input. This comparison is illustrative.

Source notes: S10 | Full register at the back.

06 / INDUSTRY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Avoiding empty parks

Land acquisition and construction are visible achievements; sustained occupancy is harder. Before expanding a site, planners should assess likely demand, connectivity and the kinds of firms that could realistically locate there. Phased development reduces the risk of spending heavily on unused capacity. Reporting should distinguish allotted land from operating units and operating units from commercially viable employment. A signed memorandum of understanding is an expression of intention, not evidence of production.

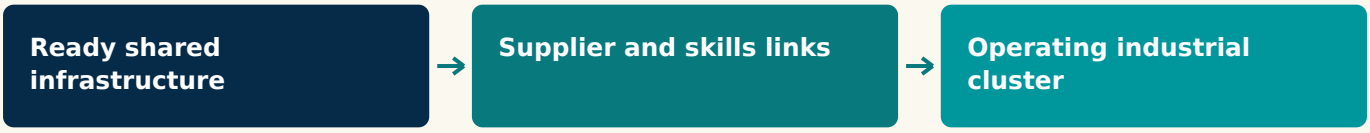
The social and environmental bargain

Industrial development can create work and local demand, but it also changes land use and places pressure on water, housing and public services. Fair rehabilitation, transparent compensation processes and meaningful participation help prevent benefits and costs from falling on different groups without redress. Common pollution-control facilities require monitoring and operating finance. A park's environmental performance should be assessed over its working life, not only when the first approval is obtained.

From job numbers to better work

Employment claims need a clear definition: construction work, direct factory jobs and indirect supply-chain jobs are different categories. Workers also need safe conditions, transport and affordable housing. Nearby training should respond to actual demand and include opportunities for women. State governments, local bodies and park managers must coordinate these services. In Mains, connect industrial policy with human development; a factory ecosystem includes the conditions under which people can live and work, not just the machinery inside the shed.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

An industrial park is not automatically a Special Economic Zone; their legal and policy arrangements are different.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Industrial parks succeed when infrastructure provision is combined with institutional and social coordination. Discuss. (250 words)

Answer route: Explain agglomeration and coordination problems. Assess demand, logistics, utilities and governance, then add land, environment, housing and skills. Recommend phased development with outcome-based evaluation.

Source notes: S10 | Full register at the back.

07 / GOVERNANCE / JANUARY + MARCH

Census 2027: preparing to count a changing India

A population count is also an exercise in state capacity, trust and careful classification.



Census 2027 digital-tools launch, New Delhi; photograph in the 5 March 2026 PIB release. Press Information Bureau, Government of India / PIB reproduction policy.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The 7 January notification scheduled the first phase of Census 2027, the houselisting and housing census, within 1 April-30 September 2026. States and Union Territories are to use a 30-day period, preceded by an optional 15-day self-enumeration window. A March government explanation distinguished this from population enumeration planned for 2027, with an earlier schedule for specified snow-bound areas. As of the quarter's close, these were preparations for enumeration, not published census results. The March explanation also stated that a caste-related question would be included in the second phase.

A fast-growing town can look very different from the settlement described in an old administrative table. Homes appear beyond previous boundaries, workers move seasonally and household arrangements change. Reliable enumeration gives policymakers a common factual base. It cannot decide policy by itself, but weak basic data makes almost every subsequent decision harder.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS I: population | GS II: governance; public policy

Source notes: S11, S12 | Full register at the back.

07 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Census 2027: preparing to count a changing India

A census and a survey answer different needs

A census aims to enumerate the entire defined population or set of units. A sample survey studies a selected subset and uses statistical methods to estimate characteristics of a larger population. Surveys can be conducted more frequently and investigate detailed questions at lower cost. A census provides a broad frame and small-area information that many surveys cannot reliably supply. Neither method is inherently superior for every purpose. The choice depends on the question, precision required, frequency and resources available.

Why houselisting comes first

Before counting people, enumerators need to identify buildings, census houses and households systematically. Information on housing and amenities supports planning and helps prepare the fieldwork for population enumeration. The phases have different functions and schedules. Confusing them leads to claims that a population count has occurred when only preparatory housing work has begun. In a revision note, keep the event date, enumeration period and reference date in separate boxes.

Categories shape the picture

A household, a family and a dwelling are not always the same unit. Migrants may work in one place while retaining ties elsewhere. Seasonal mobility, homelessness and difficult terrain complicate enumeration. Clear definitions and well-trained field staff reduce omission and duplication. Social categories also require careful design and explanation. Data collection can reveal disadvantage, but the interpretation must recognise historical context and avoid treating a statistical category as a complete description of a person's identity.

Keep separate	Meaning
Houselisting phase	Buildings, housing and amenities; preparation for the count
Population enumeration	Population characteristics collected in the later phase
Reference date	Date to which the count is conceptually related

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A municipality wants to locate new primary-health facilities. A total population number is helpful, but it also needs information about where people live, travel barriers and the location of existing services. The census can supply a foundation; local administrative and service data complete the planning exercise.

Source notes: S11, S12 | Full register at the back.

07 / GOVERNANCE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Digital convenience and exclusion

Self-enumeration can save time for people comfortable with digital forms. It may also introduce errors or exclude those without devices, connectivity or confidence. Assisted and field-based channels remain essential. Technology should help enumerators detect inconsistencies and complete coverage, rather than create a new condition that residents must satisfy to be counted. Public communication should explain the process in accessible languages and make correction procedures understandable.

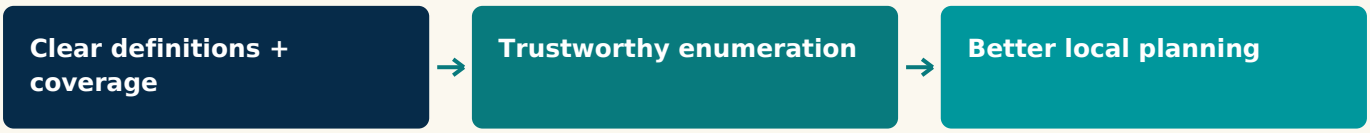
Trust is part of data quality

People are more likely to answer accurately when they understand why information is collected and how confidentiality is protected. Sensitive information requires careful access controls and disciplined use. Publishing useful aggregate statistics does not require exposing identifiable household records. A sound administrative approach separates the need for granular planning data from the public release of information that could identify individuals. Trust is therefore not merely an ethical concern; it affects the reliability of the statistics.

What the results can and cannot settle

A census can inform housing, schooling, health and infrastructure planning, but resource allocation also involves legal rules and political choices. It should not be assumed that a new count automatically changes every constituency boundary, reservation arrangement or grant formula. Those processes have their own frameworks. Strong analysis explains how better data can improve decisions while recognising the institutions through which the data must be translated into policy.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Census preparation is not a completed census; census data do not automatically trigger every downstream legal change.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Explain why reliable population data requires both technological capability and public trust. (150 words)

Answer route: Connect coverage, clear definitions and digital assistance with confidentiality and field verification. Show how errors in basic data affect local services and policy targeting.

Source notes: S11, S12 | Full register at the back.

08 / RIGHTS + EDUCATION / JANUARY

Menstrual health: making the right to education usable

Equality is tested in the conditions of an ordinary school day.



A classroom near Bengaluru, 2005. General education context; no claim about these students or this school's health facilities. Myself (Ambuj.Saxena),(cropped by Hidro) / Public domain.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

In Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Government of India, decided on 30 January, the Supreme Court recognised menstrual health within Article 21 and connected access to menstrual hygiene with equality and education. Its directions covered functional, gender-segregated toilets with water, free sanitary napkins, safe disposal, awareness and monitoring in government and private schools. The Court required student feedback in inspections and continued oversight. The judgment is identified as 2026 INSC 97.

A school can formally admit a girl while failing to provide the conditions that allow her to participate comfortably. A toilet without water, a locked supply cupboard or fear of ridicule can turn an ordinary biological process into a barrier to learning. The policy issue is practical as well as constitutional: what must a functioning school actually provide?

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: fundamental rights; education; health | GS IV: dignity

Source notes: S13 | Full register at the back.

08 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Menstrual health: making the right to education usable

Formal equality and substantive equality

Formal equality asks whether the same rule applies to everyone. Substantive equality asks whether people can use the opportunity on genuinely fair terms when their circumstances differ. Treating all students identically may preserve a disadvantage if some face barriers others do not. This does not mean that every difference in treatment is justified. The response must relate to a real barrier and be designed to remove it. School sanitation is a clear setting in which identical admission rules alone cannot secure equal participation.

Rights need an administrative chain

A constitutional principle becomes effective through budgets, procurement, staffing, maintenance and accountability. Providing a toilet is a capital task; keeping it clean, supplied and usable is a recurring task. A stock register does not prove that students can discreetly obtain what they need. A useful implementation review follows the entire chain from purchase to access. It asks who can identify a failure, who must fix it and how quickly a student can obtain help without embarrassment.

Dignity includes privacy and agency

Support should allow a student to ask for help without being publicly identified or questioned unnecessarily. Awareness should provide accurate, age-appropriate information and challenge stigma without forcing disclosure of personal experiences. Disability access, safe water and usable doors are part of the same practical environment. The objective is not simply to distribute a product. It is to make participation in school ordinary, safe and respectful for all students.

Input recorded	Outcome to verify
Toilet constructed	Private, accessible and usable every day
Supplies purchased	Students can obtain them discreetly
Awareness session held	Staff response is informed and stigma-free

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A school reports that it has two girls' toilets. An inspection finds one locked and the other without water. Counting structures produces a misleading success indicator. Counting usable, accessible facilities during the school day gives a better picture. This is an illustrative administrative example, not a finding about the photographed school.

Source notes: S13 | Full register at the back.

08 / RIGHTS + EDUCATION / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

A whole-school responsibility

Responsibility should not rest on one female teacher who happens to be available. The head teacher, staff, maintenance workers and school management all have roles. Boys also need appropriate education so that teasing and misinformation do not undermine support. A sensitive system provides a clear contact person while ensuring continuity when that person is absent. The quality of institutional arrangements matters more than a one-day awareness event followed by months of neglect.

Checking implementation without invading privacy

Feedback should focus on access and service quality, not collect unnecessary intimate information. Anonymous responses can reveal that a toilet shown as functional is actually avoided, or that supplies are available only after repeated requests. Inspectors should combine physical checks with student experience. Complaint channels must protect against retaliation and embarrassment. Public reporting can disclose school-level service gaps without naming students or exposing personal health information.

How to use the issue in an answer

The strongest argument connects rights with public administration. Identify the barrier, explain why it prevents equal participation and propose an accountable remedy. Avoid assuming that a judicial direction instantly changes every classroom. Implementation requires resources, coordination and sustained attention. Equally, avoid treating sanitation as a minor welfare add-on: when its absence keeps a child out of school, it affects the practical exercise of a central educational opportunity.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Article 21A concerns children aged 6-14; do not casually redefine its age range when discussing wider school-health directions.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

“A right is meaningful only when the conditions for exercising it exist.” Discuss with reference to school education. (250 words)

Answer route: Use substantive equality as the organising idea. Explain practical barriers and institutional duties, then discuss budgets, maintenance, privacy, feedback and accountability.

Source notes: S13 | Full register at the back.

09 / PUBLIC HEALTH / FEBRUARY

HPV vaccination: prevention as public policy

A successful launch must become an accessible, trusted and sustained health programme.



National HPV vaccination campaign launch in Ajmer, 28 February 2026. Official event photograph. Press Information Bureau, Government of India / PIB reproduction policy.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The national HPV vaccination campaign was launched at Ajmer on 28 February. The government announcement described free, voluntary, single-dose vaccination for 14-year-old girls at government health facilities, with consent. The public-health context is prevention of cervical cancer. The programme should be read alongside the WHO elimination strategy, which combines vaccination with screening and treatment rather than treating any one intervention as sufficient.

A preventive programme often succeeds before anybody can see the illness it has avoided. That makes communication and trust unusually important. Families need clear information about the purpose of vaccination and the delivery process. Health systems need to reach girls who are outside school as well as those who can be contacted through classrooms.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: health; social-sector services | GS III: biotechnology

Source notes: S14, S15 | Full register at the back.

09 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

HPV vaccination: prevention as public policy

Vaccination, screening and treatment

Vaccination aims to prevent infection with targeted types of human papillomavirus. Screening looks for disease-related changes in people who may not have symptoms. Treatment addresses identified precancer or cancer according to clinical assessment. These are different stages of prevention and care. Vaccination is not a treatment for an existing cancer and does not make all future screening unnecessary. At the system level, prevention works best when people can move between these services without avoidable delays.

The WHO 90-70-90 framework

The WHO strategy sets 2030 targets of fully vaccinating 90% of girls by age 15, screening 70% of women with a high-performance test by ages 35 and 45, and treating 90% of women identified with cervical disease. Its elimination threshold is fewer than four cases per 100,000 women per year. Elimination as a public-health problem is therefore different from literal eradication of every infection. The framework is useful because it forces attention to the whole continuum of care.

Why delivery design matters

A free vaccine still carries indirect access costs: travel, time away from work for a caregiver, uncertainty about opening hours and difficulty obtaining information. Supply and cold-chain systems must match the campaign's geography. Consent must be informed and communication should be understandable. Records should support follow-up and programme monitoring while protecting privacy. A large launch event can generate awareness, but routine delivery determines who is actually reached.

Intervention	Main purpose
Vaccination	Prevent targeted HPV infection
Screening	Detect relevant changes before or without symptoms
Treatment	Manage identified precancer or cancer

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Imagine two districts with equal doses available. One announces a single camp; the other offers predictable sessions, clear information and outreach to girls outside school. Their nominal supply is identical, but effective access may differ greatly. This example shows why administrative design belongs in a health-policy answer.

Source notes: S14, S15 | Full register at the back.

09 / PUBLIC HEALTH / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Equity beyond the school gate

School-based communication can reach many adolescents efficiently, but it can miss girls who have dropped out, migrate or live far from a facility. Local outreach should identify these gaps without stigmatising families. Health and education departments need clear coordination, and community workers need accurate material rather than improvised answers. Coverage should be examined by geography and social barriers, not only through a national total that can conceal pockets of exclusion.

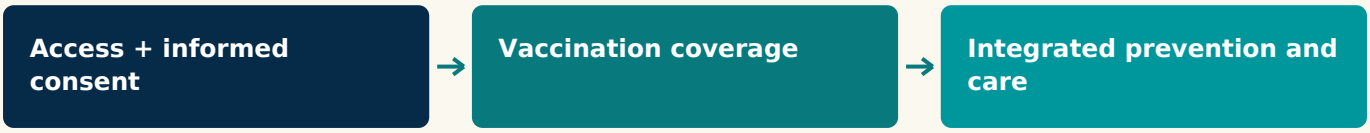
Responding to concerns responsibly

Public trust is weakened when authorities dismiss every question or promise that a medical intervention has no possible risk. A better approach explains benefits and known safety information accurately, uses established reporting systems and responds promptly to rumours. Communication should distinguish an event occurring after vaccination from an event proven to have been caused by it. This distinction requires clinical investigation, not speculation on social media. Transparent processes support confidence more reliably than exaggerated assurances.

The long-term policy test

Vaccination should strengthen, rather than distract from, screening and treatment capacity. A woman with an abnormal screening result needs timely referral and care; otherwise screening alone cannot deliver its intended benefit. Programme evaluation should therefore examine both coverage and the functioning of the referral pathway. In Mains, connect prevention with primary healthcare, informed consent, gender equity and financial protection. The goal is an integrated system that reduces avoidable disease and suffering over time.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

The WHO elimination threshold does not mean zero cases, and vaccination does not replace the entire screening-and-treatment pathway.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Explain how India can translate an adolescent vaccination campaign into an equitable preventive-health programme. (250 words)

Answer route: Begin with prevention, then examine access, consent, supply, communication and data privacy. Link vaccination to screening and treatment, with disaggregated monitoring of underserved groups.

Source notes: S14, S15 | Full register at the back.

10 / INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS / JANUARY

India-EU: trade access and strategic partnership

Concluding negotiations is an important milestone; firms still need the capacity to use an agreement.



Container ship at Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009. Archival trade context; not a shipment under the 2026 agreements. Liese Coulter, CSIRO / CC BY 3.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

At the 16th India-EU Summit in New Delhi on 27 January, the two sides announced the conclusion of negotiations for a free trade agreement. The summit also advanced a security and defence partnership, a joint strategic agenda towards 2030 and a mobility framework. Conclusion of negotiations is not the same legal stage as entry into force. This chapter treats the January announcement as a negotiating milestone, not proof that every promised preference was already operational.

A tariff concession can open a door, but it does not move a product through it. An exporter still needs reliable production, product standards, testing, documentation and delivery. The wider India-EU relationship matters because trade increasingly sits alongside technology, supply-chain resilience, climate policy and security cooperation.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: bilateral and regional agreements | GS III: external trade

Source notes: S16, S17, S18 | Full register at the back.

10 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

India-EU: trade access and strategic partnership

What a free trade agreement changes

An FTA generally reduces specified trade barriers between its parties according to negotiated schedules and conditions. It is not the same as a customs union, whose members also adopt a common external tariff. Nor does an FTA automatically create unrestricted movement of workers. Commitments differ across goods, services, investment and mobility. A careful answer identifies the specific field being discussed instead of treating the word agreement as a promise of complete economic integration.

Why rules of origin matter

Preferential treatment is intended for qualifying products of the partner economies. Rules of origin determine whether a good qualifies, using criteria such as sufficient processing or specified value addition. Without such rules, a third-country product might simply be routed through the partner to obtain a lower tariff. However, complicated origin rules can also raise compliance costs, particularly for smaller exporters. The policy challenge is to prevent misuse without making legitimate trade unnecessarily difficult.

Trade creation and trade diversion

An agreement can create trade when consumers switch from higher-cost domestic production to a more efficient partner supplier. It can divert trade when a preference leads them to replace an efficient outside supplier with a less efficient partner. The result depends on tariff structures, production costs and consumer response. This is why the number of tariff lines covered does not by itself establish the agreement's overall welfare effect. Competition and adjustment support deserve attention alongside market access.

Stage or concept	Do not confuse it with
Negotiations concluded	Agreement already in force
FTA	Customs union or single market
Market access	Automatic compliance with product standards

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A hypothetical garment exporter receives a lower tariff but cannot document the required origin of its inputs. The preferential rate may remain unusable for that shipment. Training, traceability and clear documentation can therefore be as important to a small firm as the headline tariff reduction.

Source notes: S16, S17, S18 | Full register at the back.

10 / INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The opportunity for India

A large, rules-based market can encourage firms to improve quality and integrate into supply chains. Greater predictability can support investment decisions that require several years to repay. Services and professional links can also deepen commercial relationships. These gains are conditional on domestic capability. Better ports, testing facilities, contract enforcement and accessible guidance for smaller firms determine whether preferences are used broadly or captured mainly by exporters already equipped to meet demanding standards.

Standards are not all disguised protection

Health, safety and environmental rules can serve legitimate public purposes. They can also impose substantial compliance costs or be designed in ways that disadvantage outsiders. An informed answer examines the rule's purpose, evidence, transparency and proportionality. Mutual understanding and cooperation on testing can reduce unnecessary duplication, but exporters cannot assume that a tariff reduction removes regulatory requirements. Trade diplomacy and domestic quality infrastructure must therefore work together.

The strategic dimension

Economic dependence on a narrow set of markets or suppliers can become a vulnerability. Diversifying partners gives India more options, although diversification itself has costs. Cooperation with the EU can complement other relationships without requiring identical positions on every international issue. A balanced assessment recognises shared interests and areas of friction. Strategic partnership is sustained by practical cooperation and reliable institutions, not by assuming that commercial and geopolitical interests will always coincide.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER

Negotiated market access → **Standards and origin compliance** → **Usable export opportunities**

PRELIMS TRAP

Preferential tariffs are conditional; an FTA does not automatically permit free movement of all workers.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Evaluate the opportunities and domestic reforms associated with a deeper India-EU economic partnership. (250 words)

Answer route: Cover goods, services, investment and strategic diversification. Balance gains with adjustment costs, standards and origin compliance. Conclude with logistics, skills and support for smaller exporters.

Source notes: S16, S17, S18 | Full register at the back.

11 / INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY / FEBRUARY

India-US trade: read the sequence, not one headline

February showed how domestic legal institutions can reshape international economic negotiations.



Container ship at Fremantle, Western Australia, 2009. Archival trade context; not a shipment under the 2026 agreements. Liese Coulter, CSIRO / CC BY 3.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 6 February, India and the United States announced a framework for an interim trade agreement, including an announced 18% US reciprocal tariff under the then-existing legal framework. On 20 February, the US Supreme Court held that IEEPA did not authorise the President to impose tariffs. A separate presidential proclamation that day introduced a temporary 10% import surcharge under Section 122, effective 24 February, with exceptions. The earlier 18% headline must therefore not be presented as a universal rate operating unchanged at the quarter's close.

For an exporter, a trade announcement is only one part of the story. The legal authority, effective date, product coverage and customs implementation determine what happens to a shipment. February's sequence is a useful lesson in how diplomacy and domestic law interact, and why a current-affairs note needs dates as well as numbers.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: India’s relations; institutions | GS III: trade

Source notes: S19, S20, S21 | Full register at the back.

11 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

India-US trade: read the sequence, not one headline

A framework is not a complete tariff schedule

A joint framework records intended terms and a direction for negotiations. Firms still need operational rules and product-specific treatment. A country's import duty can contain several components, with exemptions or special measures applying to particular products. Adding a headline percentage to every shipment without checking these details is unsafe. For examination purposes, the enduring lesson is to distinguish a political announcement, a legal instrument and the administrative act that applies the measure.

Tariffs affect more than the foreign seller

A tariff is collected on imports, but its economic burden can be shared among foreign producers, importing businesses and consumers. The distribution depends on competition, exchange rates and the ability to find alternatives. Domestic producers may benefit from protection, while firms using imported inputs may face higher costs. A tariff can therefore help one industry and hurt another in the same economy. It should not be described as money paid exclusively by the exporting country's government.

Institutions constrain trade policy

The February court decision addressed authority under a particular US statute. It did not declare that all tariffs under every law were impossible. The subsequent use of a different statutory route illustrates the distinction between the policy objective and the legal power available to pursue it. In comparative politics, this is an example of checks and balances. In trade analysis, it is a source of regulatory uncertainty that firms and negotiating partners must consider.

February date	Milestone
6 February	Interim-trade framework announced
20 February	IEEPA tariff authority rejected by the Supreme Court
24 February	Section 122 surcharge took effect under the proclamation

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Illustrative incidence: an imported input costs 100 units before a tariff. A 10% surcharge would add 10 units if applied to that customs value and if no exception or other adjustment applied. Whether the final buyer pays all 10 depends on pricing and market conditions. This is a simplified example, not a customs quotation.

Source notes: S19, S20, S21 | Full register at the back.

11 / INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Why uncertainty itself has a cost

Businesses choose suppliers, prices and production locations before a shipment reaches customs. Rapidly changing rules can delay orders and investment even when the final tariff is lower than feared. Smaller firms may have fewer resources to track revisions or absorb a sudden cost. Predictable procedures, official guidance and clear contracts can reduce avoidable disruption. Policy analysis should therefore consider stability and transparency alongside the average level of protection.

India's negotiating choices

India seeks market access while protecting legitimate domestic interests and preserving room for development policy. Different sectors have different exposure to competition, so an economy-wide verdict based on one headline is inadequate. Adjustment support, diversification and stronger domestic productivity can reduce vulnerability. At the same time, retaliatory measures should be assessed for their effects on Indian consumers and input-using firms. Negotiating strength comes partly from the ability to sustain competitiveness at home.

How to write a dated trade answer

Begin with the sequence and identify the legal change. Then discuss transmission through prices, supply chains and business expectations. Avoid claiming a single current tariff for every product unless the question supplies the relevant date and coverage. For this retrospective quarter, the important conclusion is that the early-February framework cannot be read in isolation from the events later that month. Subsequent developments outside March are intentionally excluded from the account.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

A judgment against one source of tariff authority is not a prohibition on every tariff under other laws.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

How do domestic institutions and policy uncertainty affect the prospects of international trade agreements? (250 words)

Answer route: Use the February sequence briefly. Analyse legal authority, implementation, investment uncertainty and firm-level costs. Conclude with transparent rules, diversified markets and stronger domestic competitiveness.

Source notes: S19, S20, S21 | Full register at the back.

12 / INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS / FEBRUARY

India-France: partnership with room for independent choices

Defence, innovation and long-term technology capability sit behind the diplomatic label.



Sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue, Bengaluru, 17 February 2026. Official event photograph. Press Information Bureau, Government of India / PIB reproduction policy.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

During President Emmanuel Macron's February visit, India and France elevated their relationship to a Special Global Strategic Partnership. The two leaders inaugurated the India-France Year of Innovation in Mumbai on 17 February. The visit also included a defence dialogue in Bengaluru and participation in the AI summit programme. The announcements provide an opportunity to examine strategic autonomy, technology cooperation and the difference between buying equipment and developing capability.

A durable partnership is not measured only by the number of agreements signed during a visit. It is tested when projects encounter delays, technologies change or the partners disagree on another issue. India-France relations offer a useful setting for studying cooperation that seeks practical depth while leaving space for independent foreign-policy decisions.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: bilateral relations | GS III: defence technology

Source notes: S22, S23 | Full register at the back.

12 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

India-France: partnership with room for independent choices

Strategic autonomy is a capacity

Strategic autonomy means preserving the ability to make choices in light of national interests. It does not require avoiding all partnerships or producing every item domestically. In practice, reliable partnerships can increase autonomy by widening access to technology, markets and diplomatic options. Dependence becomes a concern when a critical capability can be interrupted without alternatives. The policy task is to distinguish useful interdependence from concentrated vulnerability.

Purchase, production and design capability

Importing a finished platform provides a capability but may leave maintenance, upgrades and key components dependent on external suppliers. Local assembly can create jobs and experience, yet may still rely heavily on imported subsystems. Deeper capability involves engineering knowledge, testing, design authority and a network of domestic suppliers. These stages should not be treated as interchangeable. The terms of a specific agreement determine what knowledge and rights are actually shared.

Innovation cooperation needs institutions

A year of innovation can convene researchers, firms and students, but sustained results require funding, intellectual-property arrangements and pathways from research to application. Joint laboratories and academic exchanges work best when objectives and responsibilities are clear. Technology transfer is not simply handing over a document: skills, tacit knowledge, testing and repeated collaboration matter. This explains why a ceremonial announcement should be followed by institutions capable of supporting long projects.

Form of cooperation	Capability question
Equipment purchase	Can it be operated and maintained reliably?
Local production	What value and expertise are created domestically?
Joint development	Who controls design, upgrades and intellectual property?

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Suppose a defence system is assembled locally but its critical software and replacement components remain externally controlled. Domestic assembly has value, yet full operational independence has not necessarily been achieved. The appropriate assessment asks about maintenance rights, upgrades, suppliers and skills rather than using one label such as indigenisation.

Source notes: S22, S23 | Full register at the back.

12 / INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Security cooperation and the maritime domain

India's interests extend to secure sea lanes, resilient supply chains and a stable Indian Ocean. Cooperation with capable partners can support awareness, coordination and practical capacity. Such cooperation should be assessed against specific objectives rather than assumed to be an alliance commitment. Diplomatic language may signal closeness, but legal obligations and operational arrangements must be examined separately. An answer gains precision by distinguishing partnership, interoperability and mutual-defence commitments.

The economic and human foundation

Students, researchers and businesses give a relationship continuity beyond leaders' visits. Mobility can spread knowledge and support commercial links, while standards and recognition issues can create friction. Cooperation should be judged by whether opportunities are accessible and institutions can manage practical problems. A narrow defence-only account misses these foundations. Equally, a list of cultural exchanges without strategic analysis misses why the relationship matters in a changing international order.

What a balanced assessment includes

Long-term projects can face cost, delivery and technology-sharing constraints. The partners may also differ on trade, regulation or international crises. Recognising those differences does not negate the partnership. It helps identify where clear contracts, political attention and institutional dialogue are needed. India's objective should be to convert cooperation into durable domestic capability and greater policy choice, while maintaining realistic expectations about what any single partner can provide.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

A strategic partnership is not automatically a mutual-defence treaty, and assembly is not identical to design capability.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Explain how international technology partnerships can strengthen strategic autonomy. What safeguards are necessary? (250 words)

Answer route: Define autonomy as the ability to choose. Discuss diversification, skills and co-development; examine concentration, intellectual property and lifecycle dependence. End with measurable domestic capability.

Source notes: S22, S23 | Full register at the back.

13 / SCIENCE + GOVERNANCE / FEBRUARY

AI Impact Summit: access, trust and public value

The next question after an AI demonstration is whether it works fairly in ordinary public services.



Servers at CERN Computer Centre, 2018. Archival computing context; not the AI summit venue or an Indian AI facility. Marián Hubinský / CC BY-SA 4.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact emerged from the 18-19 February summit. The 21 February official release reported endorsement by 92 countries and international organisations combined. It organised cooperation around seven pillars, including access to AI resources, trusted systems, science, human capital, social empowerment, economic benefit and efficient infrastructure. The initiatives were described as voluntary and collaborative; the declaration is not a binding global AI law.

An AI tool may answer a polished English question impressively and still fail when a farmer uses a local expression, a patient describes symptoms unclearly or a citizen submits a poor-quality document. The public value of AI depends on the conditions of use. Access, reliability and accountability must be designed into the service, not added after deployment.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: AI; science and technology | GS II: governance

Source notes: S24 | Full register at the back.

13 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

AI Impact Summit: access, trust and public value

Models need an ecosystem

An AI model is only one component of a working system. Data, computing resources, software, connectivity and skilled people are also required. Training develops model parameters from data; inference uses an existing model to produce an output. Both can consume resources, but they have different cost and operational profiles. A country can expand useful applications without training every large model from scratch, provided it can evaluate, adapt and govern the systems it uses.

Accuracy is not the only quality measure

A system may perform well on average and poorly for a particular language, region or group. It can also give a confident answer without a reliable factual basis. Evaluation should therefore match the intended use and include difficult real-world cases. In public services, the cost of an error matters: an incorrect entertainment suggestion is different from an incorrect eligibility decision. Human review, traceable sources and an accessible appeal route are important where outcomes affect rights or essential services.

Access without accountability is incomplete

Lower-cost computing and open tools can widen participation, but they do not automatically produce fair outcomes. Data may be unrepresentative, sensitive information may be exposed and users may not understand the limits of an output. Clear responsibility is needed among the developer, procuring agency and service operator. A citizen should not be told that nobody can explain or correct an adverse result because an algorithm produced it.

Promise	Operational test
Access	Can smaller institutions afford and use the system?
Trust	Are errors detected, explained and corrected?
Public value	Does the service improve for its intended users?

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A district tests an AI assistant for scholarship queries. It should compare answers against official rules, test local-language questions and keep a human help channel. A faster response is useful only if students receive correct guidance and can challenge mistakes. This is an illustrative governance design, not a claim about an existing deployment.

Source notes: S24 | Full register at the back.

13 / SCIENCE + GOVERNANCE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The case for international cooperation

AI systems and their supply chains cross borders. Shared evaluation methods, scientific collaboration and accessible resources can help countries with fewer technical assets participate. Voluntary platforms can spread practical tools faster than a treaty process, but they need sustained contributions and transparent governance. The test is whether a platform helps institutions solve concrete problems, not simply whether many countries endorsed a declaration at a summit.

A procurement problem as much as a technology problem

Public agencies should define the service problem before buying an AI product. A clear baseline makes it possible to assess whether the system improves accuracy, turnaround time or access. Contracts should address data handling, audit access, model updates and exit options. Otherwise, an agency may become dependent on a vendor whose system it cannot assess or replace. Pilot projects should include conditions for stopping or redesigning the service when evidence is poor.

Energy, skills and the distribution of gains

Computing infrastructure needs electricity, cooling and reliable networks. Expanding capacity should therefore be considered alongside efficiency and local environmental constraints. Workers need opportunities to adapt as tasks change, and public institutions need enough technical knowledge to supervise procurement. The benefits of AI will not be shared merely because the technology is available. Education, competition, public-interest applications and accountable institutions determine who can use it productively.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

The endorsement count includes international organisations; a voluntary declaration does not itself create a binding global regulator.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

“Democratising AI requires more than access to computing power.” Discuss. (250 words)

Answer route: Explain the ecosystem, then cover representative data, local languages, skills, affordability, accountability and competition. Use one public-service example and end with evaluation based on citizen outcomes.

Source notes: S24 | Full register at the back.

14 / SPACE / JANUARY

PSLV-C62: reliability, failure analysis and the space economy

A mission anomaly is a technical event and an institutional learning challenge.



PSLV-C57 / Aditya-L1, 2 September 2023. Archival image of a different PSLV mission, not PSLV-C62. Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) / CC BY 3.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

ISRO's PSLV-C62 mission, scheduled for 12 January, carried EOS-N1 as its principal payload with co-passenger satellites. ISRO reported an anomaly near the end of the PS3 stage and said detailed analysis had been initiated. The initial official update did not establish the final root cause. The event placed technical investigation and launch reliability at the centre of the discussion.

Spaceflight compresses years of engineering into a sequence in which timing, propulsion, guidance and separation must work together. When something goes wrong, the useful question is not whether a complex system can ever fail. It is whether the investigation can identify the cause, verify corrective action and strengthen confidence before the next mission.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: space technology; indigenisation; risk management

Source notes: S25, S38 | Full register at the back.

14 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

PSLV-C62: reliability, failure analysis and the space economy

A launcher and a satellite do different jobs

A launch vehicle supplies the energy and trajectory needed to place a payload on its intended path. The satellite then carries out its mission, subject to successful deployment and functioning onboard systems. A powerful instrument has little operational value if it cannot reach a usable orbit. Conversely, a successful launch does not guarantee that every payload will perform as intended. Mission assessment should separate launch performance, deployment and the subsequent operation of the spacecraft.

Why stages are used

A multistage rocket discards structures and engines that are no longer needed, reducing the mass that later stages must accelerate. The sequence requires coordinated propulsion, guidance and separation. PSLV is a four-stage vehicle using alternating solid and liquid propulsion stages. The PS3 reference identifies the third stage; it is not a generic label for the entire vehicle. An anomaly's timing helps an investigation focus, but timing alone does not prove which component or process caused it.

Reliability is built through evidence

Engineers compare telemetry, test results, manufacturing records and prior mission behaviour. A root-cause finding should distinguish the immediate failure from underlying design, process or organisational factors. Corrective action then needs verification. Merely replacing the component that appeared to fail may be insufficient if the deeper issue is a manufacturing variation, an interface or an incomplete test. This is why careful failure analysis matters to future reliability.

Term	Meaning
Launch vehicle	Carries the payload towards the required trajectory
Payload	Spacecraft or instrument being carried
Failure analysis	Evidence-led identification and correction of causes

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A launcher may perform normally in early flight and encounter a later-stage problem. Early success does not imply final mission success. The same logic applies to complex public projects: intermediate milestones are valuable, but the intended outcome must be verified separately.

Source notes: S25, S38 | Full register at the back.

14 / SPACE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The commercial dimension

Customers consider launch price, schedule, orbit access and confidence in delivery. A mission anomaly can affect insurance, customer planning and the timing of later launches. The appropriate response is transparent communication consistent with technical and security requirements, followed by evidence-based corrective action. Commercial growth depends on a reliable ecosystem of suppliers, testing, mission operations and regulation, rather than on counting launches alone.

Public capability and private participation

Private firms can develop components, launch services and downstream applications, while public institutions provide research, infrastructure and strategic capabilities. These roles can complement one another when responsibilities and standards are clear. Safety, liability and access to testing facilities matter for new entrants. A policy that encourages participation should also ensure that firms can demonstrate reliability. Lowering unnecessary administrative barriers is different from weakening technical assurance.

What an aspirant should take away

Use the event to discuss technological risk and institutional learning. Avoid dramatic claims that one anomaly proves the failure of an entire programme, or equally uncritical claims that experience makes failure impossible. Mature technological systems improve through disciplined investigation. The broader governance lesson is that transparent learning, independent scrutiny where appropriate and a culture that reports problems early are assets in high-risk engineering.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

An anomaly near PS3 does not establish its root cause; do not invent a failure mechanism before the investigation reports it.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

What institutional practices are essential for a reliable and competitive space sector? (150 words)

Answer route: Combine technical assurance with transparent investigation, supplier quality, testing access and clear regulation. Distinguish commercial ambition from verified mission performance.

Source notes: S25, S38 | Full register at the back.

15 / CLIMATE / MARCH

India’s 2031-35 NDC: three targets, three different meanings

Emissions intensity, power capacity and a carbon sink must never be used interchangeably.



THE ISSUE BEHIND THE NEWS

Climate targets often look simple because each is expressed as a percentage or a large number. The hard part is the denominator. A target per unit of GDP answers a different question from a target for total emissions. A share of installed power capacity also differs from the share of electricity actually generated.

Solar-powered farm infrastructure in Tamil Nadu, 2010. Archival context for development and clean energy. PWRDF / CC BY 2.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 25 March, the Cabinet approved India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution for 2031-35 for communication to the UNFCCC. The 2035 targets include a 47% reduction in emissions intensity of GDP from 2005, a 60% share of cumulative installed electric-power capacity from non-fossil sources, and a forest-and-tree carbon sink of 3.5-4.0 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent from the 2005 baseline. These are different indicators; none should be casually substituted for an absolute emissions-reduction target.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: climate change; energy | GS II: international commitments

Source notes: S26 | Full register at the back.

15 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

India’s 2031-35 NDC: three targets, three different meanings

Intensity and absolute emissions

Emissions intensity is emissions divided by economic output. It can fall while total emissions rise if output grows faster than intensity declines. That does not make the intensity target meaningless: it measures how carbon-efficient economic activity becomes. But it cannot be described as an identical percentage cut in total emissions. Assessment should consider both the efficiency of growth and the resulting emissions path, alongside development needs and the distribution of transition costs.

Capacity and generation

Installed capacity measures the rated ability of power equipment to produce electricity. Generation measures the electricity actually produced over time. Different technologies operate for different numbers of hours and respond differently to weather and system conditions. Consequently, a 60% capacity share does not automatically yield a 60% generation share. Non-fossil also includes nuclear power; it is not a synonym for solar and wind alone. Transmission, storage and flexible operations influence how much useful electricity the system can deliver.

What a carbon sink requires

A sink removes and stores more carbon than it releases over the relevant accounting period. Forest and tree-based sinks depend on survival, growth, ecological conditions and protection from degradation. Planting seedlings is an input, not a guaranteed long-term stock of carbon. Native biodiversity, water availability and local livelihoods matter to the durability of restoration. Carbon accounting should not encourage replacing diverse ecosystems with unsuitable plantations merely to maximise a narrow numerical indicator.

2035 indicator	What it measures
47% lower intensity	Emissions per unit GDP, relative to 2005
60% non-fossil capacity	Share of installed electric-power capacity
3.5-4.0 billion tonnes sink	Forest/tree carbon-sink target, CO2 equivalent

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Illustrative intensity arithmetic: an economy's output doubles while emissions per unit of output fall by 40%. Total emissions become 2 × 0.60 = 1.20 times the original level, a 20% increase. This example explains why intensity reduction and absolute reduction are not identical; it is not India's projected emissions path.

Source notes: S26 | Full register at the back.

15 / CLIMATE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The implementation challenge

Targets need sectoral pathways: cleaner electricity, efficient industry, transport choices, building performance and land management. Each pathway faces different institutions and investment cycles. Retiring or upgrading long-lived assets cannot be managed through slogans alone. Predictable regulation, credible finance and coordination between central and state agencies reduce uncertainty. Progress should be monitored with clear definitions so that improvements in one indicator do not hide deterioration in another.

A just transition

Workers and regions dependent on carbon-intensive activities can face concentrated costs even when the national economy benefits over time. Skills, social protection, local diversification and participation in planning are therefore part of climate policy. Household affordability also matters. A transition that raises reliability and lowers pollution while protecting vulnerable users is more durable politically than one whose costs are poorly explained or unevenly distributed.

The international perspective

National contributions reflect a world in which countries differ in historical emissions, income and development needs. India can argue for equity and access to finance and technology while still pursuing credible domestic implementation. Those positions are complementary. In an answer, avoid choosing between international fairness and domestic action as if only one were possible. The quality of the pathway, the reliability of measurement and the distribution of benefits all affect the credibility of a target.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Non-fossil capacity is not the same as renewable generation, and a GDP-intensity target is not an absolute emissions cut.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Explain the challenges of translating climate targets into an equitable development pathway. (250 words)

Answer route: Distinguish the indicators first. Discuss power-system integration, industrial investment, ecological restoration, finance and workers. Conclude with transparent monitoring and a just transition.

Source notes: S26 | Full register at the back.

16 / ENVIRONMENT / JANUARY

Ramsar wetlands: recognition is the beginning

A wetland survives through its water regime, catchment and relationship with surrounding communities.



Patna Bird Sanctuary, Etah, Uttar Pradesh, January 2015. Archival photograph of the site announced in January 2026. Viragsharma / CC BY-SA 3.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 31 January, the government announced Patna Bird Sanctuary and Chhari-Dhand as new additions to India's Ramsar list. Patna Bird Sanctuary is in Etah district, Uttar Pradesh, not in Bihar. Chhari-Dhand is in Kutch, Gujarat. The announcement is a useful starting point for studying wetland ecology and wise use; international recognition should not be confused with proof that every local conservation problem has been resolved.

A wetland may look empty during a dry season and become a feeding or breeding ground when water returns. Judging it from one photograph or one month can therefore be misleading. Its ecological character depends on seasonal water, sediment, vegetation, nutrients and connections with the surrounding landscape.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: biodiversity; conservation | GS I: geography

Source notes: S27, S39 | Full register at the back.

16 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Ramsar wetlands: recognition is the beginning

A wetland is more than open water

Wetlands include a variety of water-influenced ecosystems, not only permanent lakes. Their importance comes from processes: storing floodwater, supporting biodiversity, cycling nutrients and sustaining livelihoods. Some services depend on maintaining seasonal variation rather than keeping water levels permanently high. Converting a wetland into a neat, deep reservoir can change the habitat even if the surface still looks like water. Conservation must therefore begin with an understanding of the site's ecological functions.

The catchment connection

Water entering a wetland carries the effects of activities outside its boundary. Upstream withdrawals can reduce inflows; polluted runoff can alter water quality; roads and embankments can interrupt natural drainage. Protecting only the visible waterbody may therefore fail. Management should consider the catchment, inflow channels and surrounding land use. This is a general lesson in environmental governance: administrative boundaries rarely match the full area over which ecological processes operate.

Wise use and local livelihoods

Wise use seeks to maintain wetland ecological character while allowing sustainable benefits. It is not an automatic instruction to exclude every human activity, nor permission for unlimited extraction. Fishing, grazing, tourism and water use have different effects depending on intensity, timing and local conditions. Community knowledge can help identify changes in seasons and species. Durable management combines that knowledge with ecological monitoring and transparent rules about access and responsibility.

Site	Location to remember
Patna Bird Sanctuary	Etah, Uttar Pradesh
Chhari-Dhand	Kutch, Gujarat
Conservation principle	Maintain ecological character through wise use

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

If a lake is cleaned locally but an upstream drain continues to discharge sewage, repeated clean-up drives will treat symptoms. A durable response must stop or treat the inflow, monitor water quality and maintain the system. This example illustrates catchment-based management; it is not a report about either newly announced site.

Source notes: S27, S39 | Full register at the back.

16 / ENVIRONMENT / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

What designation can achieve

International recognition can raise attention, support planning and encourage monitoring. It can also strengthen the argument against treating wetlands as vacant land available for construction. However, a designation does not itself remove sewage, restore a blocked channel or resolve a dispute over water. These tasks require institutions, budgets and cooperation across departments. The outcome should be assessed through ecological condition and community well-being, not through the number of plaques installed.

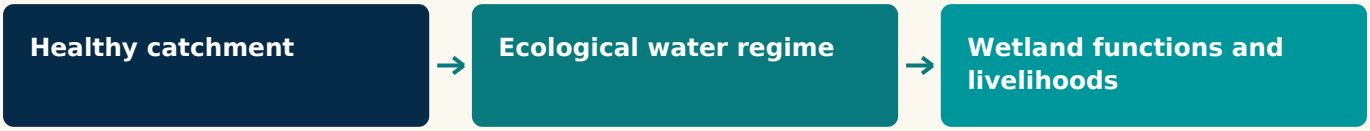
Tourism and the carrying-capacity question

Visitors can generate income and political support for conservation, but poorly managed tourism can disturb birds, increase waste and damage sensitive edges. Infrastructure should be placed and operated with ecological limits in mind. Local guides and small enterprises can share benefits, while visitor rules protect habitat. A wetland should not be transformed into a generic recreation park at the expense of the features that made it valuable.

Building a stronger conservation answer

Use a pressure-response framework. Identify the pressures on water quantity, quality, habitat and livelihoods; match each with a responsible institution and a practical measure. Catchment treatment, sewage control and seasonal access rules address different problems. Add monitoring that can detect deterioration early. This produces a more convincing answer than a list of awareness campaigns, plantations and committees without explaining what each measure is supposed to change.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Patna Bird Sanctuary is in Uttar Pradesh. A Ramsar designation is not identical to a national-park notification.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Why must wetland conservation extend beyond the boundary of the waterbody? Explain with a governance framework. (150 words)

Answer route: Cover catchment inflows, drainage, pollution and livelihoods. Link each pressure to coordination, monitoring and sustainable use rather than relying on designation alone.

Source notes: S27, S39 | Full register at the back.

17 / GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT / JANUARY

The high seas treaty enters into force

Protecting biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction requires rules that connect science, equity and implementation.



Coral ecosystem photograph, NOAA, no later than July 2022. General marine context; not a claimed BBNJ protected area. NOAA; photographer unidentified / Public domain.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, commonly called the BBNJ or high seas agreement, entered into force on 17 January. Adopted in 2023 under UNCLOS, it addresses marine genetic resources and benefit sharing, area-based management tools including protected areas, environmental impact assessments, and capacity building with marine-technology transfer. Its entry into force is a legal milestone; implementation still requires institutions, scientific work and cooperation.

Ocean currents and marine species do not stop at the limits of a coastal state's jurisdiction. Yet the ability to study, exploit and protect the open ocean is distributed very unevenly. The BBNJ framework addresses both conservation and the question of who can participate in, and benefit from, activities in those areas.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: international institutions | GS III: biodiversity

Source notes: S28, S29 | Full register at the back.

17 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

The high seas treaty enters into force

The jurisdiction question

Coastal states have defined rights and responsibilities in maritime zones under international law. Areas beyond national jurisdiction require a different governance approach from a state's internal waters or territorial sea. The high seas and the international seabed area are not simply ownerless spaces where no rules apply. Existing legal and sectoral arrangements remain relevant. A sound answer avoids suggesting that the new agreement replaces all ocean law or gives one state control over the open ocean.

Why marine genetic resources matter

Organisms from marine environments can contribute to scientific research and potentially to commercial applications. Access to ships, laboratories, data and expertise determines who can study them. Benefit sharing therefore concerns more than the physical collection of a sample. It raises questions about research cooperation, information and the distribution of gains. Conservation and equity are connected: countries are more likely to support a system in which participation is feasible and benefits are not captured only by the best-equipped actors.

Protected areas and impact assessment

Area-based tools can protect important habitats or ecological processes, while environmental impact assessment considers the likely effects of proposed activities. They serve different but complementary purposes. An assessment is meaningful when it informs a decision, considers alternatives and supports monitoring, rather than becoming paperwork after a project is effectively settled. Scientific uncertainty should be acknowledged and managed through proportionate safeguards and continued observation.

Pillar	Core issue
Genetic resources	Research access and fair benefit sharing
Area-based tools + EIA	Protect places and assess activities
Capacity + technology	Make participation practically possible

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A proposed activity may occur far from any coast but still affect a migratory species or a connected ecosystem. National boundaries alone cannot organise a complete response. Shared scientific assessment and coordinated rules are needed because the ecological effect crosses the space managed by individual states.

Source notes: S28, S29 | Full register at the back.

17 / GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The implementation gap

Remote ocean areas are expensive to observe and difficult to police. Designating a protected area on paper is easier than monitoring what happens there. Scientific data, satellite tools, vessel information and cooperation among institutions can help, but they require funding and agreed procedures. The agreement's effectiveness will depend on these operational arrangements. Entry into force should therefore be celebrated as a beginning rather than mistaken for an immediate restoration of marine ecosystems.

Capacity building is central

Countries with limited marine research infrastructure need access to training, equipment, data and partnerships. Otherwise, formal equality in negotiations can coexist with large differences in practical influence. Technology transfer also has to consider maintenance and the ability to use equipment after a project ends. Long-term institutional capability is more valuable than a one-off demonstration. In an answer, treat capacity building as part of the agreement's architecture, not a charitable afterthought.

India’s analytical interest

India has a long coastline, maritime trade interests and a growing scientific stake in ocean research. The broader policy issues include biodiversity knowledge, equitable access, responsible innovation and coordination with existing maritime obligations. Do not infer India's precise treaty status from the agreement's global entry into force; signature, ratification and domestic implementation are distinct questions. The general significance can be explained without making an unverified claim about a country's legal position.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER

Shared rules and science → **Capacity and monitoring** → **Conservation beyond borders**

PRELIMS TRAP

Entry into force globally is not proof that every country has ratified; the agreement does not turn all high-seas activity into a blanket prohibition.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Discuss the conservation and equity challenges in governing biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. (250 words)

Answer route: Begin with connected ecosystems and fragmented capacity. Explain the four pillars, then address science, monitoring, finance and institutional coordination. Keep treaty status distinct from general policy interest.

Source notes: S28, S29 | Full register at the back.

18 / AGRICULTURE + TECHNOLOGY / FEBRUARY

Bharat-VISTAAR: useful agricultural advice needs local knowledge

An AI interface can widen access, but a farmer still needs advice that fits the field.



Farm work in East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, 2010. Archival context; the person is not identified as a scheme beneficiary. kiran kumar / Kiran Kumar G / CC BY-SA 2.0.

THE ISSUE BEHIND THE NEWS

Two farmers in the same district may grow the same crop under different conditions. One has irrigated land and reliable credit; the other depends on rainfall and cannot risk an expensive input. Advice becomes useful only when it recognises those differences. The challenge for an AI-based extension service is to connect general knowledge with local circumstances.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The Union Budget proposed Bharat-VISTAAR, expanded as Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources. The proposed multilingual AI tool is intended to connect AgriStack portals and ICAR's agricultural-practice information to support farm advice. The February announcement was a proposal, not evidence that the service had already reached every farmer or produced a measured increase in yields.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: agriculture; e-technology | GS II: digital governance

Source notes: S30 | Full register at the back.

18 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Bharat-VISTAAR: useful agricultural advice needs local knowledge

Information is one constraint among several

A farmer may know the recommended practice and still be unable to follow it because water, labour, finance or the input itself is unavailable. Digital extension should therefore be assessed as part of a wider agricultural system. Better advice can reduce uncertainty, but it does not replace irrigation, functioning markets or risk protection. In Mains, distinguish an information failure from a resource constraint. The appropriate remedy depends on which problem is actually preventing adoption.

From a database to a dependable answer

An advisory system needs accurate source material, relevant context and a way to handle uncertainty. Crop stage, soil conditions, weather and local pest observations can change the recommendation. If these inputs are incomplete, a confident response may be harmful. Systems should identify the source and date of guidance, ask for necessary context and refer uncertain cases to trained extension personnel. The user's ability to understand and question the answer is part of reliability.

Language and inclusion

Translation alone is not enough. Farmers use local names, mixed languages, photographs and spoken descriptions. A service should be tested with these forms of communication, including low-literacy and low-connectivity settings. Assisted access through trusted local institutions can help people who do not use smartphones confidently. Women farmers and tenants should not be overlooked merely because a digital record or household phone is held in somebody else's name.

System input	Why it matters
Reliable knowledge	Prevents unsupported recommendations
Local context	Makes advice relevant to the field
Human escalation	Handles uncertainty and unusual cases

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A farmer asks why leaves are yellow. Nutrient deficiency, waterlogging, disease and other causes may produce overlapping signs. A responsible advisory process asks for context and may recommend field assessment; it should not automatically prescribe an input from a short description. This is a governance example, not crop-treatment advice.

Source notes: S30 | Full register at the back.

18 / AGRICULTURE + TECHNOLOGY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

The data-governance question

Linking agricultural records can improve the relevance of services, but it also raises questions about purpose, access and correction. A farmer should be able to understand what data are being used and challenge an error that affects advice or service access. Sensitive information should not be shared unnecessarily. Data quality is as important as collection: an outdated crop record can make an apparently personalised answer less useful than a careful conversation with a field worker.

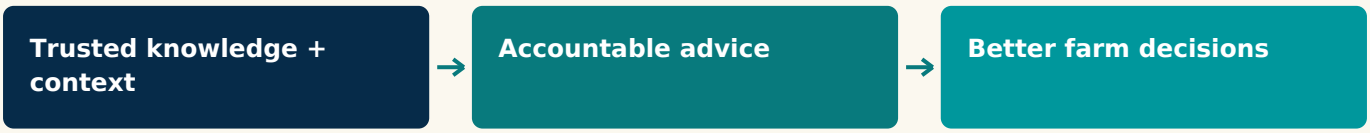
Avoiding commercial distortion

Advisory platforms may influence purchases of seeds, fertiliser or other inputs. Recommendations should therefore be transparent about evidence and commercial interests. A tool that consistently steers users towards a vendor without a sound agronomic basis can undermine trust. Public-interest evaluation should compare advice against reliable expert guidance and examine whether farmers experience lower risk or better decisions, rather than simply counting queries or app downloads.

A practical model for extension

Digital tools can handle common questions and help extension workers retrieve information quickly. Field staff remain important for diagnosis, local interpretation and building trust. The strongest model combines the reach of technology with accountable human support. Pilot evaluation should examine errors, comprehension, adoption and consequences across different farming situations. An increase in the number of answers generated is not, by itself, evidence of agricultural improvement.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Bharat-VISTAAR is an AI advisory proposal; do not confuse it with similarly named statistical or other programmes.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Evaluate the potential and limitations of AI-based agricultural extension in India. (250 words)

Answer route: Explain reach, language and timely advice, then assess local context, data quality, resource constraints and commercial bias. Recommend expert oversight, assisted access and outcome-based evaluation.

Source notes: S30 | Full register at the back.

19 / INFRASTRUCTURE / MARCH

Modified UDAN: connectivity that lasts

Opening an airport and sustaining a useful air service are different achievements.



Air India Regional CRJ700 at Dehradun, 2012. Archival aviation context; not evidence of a Modified UDAN route. Arjun Sarup / CC BY-SA 4.0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 25 March, the Cabinet approved Modified UDAN with an outlay of ₹28,840 crore over ten years, from 2026-27 to 2035-36. The announced design includes development of 100 airports from existing unserved airstrips and 200 helipads, alongside support measures including viability-gap funding. These are programme targets and financial provisions, not a statement that the facilities or routes were already operating in March.

For a remote region, a dependable air connection can shorten a journey that otherwise takes a day or more. But an airport with no sustained service contributes little to that goal. Regional aviation policy must consider both the public value of connectivity and the commercial realities of operating aircraft on thin routes.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: transport; investment; regional development

Source notes: S31, S32 | Full register at the back.

19 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Modified UDAN: connectivity that lasts

Why a route may need support

An airline faces costs for aircraft, crews, fuel, maintenance and airport use. On a route with low or seasonal demand, ticket revenue may not cover these costs at affordable fares. Viability-gap support can help bridge a defined gap when the wider public benefit justifies intervention. The support should be linked to service delivery and reviewed over time. It is not a substitute for examining whether the route, aircraft and schedule suit the market.

An airport is part of a network

Passengers need to reach the airport and connect to useful destinations at workable times. Road access, flight frequency, reliability and onward connections influence demand. A short flight with an inconvenient schedule may offer less practical value than expected. Regional aviation therefore needs coordination with surface transport and local economic activity. Infrastructure should be assessed as a network, rather than as isolated facilities inaugurated one after another.

Public benefit and commercial viability

A route can provide social value through emergency access, tourism or business links even when initial ticket revenue is weak. But the size and distribution of that value should be examined, not assumed. Support that mainly benefits a small group while displacing more effective public spending deserves scrutiny. The policy question is whether the public contribution purchases a useful and reasonably priced service that alternatives cannot provide as well.

Milestone	Stronger outcome measure
Airport developed	Safe facility with usable services
Route awarded	Reliable flights actually operated
Passengers carried	Access benefits relative to public cost

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A hypothetical route operates twice a week but frequently cancels. Its existence on a route map may overstate the connectivity people can rely on. Measuring completion rates and practical travel-time savings gives a better assessment than counting the route once at launch.

Source notes: S31, S32 | Full register at the back.

19 / INFRASTRUCTURE / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

What can undermine continuity

Demand may be overestimated, aircraft may be unsuitable for the route or operational constraints may interrupt service. Airport staffing and maintenance also require recurrent resources. A programme focused only on construction can overlook these costs. Contracts should define service expectations and provide transparent information about performance. Route reviews should be able to redesign an arrangement when evidence shows that the original assumptions were unrealistic.

The regional-development claim

Connectivity can support tourism and enterprise, but it does not automatically create a productive local economy. Skills, accommodation, public services and market links must develop alongside it. Environmental constraints and disaster risk also matter, especially in fragile hill regions. An attractive development narrative should be tested against local capacity and the costs of increased activity. Sustainable connectivity means matching the service to the region's needs and limits.

How to assess the programme

Track operational routes, reliability, passenger use, subsidy per useful service and the experience of intended users. Compare alternatives where relevant, including improved roads or rail. Do not use a single national average to dismiss every remote route: some provide exceptional access benefits. Equally, do not treat every route as equally valuable. A transparent framework can recognise social necessity while identifying arrangements that require redesign or withdrawal.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER

Suitable route design → **Reliable operation** → **Useful regional access**

PRELIMS TRAP

Viability-gap funding supports an identified viability gap; it does not make every route permanently self-sustaining.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Regional air connectivity should be evaluated as a service, not merely as infrastructure. Discuss. (150 words)

Answer route: Explain network access and thin-route economics. Add reliability, recurrent costs, affordability and social value, then recommend transparent route-level evaluation.

Source notes: S31, S32 | Full register at the back.

20 / CULTURE + LIVELIHOODS / MARCH

Bharat Tribes Fest: culture, markets and control over value

An exhibition creates visibility; a livelihood strategy must improve the artisan’s bargaining position.



Bharat Tribes Fest inauguration at Sunder Nursery, New Delhi, 18 March 2026. Official event photograph. Press Information Bureau, Government of India / PIB reproduction policy.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

Bharat Tribes Fest 2026 was inaugurated at Sunder Nursery, New Delhi, on 18 March under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED. The event brought tribal products, crafts and cultural expression to a wider audience. On 28 March, an extension to 5 April was announced. This edition records that extension as a decision known within the quarter and does not claim April attendance or sales outcomes.

A visitor may see a beautiful textile or a forest-based product and remember the stall. The producer sees a longer chain: raw material, labour, transport, payment, design, branding and the margin retained after every intermediary is paid. Cultural visibility becomes economic empowerment only when people gain a fairer position in that chain.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS I: culture; society | GS II: tribal welfare | GS III: livelihoods

Source notes: S33, S34 | Full register at the back.

20 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Bharat Tribes Fest: culture, markets and control over value

Culture is a living practice

Crafts and performances are sustained by communities, skills and meanings that evolve over time. Preserving culture does not require freezing it in an imagined past. Producers may choose new designs or markets while retaining valued techniques and identity. The important question is who makes those choices. A development programme should support community agency rather than treating people as decorative representatives of a fixed cultural category.

Where value is added and captured

A product may gain value through quality, design, certification, packaging and access to customers. The producer does not automatically receive that additional value. Bargaining power, market information and payment terms shape the distribution. Collective organisations can help aggregate supply and negotiate, but their governance must be accountable to members. A label or platform is useful only if it improves actual returns and does not create a new layer of dependence.

Forest-based livelihoods need ecological limits

Products drawn from forests can support income while maintaining incentives to conserve the resource. Unsustainable harvesting, however, can weaken the very base of the livelihood. Local knowledge, regeneration and rules for collection are therefore economically important as well as environmentally important. Market expansion should be matched with an assessment of sustainable supply. A sudden rise in demand is not automatically a reason to extract more without limits.

Visible success	Deeper question
More visitors	Are repeat buyers and orders created?
Higher retail price	Does producer income improve?
Wider recognition	Do communities control representation and benefits?

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

An artisan sells a product for ₹500, but transport, packaging and commissions absorb ₹200 beyond production costs. A higher retail price is not necessarily a higher producer income. A value-chain analysis asks where costs arise and who retains the margin. The numbers are illustrative, not festival sales data.

Source notes: S33, S34 | Full register at the back.

20 / CULTURE + LIVELIHOODS / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Beyond a festival

Exhibitions can test demand, generate contacts and help producers understand customer preferences. The benefits may fade if there is no system for repeat orders, consistent quality and timely delivery. Follow-up support should address these practical needs. Digital sales channels can widen reach, but photography, inventory, returns and customer communication require skills and resources. Counting stalls or visitors is therefore only an initial measure of success.

Respecting knowledge and identity

Traditional designs and knowledge can be copied or marketed without fair recognition or benefit. Communities should have a meaningful voice in how their work is represented and used. Not every cultural expression fits neatly into a standard commercial intellectual-property model, which makes careful institutional support important. The aim is to prevent exploitation while allowing producers to choose useful forms of innovation and market participation.

A balanced tribal-development answer

Avoid portraying tribal communities as either isolated from markets or automatically empowered by market entry. Their circumstances and preferences vary. Effective policy combines rights, access to services, ecological security and control over economic decisions. Market initiatives can contribute, but they cannot substitute for these foundations. Evaluate whether income is stable, payments are timely and producers retain influence over their work, rather than assuming that publicity is equivalent to empowerment.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

A cultural marketplace is not, by itself, proof of sustained livelihood improvement or community control.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

How can market access for tribal products support both livelihoods and cultural autonomy? (250 words)

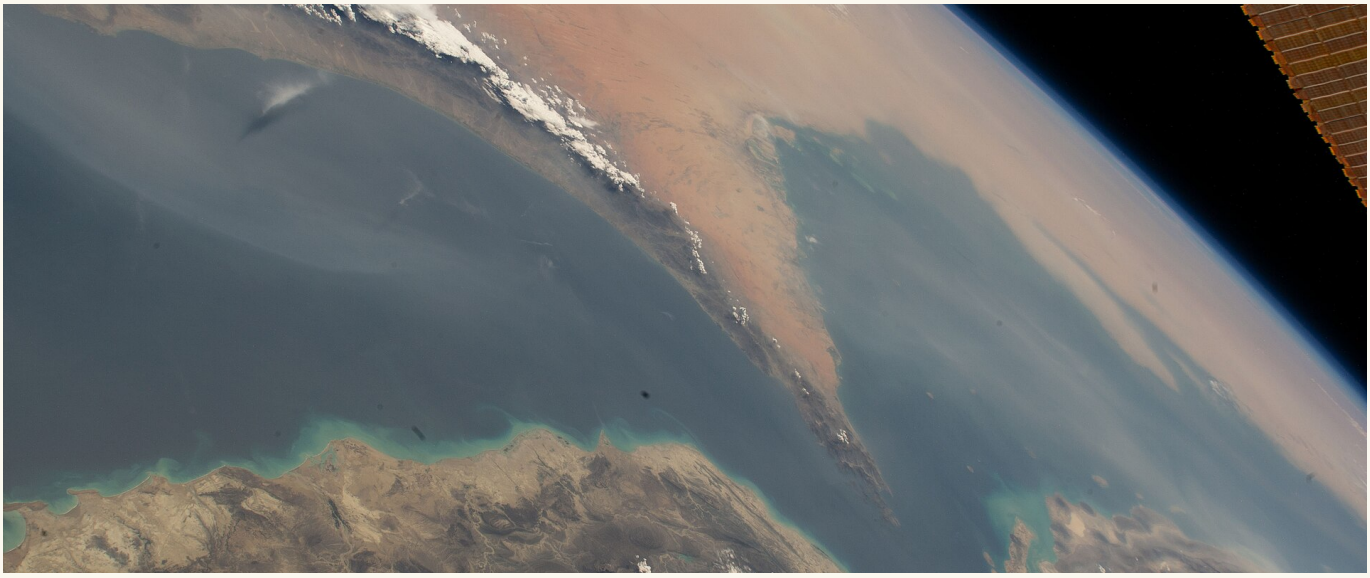
Answer route: Discuss value addition, collective bargaining and repeat demand. Balance these with ecological limits, knowledge protection and community choice. Recommend producer-level outcome measures.

Source notes: S33, S34 | Full register at the back.

21 / INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / FEBRUARY + MARCH

West Asia: India’s exposure to a regional conflict

Energy, sea lanes, citizens and diplomacy form one connected policy problem.



Strait of Hormuz photographed from space, 18 August 2022. Archival geography; not an image of the 2026 conflict. NASA / Public domain.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

The External Affairs Minister's 9 March parliamentary statement placed the latest round of conflict from 28 February, involving US and Israeli strikes on Iran and subsequent escalation in the region. An earlier Indian statement on 3 March highlighted the safety of nearly one crore Indian citizens in the Gulf and risks to shipping, energy and trade. This account is limited to developments and official positions available by 31 March; it does not import later phases of the conflict.

For India, a crisis in West Asia is simultaneously a foreign-policy issue and a domestic economic concern. A disruption can affect energy import costs, shipping insurance, businesses and families with members working in the Gulf. These channels interact, so an effective response cannot be organised within one ministry or one policy instrument.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS II: international relations; diaspora | GS III: energy security

Source notes: S35, S36 | Full register at the back.

21 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

West Asia: India’s exposure to a regional conflict

Why chokepoints matter

A maritime chokepoint concentrates traffic through a narrow passage. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the wider sea routes beyond. A threat to transit can raise costs even before every shipment is physically stopped, because shipowners and insurers reassess risk. Geography therefore shapes economic vulnerability. In revision, locate the strait accurately and distinguish it from Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal.

The energy-price transmission

Higher imported energy costs can affect transport, electricity production and industrial inputs. Firms may absorb part of the cost, pass it to consumers or reduce output. The effect on inflation depends on taxes, subsidies, pricing arrangements and the duration of the shock. A larger import bill can also put pressure on the current account. These mechanisms explain vulnerability; they do not establish a precise forecast for inflation or the exchange rate without further evidence.

Citizens and the diaspora

A large overseas workforce creates responsibilities for consular support, reliable communication and contingency planning. People differ in their ability to move, obtain documents or leave employment safely. Seafarers may face a distinct set of risks. Policy must be attentive to these groups rather than treating the diaspora as a single undifferentiated category. Accurate advisories and coordination with host governments are practical tools of protection, not merely diplomatic statements.

Channel	Indian policy concern
Energy and shipping	Supply continuity and higher import costs
Citizens and seafarers	Consular support and contingency planning
Diplomacy	De-escalation while preserving multiple relationships

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

A tanker need not be attacked for transport costs to rise. If perceived risk increases, insurance premiums and freight charges may rise across affected routes. This illustrates how uncertainty can transmit a regional security shock into prices elsewhere; it is not a claim about a particular vessel or premium.

Source notes: S35, S36 | Full register at the back.

21 / INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Diplomacy under competing interests

India maintains important relationships across the region and beyond it. A crisis can create pressure to align every position with one partner, but India must also consider citizen safety, energy security and international law. Calls for restraint and dialogue need to be accompanied by channels that can communicate with relevant actors. Strategic autonomy in this setting is the capacity to pursue these interests consistently, not an absence of concern about violence or instability.

Resilience without the illusion of insulation

Diversifying energy suppliers, maintaining appropriate reserves and improving efficiency can reduce vulnerability. They cannot instantly eliminate the effect of a major global price shock. Alternative shipping routes may be longer or may not solve a disruption at the point of production. Resilience therefore involves layered measures: contingency planning, diversified relationships, reliable information and the ability to protect essential domestic needs during a prolonged disturbance.

How to structure a Mains answer

Begin with India's connected interests, then explain the transmission channels. Separate immediate actions such as citizen assistance and supply monitoring from medium-term measures such as diversification and efficiency. Avoid sensational claims that a strait is completely closed unless a dated, authoritative source establishes that fact. A strong answer is specific about risks and proportionate about the remedies available to India.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Do not confuse Hormuz with Bab el-Mandeb; an elevated shipping risk is not proof of a total blockade.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

Assess India’s vulnerabilities and policy options during instability in West Asia. (250 words)

Answer route: Use the channels of energy, trade, citizens and diplomacy. Distinguish immediate protection from long-term resilience, and discuss the limits of diversification and reserves.

Source notes: S35, S36 | Full register at the back.

22 / ENERGY + ECOLOGY / MARCH

Small hydropower: renewable does not mean impact-free

Site selection and river-basin planning determine whether small projects deliver durable value.



Bistra I small hydroelectric facility, 25 August 2024. Archival illustration; not an Indian scheme beneficiary. Ajznponar / CC0.

WHAT CHANGED THIS QUARTER

On 18 March, the Cabinet approved the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme for 2026-27 to 2030-31, with an outlay of ₹2,584.60 crore and an intended capacity addition of about 1,500 MW. The scheme covers projects in the 1-25 MW range. The announcement concerns support and planned development; it should not be reported as capacity already commissioned during the quarter.

A river can provide electricity while also supporting fish, irrigation, sediment movement and local livelihoods. The word small describes a project's capacity category; it does not answer every question about its location or cumulative effects. Sound energy policy asks what the project delivers and what happens to the river around it.

UPSC CONNECTION

GS III: energy; infrastructure; environmental assessment

Source notes: S37 | Full register at the back.

22 / CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT

Build the foundation

Small hydropower: renewable does not mean impact-free

How hydropower produces electricity

Moving water turns a turbine connected to a generator. The potential output depends on the flow of water, the available head or height difference, and the efficiency of the equipment. Installed capacity is a rated maximum, while actual generation varies with water availability and operations. A project with a respectable capacity figure may produce much less during a dry season. Energy planning therefore needs realistic seasonal generation estimates, not only a total of nameplate megawatts.

Run-of-river is not no-impact

Some projects use river flow with relatively limited storage, but they may still divert water through a channel or tunnel before returning it downstream. The intervening stretch can experience altered flow. Structures can also affect sediment movement and aquatic connectivity. The magnitude depends on the site and design. It is misleading to infer zero environmental effect from a label such as run-of-river, just as it is misleading to assume that every project has the same impact.

The basin rather than the isolated project

Several small projects on one river can collectively change its behaviour even when each appears modest on its own. Cumulative assessment considers how diversions, barriers and altered flow interact across the basin. It should include other water users and ecological requirements. A project-by-project review without this wider view can miss the combined pressure. River-basin planning is therefore a coordination tool, not simply an additional document in the approval process.

Indicator	What it leaves out
Installed MW	Seasonal electricity actually produced
Small project size	Cumulative effects of several projects
Renewable source	Site-specific ecological and social impacts

UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH AN EXAMPLE

Two 10 MW projects may generate different amounts over a year because river flow and operating conditions differ. One may also affect a sensitive low-flow stretch more severely. Comparing installed capacity alone misses both energy performance and ecological cost. The example is illustrative.

Source notes: S37 | Full register at the back.

22 / ENERGY + ECOLOGY / ANALYSIS

Think beyond the announcement

Where small hydro can contribute

Suitable projects may provide local electricity and diversify renewable supply. They can be useful where geography, flow and grid conditions support them. Access roads, transmission and maintenance capability still matter. A small project in a difficult location can face substantial costs. Public support should be linked to realistic technical and economic appraisal, rather than assuming that every identified site is worth developing immediately.

Climate and disaster risk

Historical flow records help design a project, but future variability, extreme rainfall, sediment loads and slope instability also deserve attention. Vulnerable infrastructure can create both financial losses and downstream risks. Resilient design, safe operating procedures and emergency planning are necessary. A climate-friendly energy source should itself be designed for a changing climate. The assessment should consider the full life of the asset, not only its expected first-year generation.

A better basis for public support

Subsidies can help projects that offer public value but face initial financing constraints. They should not conceal weak demand estimates, poor environmental design or inadequate maintenance. Evaluation should track actual generation, reliability, ecological conditions and local benefits. Community participation can identify water-use conflicts early. A balanced answer supports renewable development while insisting that site-specific evidence and basin-level limits determine the pace and form of expansion.

MECHANISM TO REMEMBER



PRELIMS TRAP

Small hydropower is not the same as pumped storage, and installed capacity is not annual generation.

MAINS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTION

How can small hydropower expansion be reconciled with river conservation and local needs? (250 words)

Answer route: Explain flow, head and seasonal output. Add cumulative effects, ecological flows, disaster risk and community water use. Conclude with basin planning and performance-linked support.

Source notes: S37 | Full register at the back.

CROSS-TOPIC REVISION

Four ideas that connect the quarter

Use these connections to turn individual facts into a coherent Mains answer.

Money is not the final outcome

Budget, SIDBI, Urban Fund, BHAVYA and UDAN

The common error is to move directly from an allocation to a claim of success. An outlay authorises or plans resources. An output is something delivered, such as a facility or a service session. An outcome is the change people experience. The causal chain can break at procurement, execution, operation or access. In an answer, use one appropriate outcome measure rather than repeating the programme's financial size.

Policy	Useful outcome measure
Capital investment	Reliability or time saved
Enterprise finance	Additional productive activity
Urban water	Quality, continuity and affordability
Regional aviation	Reliable access relative to public cost

Access is a practical condition

APY, school health, HPV, census and AI

A scheme can be formally open while remaining difficult to use. Indirect costs, language, documentation, disability access and fear of embarrassment can all matter. The solution is not identical in every sector: pension continuity needs usable payment systems, a school needs functional facilities, and a digital service needs assisted channels and correction. Substantive inclusion asks what prevents a person from receiving the intended benefit and assigns responsibility for removing that barrier.

Barrier	Design response
Irregular income	Understandable, workable contribution support
Stigma or privacy concerns	Discreet access and confidential feedback
Digital exclusion	Assisted and offline alternatives
Incorrect records	Accessible correction and appeal

CROSS-TOPIC REVISION

Numbers, capability and resilience

Use these connections to turn individual facts into a coherent Mains answer.

The denominator changes the argument

GDP, fiscal ratios, NDC and hydropower

A percentage is meaningful only when its denominator and period are clear. Debt/GDP is a stock relative to annual income; emissions/GDP is an intensity; capacity share is not generation share. The same discipline applies to programme data: beneficiaries enrolled, active participants and people receiving a benefit are different populations. Before using a statistic, write its unit, date, definition and source. This small habit prevents many avoidable Prelims and Mains errors.

Expression	Check before using
Growth rate	Real or nominal; series and period
Debt ratio	Debt stock and GDP denominator
Capacity share	Rated capacity, not annual generation
Coverage	Enrolled, active or actually served?

Resilience is more than self-sufficiency

India-EU, India-France, West Asia, AI and space

Resilience means retaining useful options when conditions change. It may require domestic capability, diversified partners, reserves, reliable institutions or the ability to repair and learn. Producing everything at home is not automatically efficient or feasible; dependence on one supplier can nevertheless be risky. Explain which capability is critical, what disruption would do and how the proposed measure reduces that vulnerability. This produces a more precise argument than using self-reliance as an unexplained slogan.

Vulnerability	Possible response
One critical supplier	Diversification and lifecycle capability
Uncertain trade rules	Clear guidance and alternative markets
Technical failure	Investigation, testing and correction
Energy disruption	Efficiency, reserves and diversified supply

GS IV / ORIGINAL HYPOTHETICAL CASE

A school inspection that looks successful on paper

Practise a reasoned decision, not a list of ethical vocabulary.

THE SITUATION

You are the district education officer. A review dashboard shows that every school has separate toilets and adequate menstrual-hygiene supplies. During an unannounced visit, students privately tell you that the toilets are often locked, water is irregular and asking for supplies attracts jokes. The head teacher says the school met its construction targets and asks you to avoid recording failures before an award ceremony. The maintenance grant is limited.

Identify the ethical issues and stakeholders. What immediate and longer-term action would you take?

The conflict

The pressure to preserve an institutional reputation conflicts with truthful reporting, student dignity and the duty to provide usable services. Students, parents, teachers, maintenance staff and the administration all have interests, but the children face the direct burden. The officer should distinguish a resource constraint from concealment: limited funds require prioritisation; they do not justify falsifying a record.

Immediate response

Verify the facilities without exposing the students who spoke. Ensure that a usable toilet, water and discreet access to supplies are available through practical interim arrangements. Record the gaps accurately and communicate a time-bound corrective plan. Do not allow the award timetable to determine the factual report. Address mocking behaviour through appropriate school processes while avoiding public humiliation of any child.

Institutional response

Review the maintenance budget and responsibility for daily checks. Introduce confidential student feedback and periodic verification of functionality. Train staff, including male staff, in respectful support. Escalate funding gaps with evidence and track whether repairs remain effective. A good decision combines immediate protection with a system that makes failure visible early.

Why this is defensible

The approach protects dignity, honesty and accountability without assuming that punishment alone will restore a broken service. It uses resources proportionately, preserves confidentiality and gives the school a clear route to compliance. Success means students can participate comfortably, not merely that the dashboard returns to green.

GS IV / ORIGINAL HYPOTHETICAL CASE

An AI advisory error in a district service

Practise a reasoned decision, not a list of ethical vocabulary.

THE SITUATION

A district has piloted an AI assistant for agricultural queries. A farmer reports that a confident response led to unnecessary expenditure. The vendor points to an accuracy score from a general test and says the contract does not require explanations. Staff are under pressure to report high adoption before the pilot is expanded. Several local-language questions have never been evaluated.

How should the district respond to the complaint and decide whether expansion is justified?

The ethical issues

The case involves accountability for public services, transparency, fairness across language groups and responsible use of public money. A general accuracy score cannot answer whether the system works for the actual users or whether a particular output was reasonable. The farmer deserves a fair hearing without an automatic assumption that either the farmer or the tool must be at fault.

Immediate response

Preserve the relevant records with appropriate privacy safeguards and arrange expert review of the advice and its context. Correct any unsafe or misleading guidance and provide a human assistance channel. Pause the affected use where the risk warrants it while investigating; a targeted pause may be more proportionate than either ignoring the issue or abandoning every digital service.

Conditions for expansion

Test local-language and difficult cases against reliable expert guidance. Require clear source information, uncertainty handling and escalation. Review the contract for audit access, responsibility, data protection and exit provisions. Report both errors and benefits honestly. Expansion should depend on evidence of useful performance and an accountable correction process, not on a usage target alone.

The administrative lesson

Public responsibility cannot be outsourced with the software. The district should learn from the complaint and improve procurement standards for future projects. A defensible decision values citizens' experience as evidence, makes uncertainty visible and treats transparency as a condition of trust.

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 01-05

50 questions · suggested time 60 minutes · +2 correct, −2/3 incorrect, 0 unattempted.

01. Article 21A provides for free and compulsory education for children aged:

(A) 3-6
(B) 6-18
(C) 6-14
(D) 14-18 only

02. Which statement about the summit’s AI initiatives is correct?

(A) They automatically create a binding global criminal law
(B) They eliminate the need for national institutions
(C) They guarantee that all models are error-free
(D) They were described as voluntary and collaborative

03. The Census 2027 houselisting window notified in January 2026 was:

(A) April-September 2026
(B) January-March 2026
(C) Only February 2027 in every area
(D) An already completed count published in January

04. An FTA differs from a customs union because an FTA does not necessarily involve:

(A) A common external tariff towards non-members
(B) Preferential terms between parties
(C) Rules of origin
(D) Negotiated conditions for trade

05. GDP at market prices equals:

(A) GVA minus all taxes
(B) GVA at basic prices plus product taxes minus product subsidies
(C) GVA plus intermediate consumption
(D) GVA minus depreciation only

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 06-10

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter’s dated context.

06. Trade diversion occurs when a preference leads buyers to:

(A) Replace a high-cost domestic producer with a more efficient partner
(B) Replace an efficient outside supplier with a less efficient partner
(C) Stop all international trade
(D) Import only services

07. In a fund-of-funds arrangement, public resources typically reach enterprises through:

(A) Only direct consumer subsidies
(B) A mandatory loan to every applicant
(C) A universal tax exemption
(D) Intermediary investment funds

08. Which statement about non-fossil power capacity is correct?

(A) It excludes nuclear energy
(B) It is different from electricity generated over a period
(C) It always equals the same percentage of annual generation
(D) It measures only solar output at noon

09. Which practice best combines useful census data with confidentiality?

(A) Publish identifiable household responses online
(B) Collect sensitive data without explaining purpose
(C) Replace all fieldwork with compulsory smartphone use
(D) Release suitable aggregates while protecting identifiable records

10. Under the announced Urban Challenge Fund financing shares, a qualifying 200-unit project would require at least how much market finance?

(A) 25
(B) 100
(C) 50
(D) 150

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 11-15

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

11. A bakery sells output worth 1,500 units and uses intermediate inputs worth 900. Its gross value added is:

(A) 2,400
(B) 900
(C) 600
(D) 1,500

12. A public guarantee on a municipal loan is best understood as:

(A) A contingent obligation if specified conditions are met
(B) Revenue already collected from residents
(C) A cancellation of the lender's risk assessment
(D) Proof that the project has no public cost

13. Consider: 1. A lower deficit-to-GDP ratio necessarily reduces nominal debt. 2. Capital expenditure always produces a higher social return than revenue expenditure. Which is correct?

(A) 1 only
(B) 2 only
(C) Both 1 and 2
(D) Neither 1 nor 2

14. The Strait of Hormuz links the:

(A) Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea
(B) Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman
(C) Red Sea and Gulf of Aden
(D) Black Sea and Aegean Sea

15. A higher retail price for a tribal craft proves higher producer income only if:

(A) The product has attractive packaging
(B) Visitor numbers rise
(C) The seller has a social-media account
(D) The producer's retained return improves after relevant costs and margins

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 16-20

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter’s dated context.

16. A rise in perceived maritime risk can increase import costs even without a total closure because:

(A) Insurance and freight costs must fall
(B) Every cargo immediately becomes free
(C) Insurers and carriers can raise risk-related charges
(D) Exchange rates cease to matter

17. Elimination of cervical cancer as a public-health problem, in the WHO strategy, means:

(A) Every HPV infection disappears worldwide
(B) Screening is no longer needed
(C) Incidence falls below the specified public-health threshold
(D) Vaccination can treat existing cancer

18. An equity infusion into a development financial institution primarily:

(A) Cancels all borrower debt
(B) Strengthens its capital base, subject to prudent deployment
(C) Guarantees that every startup succeeds
(D) Converts every loan into a grant

19. Substantive equality is most closely illustrated by:

(A) Applying an identical rule regardless of every barrier
(B) Removing a specific barrier that prevents a group from using an opportunity
(C) Assuming equal admission guarantees equal participation
(D) Ignoring differences in access to school facilities

20. Patna Bird Sanctuary, in the January Ramsar announcement, is located in:

(A) Patna district, Bihar
(B) Kutch, Gujarat
(C) Etah, Uttar Pradesh
(D) Bharatpur, Rajasthan

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 21-25

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

21. Which event came first in February 2026?

(A) The Section 122 surcharge taking effect
(B) The US Supreme Court's IEEPA tariff ruling
(C) The India-US interim-trade framework announcement
(D) The 20 February surcharge proclamation

22. Which statement about municipal borrowing is most accurate?

(A) It is a permanent substitute for municipal revenue
(B) It removes all maintenance costs
(C) It finances an asset but requires credible repayment resources
(D) It necessarily transfers ownership of every asset to a private firm

23. Which approach best assesses several small hydro projects on one river?

(A) Basin-level cumulative assessment alongside project appraisal
(B) Assume each has zero impact because it is small
(C) Compare only installed MW and ignore seasonal flow
(D) Treat all small hydro as pumped storage

24. Which measure best evaluates a regional-air-connectivity service?

(A) Reliable flights and useful access benefits relative to public cost
(B) Only airports listed in a proposal
(C) Only routes awarded but never operated
(D) Only launch-event attendance

25. Strategic autonomy is best understood as:

(A) Avoiding every international partnership
(B) Producing every good domestically regardless of cost
(C) Preserving the ability to make independent policy choices
(D) Accepting all positions of one partner

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 26-30

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

26. A fixed nominal pension loses purchasing power when:

(A) Prices rise while the pension remains unchanged
(B) Prices fall at the same rate as the pension rises
(C) The pension rises faster than prices
(D) The household changes banks with no cost

27. Which is the strongest evidence of deeper domestic technological capability?

(A) Local assembly with every critical decision controlled externally
(B) Ability to design, test, maintain and upgrade key systems
(C) Only a rise in imported finished platforms
(D) A change in a partnership's title alone

28. An economy doubles output while reducing emissions intensity by 40%. Total emissions become:

(A) 40% of the initial level
(B) 60% of the initial level
(C) 80% of the initial level
(D) 120% of the initial level

29. Under the WHO cervical-cancer strategy, the 70% target relates to:

(A) Girls vaccinated by age 15
(B) Women screened with a high-performance test by ages 35 and 45
(C) All cancers cured without treatment
(D) A reduction in the number of health facilities

30. A school sanitation programme reports construction of toilets. Which additional measure is most useful?

(A) Daily usability, water, accessibility and confidential student feedback
(B) The colour of the inauguration banner
(C) The number of procurement files alone
(D) Whether students publicly disclose personal health details

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 31-35

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

31. The New Delhi AI declaration's reported 92 endorsers comprised:

(A) Countries and international organisations combined
(B) Only 92 countries
(C) Only private companies
(D) Only Indian state governments

32. An anomaly observed near a particular launch stage establishes:

(A) A useful point for investigation, but not the final root cause by itself
(B) That every earlier mission also failed
(C) That the payload reached its intended orbit
(D) That no further evidence is needed

33. Agglomeration benefits can arise because nearby firms:

(A) Never compete for labour
(B) Share specialised suppliers, skills and knowledge
(C) Become exempt from all environmental rules
(D) Automatically acquire the same productivity

34. PSLV's four principal propulsion stages follow which sequence?

(A) Liquid-solid-liquid-solid
(B) Solid-solid-liquid-liquid
(C) Solid-liquid-solid-liquid
(D) Liquid-liquid-solid-solid

35. The strongest evidence of additionality in public enterprise finance would be:

(A) An increase in the number of press releases
(B) Replacing private funds that were already committed on identical terms
(C) Enabling a viable, underfinanced activity that otherwise would not proceed
(D) Counting the same investment under several schemes

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 36-40

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

36. Which is the most defensible reading of a growth estimate released after GDP rebasing?

(A) Compare it with earlier estimates only after checking series and methodology
(B) Treat the entire difference as newly produced output
(C) Assume all past growth rates remain identical
(D) Use it as a direct measure of income equality

37. A public AI system performs well on average but poorly in one regional language. The best response is to:

(A) Ignore subgroup results
(B) Evaluate that use case, correct weaknesses and retain accountable assistance
(C) Assume average accuracy proves universal fairness
(D) Remove every appeal channel

38. Why can wetland protection fail despite fencing the waterbody?

(A) Upstream pollution and altered catchment inflows remain unaddressed
(B) Wetlands have no connection to surrounding land
(C) Every wetland must have permanently deep water
(D) Ecological character is determined only by fencing

39. The US Supreme Court's February ruling discussed in this issue held that:

(A) IEEPA did not authorise the President to impose tariffs
(B) Every tariff under every US statute was invalid
(C) India and the US had formed a customs union
(D) All import duties worldwide were abolished

40. Global entry into force of a treaty means that:

(A) Every state has necessarily ratified it
(B) The treaty's entry-into-force conditions have been met; individual state status remains distinct
(C) All implementation is complete
(D) National signatures and ratifications are interchangeable

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 41-45

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

41. Expenditure is 200 units; revenue and non-debt capital receipts are 160; interest payments are 15. The primary deficit is:

(A) 25
(B) 40
(C) 55
(D) 175

42. Which is NOT one of the BBNJ agreement's principal areas?

(A) Marine genetic resources and benefit sharing
(B) Environmental impact assessments
(C) Capacity building and technology transfer
(D) Automatic transfer of every coastal state's territorial sea to the UN

43. Rules of origin primarily determine:

(A) The nationality of every consumer
(B) The exchange rate for all transactions
(C) Whether all goods meet environmental standards
(D) Whether a good qualifies for preferential treatment under an agreement

44. Which correctly describes vaccination and screening?

(A) Both are treatments for established cancer
(B) Screening makes all vaccination unnecessary
(C) Vaccination always removes all future screening needs
(D) Vaccination prevents targeted infection; screening detects relevant changes

45. Consider: 1. A guaranteed fixed pension is necessarily inflation-indexed. 2. Enrolment alone measures effective pension coverage. Which is correct?

(A) 1 only
(B) 2 only
(C) Both 1 and 2
(D) Neither 1 nor 2

PRELIMS PRACTICE / ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Practice set · 46-50

Choose the single best answer. Statements use the quarter's dated context.

46. Which statement correctly distinguishes a census from a sample survey?

(A) A census always has no measurement error
(B) A survey cannot estimate population characteristics
(C) A census aims at complete enumeration; a survey studies a selected subset
(D) A census and survey necessarily have identical costs

47. Which best distinguishes industrial-park success from an announcement?

(A) The number of launch ceremonies
(B) The area shown on a promotional map
(C) The number of memoranda signed
(D) Operating firms using reliable services and sustaining productive work

48. Which receipt is excluded when calculating the fiscal deficit?

(A) Tax revenue
(B) Non-tax revenue
(C) Borrowing
(D) Disinvestment receipts

49. The economic burden of a tariff:

(A) Must always fall entirely on the foreign government
(B) Can never affect domestic consumers
(C) Must always be borne only by the importer's employees
(D) Can be shared across producers, importers and consumers depending on market conditions

50. For AI-based farm advice, which is most important when a symptom has several possible causes?

(A) Provide the most confident answer regardless of evidence
(B) Recommend the same input to every farmer
(C) Obtain relevant context and allow expert escalation
(D) Ignore crop stage and local conditions

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Answer key

Check the key only after attempting the set.

Questions	Answers
01-05	01 C 02 D 03 A 04 A 05 B
06-10	06 B 07 D 08 B 09 D 10 B
11-15	11 C 12 A 13 D 14 B 15 D
16-20	16 C 17 C 18 B 19 B 20 C
21-25	21 C 22 C 23 A 24 A 25 C
26-30	26 A 27 B 28 D 29 B 30 A
31-35	31 A 32 A 33 B 34 C 35 C
36-40	36 A 37 B 38 A 39 A 40 B
41-45	41 A 42 D 43 D 44 D 45 D
46-50	46 C 47 D 48 C 49 D 50 C

TURN A SCORE INTO A DIAGNOSIS

For each error, record whether it came from a missing fact, a confused concept, a date/status mistake or an avoidable reading error. Revisit the linked chapter and explain the correct reasoning aloud before another attempt.

Practice score = 2 × correct answers − (2/3) × incorrect answers. Maximum: 100. This is an original learning set, not a prediction of the examination or an official UPSC paper.

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Why the answers are correct

Questions 01-10 · Use the chapter links to repair the underlying concept.

01 / C The constitutional age range is six to fourteen. Wider school-health policies or directions should not be confused with rewriting that range. [Chapter 08]

02 / D The declaration advances cooperation and non-binding frameworks. It does not itself establish an enforceable universal AI code. [Chapter 13]

03 / A The notified first-phase window is 1 April-30 September 2026, with a 30-day enumeration period selected within it. [Chapter 07]

04 / A A common external tariff is characteristic of a customs union. FTA parties can retain their own external tariff policies. [Chapter 10]

05 / B The bridge from GVA at basic prices to GDP at market prices is net product taxes, not all taxes or intermediate consumption. [Chapter 02]

06 / B The preference can alter sourcing away from the lowest-cost external supplier. This differs from trade creation. [Chapter 10]

07 / D A fund of funds invests through other funds. This differs from directly selecting and financing every underlying enterprise. [Chapter 03]

08 / B Capacity is rated equipment capability; generation depends on utilisation and conditions. Non-fossil includes nuclear. [Chapter 15]

09 / D Granular planning and confidentiality can coexist through appropriate aggregation, controlled access and field-based inclusion. [Chapter 07]

10 / B The minimum market-finance share is 50%. Half of 200 is 100. Central assistance at 25% would be 50. [Chapter 05]

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Why the answers are correct

Questions 11-20 · Use the chapter links to repair the underlying concept.

11 / C Value added is output less intermediate consumption: 1,500 minus 900 equals 600. [Chapter 02]

12 / A Guarantees shift or share risk. They can create a future public liability and should be disclosed and managed. [Chapter 05]

13 / D Debt can rise while its GDP ratio falls. Efficient health or education services can have high value even when classified as revenue spending. [Chapter 01]

14 / B Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Bab el-Mandeb links the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. [Chapter 21]

15 / D Value-chain costs and intermediary margins determine the income retained by the producer. [Chapter 20]

16 / C Risk premiums and changed routing or operating decisions can transmit costs before a complete physical interruption. [Chapter 21]

17 / C Elimination as a public-health problem uses a threshold; it is different from global eradication or zero infections. [Chapter 09]

18 / B Capital can support lending capacity and absorb losses, but lending still requires funding, appraisal and prudent risk management. [Chapter 03]

19 / B Substantive equality considers real barriers to participation and supports justified measures to address them. [Chapter 08]

20 / C The site is in Etah, Uttar Pradesh. Chhari-Dhand, the other site in the announcement, is in Kutch, Gujarat. [Chapter 16]

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Why the answers are correct

Questions 21-30 · Use the chapter links to repair the underlying concept.

21 / C The framework was announced on 6 February; the ruling and proclamation were on 20 February, and the surcharge took effect on 24 February. [Chapter 11]

22 / C Debt provides upfront finance. Repayment still depends on revenue, transfers or other credible resources. [Chapter 05]

23 / A Combined diversions, barriers and flow changes can matter. Small capacity does not remove the need to assess cumulative effects. [Chapter 22]

24 / A Connectivity depends on actual operation, reliability, useful schedules and value to intended users. [Chapter 19]

25 / C Well-designed partnerships can widen options. Autonomy concerns the capacity to choose, not compulsory isolation. [Chapter 12]

26 / A If prices rise and the payment is unchanged, the same money purchases fewer goods and services. [Chapter 04]

27 / B Design authority, engineering skills, testing and lifecycle support indicate capability beyond assembly alone. [Chapter 12]

28 / D Total emissions equal output multiplied by intensity: 2 × 0.60 = 1.20 of the original level. [Chapter 15]

29 / B The 90-70-90 framework covers vaccination, screening and treatment. The middle target concerns screening. [Chapter 09]

30 / A Functionality and user experience test whether the infrastructure enables participation. Unnecessary disclosure undermines dignity. [Chapter 08]

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Why the answers are correct

Questions 31-40 · Use the chapter links to repair the underlying concept.

31 / A The official release counted countries and international organisations together. The distinction prevents an inflated country count. [Chapter 13]

32 / A Timing guides analysis. Telemetry, tests and process evidence are needed to establish cause and verify corrective action. [Chapter 14]

33 / B Clusters can deepen supplier and labour markets and spread knowledge. Benefits are conditional, not automatic. [Chapter 06]

34 / C PSLV uses alternating solid and liquid stages, beginning with a solid first stage; PS3 is the third, solid stage. [Chapter 14]

35 / C Additionality asks what useful activity the intervention enables beyond what would have occurred without it. [Chapter 03]

36 / A A new series can change measurement and revisions. Comparing different vintages without checking definitions can mislead. [Chapter 02]

37 / B Evaluation must reflect actual users and error costs. Aggregate performance can conceal unequal service quality. [Chapter 13]

38 / A Catchment activities affect water quantity, quality and connectivity. Management must extend beyond the visible boundary. [Chapter 16]

39 / A The ruling concerned the authority supplied by IEEPA. Other statutory tariff powers are a separate legal question. [Chapter 11]

40 / B Global operation and a particular state’s legal position are separate questions. Signature and ratification are distinct stages. [Chapter 17]

PRELIMS PRACTICE

Why the answers are correct

Questions 41-50 · Use the chapter links to repair the underlying concept.

41 / A Fiscal deficit is 40. Subtracting interest payments of 15 gives a primary deficit of 25. [Chapter 01]

42 / D BBNJ concerns biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. It does not transfer national territorial seas to the UN. [Chapter 17]

43 / D Origin rules prevent preferences being obtained merely by routing non-qualifying third-country goods through a partner. [Chapter 10]

44 / D The interventions have different functions and complement treatment within a broader prevention-and-care strategy. [Chapter 09]

45 / D A nominal guarantee does not automatically index purchasing power. Active contributions and access to benefits also matter. [Chapter 04]

46 / C Coverage objectives differ. Both can contain errors, and a well-designed survey can estimate population characteristics. [Chapter 07]

47 / D Operational services, production and durable employment are stronger outcomes than intentions, allotments or ceremonies. [Chapter 06]

48 / C Fiscal deficit is expenditure minus revenue receipts and non-debt capital receipts. Borrowing finances the resulting gap. [Chapter 01]

49 / D Legal collection and economic incidence differ. Competition, supply alternatives and pricing influence who bears the cost. [Chapter 11]

50 / C Reliable advice needs context, credible sources and a route for handling uncertainty. Confidence is not proof of correctness. [Chapter 18]

REVISION GLOSSARY

The terms behind the headlines

Compact definitions; return to the chapters for context and limitations.

Additionality. Useful activity enabled by an intervention that would otherwise not occur on comparable terms.

Agglomeration. Productivity advantages that can arise when related firms, workers and suppliers cluster.

Capacity. Rated productive capability; in power, it differs from electricity generated over time.

Contingent liability. An obligation that may arise if specified future conditions occur, as with some guarantees.

Crowding in. Public action encouraging additional private investment by improving conditions or expectations.

Emissions intensity. Emissions per unit of economic output, rather than total emissions.

Fiscal deficit. Expenditure minus revenue receipts and non-debt capital receipts.

Fund of funds. An investment vehicle that invests through other funds.

GVA. Output less intermediate consumption; gross value added by producers.

Inference. Use of an already trained AI model to produce an output.

Primary deficit. Fiscal deficit minus interest payments.

Rules of origin. Criteria determining whether a product qualifies as originating for a trade preference.

Substantive equality. An approach that considers real barriers to fair participation, beyond identical formal treatment.

Viability-gap funding. Support intended to bridge a defined viability gap in a project or service.

Wise use. Wetland management that maintains ecological character within sustainable development.

Working capital. Finance for the day-to-day operating cycle, such as inputs and payments before sales receipts.

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Gazette of India, 7 January 2026

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World Health Organization, 17 November 2020

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European External Action Service, 2026

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White House, 6 February 2026

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US Supreme Court, 20 February 2026

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White House proclamation, 20 February 2026

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Ministry of Defence / PIB, 17 February 2026

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MeitY / PIB, 21 February 2026; declaration 18-19 February

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ISRO, January 2026 mission information

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United Nations, agreement information; only status through 31 March used

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UN Secretary-General, 17 January 2026

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Cabinet / PIB, 25 March 2026

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Ministry of Tribal Affairs / PIB, 28 March 2026

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Small Hydro Power Development Scheme

Cabinet / PIB, 18 March 2026

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PSLV: vehicle and stage configuration

ISRO, technical reference

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Wise use of wetlands

Convention on Wetlands, conceptual reference

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Gazette of India, 2026

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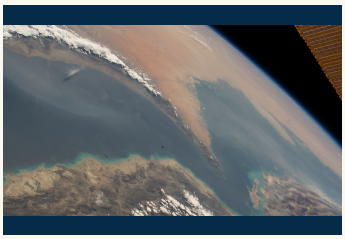

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