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Guiding Dreams, Empowering Future
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26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit



Why in News?

- The 26th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State (CHS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
- The summit also hosted the inaugural "SCO Plus" meeting.
- The summit marked the 25th anniversary of the SCO.
- The chairmanship was held by Kyrgyzstan under the theme: "25 Years of the SCO: Together for Sustainable Peace, Development and Prosperity."

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Origin and Evolution

- The SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, established in 2001 in Shanghai, China.
- It was preceded by the "Shanghai Five" mechanism comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Membership

- Member States (10): China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Belarus (newest member).
- Observer States: Afghanistan and Mongolia.
- Dialogue Partners: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bahrain, Egypt, Cambodia, Qatar, Kuwait, Laos, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Sri Lanka.

Significance

- The SCO represents approximately 25%

of the global GDP and over 40% of the world's population, a vast geopolitical space.

Secretariat

- Beijing, China.

Core Objectives

- Strengthen mutual trust, maintain regional peace, security, and stability.
- Jointly address new challenges, primarily the "Three Evils": Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism.

Structure

- Heads of State Council (HSC): The supreme decision-making body.
- Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS): Headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; a permanent organ coordinating member states' efforts against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

Outcomes of the 26th SCO Summit

Bishkek Declaration

- SCO leaders signed and issued the Bishkek Declaration, reaffirming cooperation on regional peace, security, development, and the organisation's future direction.

SCO Charter Amendments

- Approved the Protocol on Amendments and Additions to the SCO Charter, aimed at updating the institutional framework.
- Allows newer members, such as India, to actively participate in shaping the organisation's future structural and legal framework.

Universal Security Centre

- Approved regulations to establish the Universal Centre for Countering Challenges and Threats to the Security of SCO Member States.
- Aims to enhance intelligence sharing against terrorism, extremism, and organised crime.

SCO Anti-Drug Centre

- Approved regulations on the Executive Committee of the SCO Anti-Drug Centre.
- Adopted programmes on combating drug addiction and countering the spread of synthetic drugs and their precursors up to 2030.

Economic & Green Corridors

- Signed an action plan for the development of ports and logistics centres across member states (2026–2030).
- Established the framework for the SCO "Green Technology Corridor".

Global Institutional Partnerships

- Approved the SCO–CSTO–CIS Roadmap for trilateral cooperation among the SCO, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
- Decided to sign an MoU between the SCO Secretariat and the African Union Commission, further expanding the SCO's engagement with regional organisations.

International Information Security

- Adopted a Plan of Cooperation on Ensuring International Information Security for 2026–2028.

Biodiversity

- Adopted an initiative on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of

Biodiversity in SCO Member States for 2026–2031, along with a joint action plan.

Pakistan's Chairmanship (2026–2027)

- The rotating SCO chairmanship was handed over to Pakistan.
- Theme announced: "Turning Vision into Action: Connectivity, Innovation and Shared Prosperity".
- Lahore designated as the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2026–2027.

India at the 26th SCO Summit

Three Pillars of Engagement

- India's Prime Minister outlined three core pillars for the SCO's future: Security, Connectivity, and Opportunity.

Dismantling the Terror Ecosystem

- India strongly called for a unified approach to counter-terrorism.
- Urged member states to dismantle the financing and safe havens of terrorism without employing "double standards".

Addressing Global Geopolitical Conflicts

- India reiterated its steadfast position that conflicts cannot be resolved on the battlefield; dialogue and diplomacy are the only way forward.

Sovereignty in Connectivity

- India stressed that all connectivity projects must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.
- This was a principled, indirect critique of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Indian-Led Initiatives

- Youth and Innovation: The SCO endorsed India's initiatives to strengthen scientific and technical cooperation through the SCO Young Scientists Forum and SCO Young Authors Conference.
- Civilisational Dialogue: Member states welcomed India's initiative to host the first SCO Civilisation Dialogue Forum in 2026.
- Language Reform: During India's 2022–23 SCO Presidency, India proposed adding English as an official and working language. The 26th SCO Summit added English alongside Russian and Chinese.

"SCO Plus" Format

- The "SCO Plus" is an expanded multilateral dialogue mechanism that includes non-member states and international organisations to discuss global challenges and multipolarity.
- Theme for 2026: "The UN as a Key Element of a Just World Order: The



Contribution of the SCO Plus States to the Formation of a Multipolar World".

Why is the SCO Significant for India?

Security and Counter-Terrorism

- Through the RATS mechanism, India gains access to intelligence sharing and joint counter-terrorism exercises.
- Crucial for securing India's borders and combating cross-border terrorism emanating from its neighbourhood.

Connect Central Asia Policy

- The SCO provides a direct diplomatic and economic gateway to the resource-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs), a region where India lacks direct land access.
- Central Asian nations (like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) are rich in hydrocarbons and uranium.
- Active participation in the SCO allows India to secure its long-term energy needs.

Balancing Strategic Autonomy

- Engaging in the SCO (which includes China and Russia) while simultaneously being a core member of the Quad (with the US, Japan, and Australia) allows India to successfully exercise its policy of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

Challenges Facing the SCO and the Way Forward

Decision-Making: Consensus is often affected by India–Pakistan tensions and India–China disputes.

Way Forward: Strengthen confidence-building and dispute-management mechanisms.

Geopolitical Balance: China–Russia influence and the inclusion of Iran and Belarus create perceptions of an anti-Western bloc.

Way Forward: Maintain SCO as an inclusive, non-bloc platform consistent with strategic autonomy.

Terrorism & Security: RATS has limited en-

forcement capacity, while members differ in their approach to terrorism.

Way Forward: Improve intelligence sharing, common databases, terror-financing controls and coordinated action.

Economic Cooperation: China's economic dominance can create trade imbalances and dependence among smaller members.

Way Forward: Promote equitable financing, balanced trade and diversified economic cooperation.

Connectivity: BRI, INSTC and Trans-Caspian routes face geopolitical and customs-related barriers.

Way Forward: Develop interoperable corridors, harmonised customs procedures and sovereignty-respecting connectivity.

Conclusion

The Bishkek SCO summit gave India new institutions and a louder voice; the task now is to convert that into real security, connectivity, and multipolar influence without being dragged into old rivalries or an anti-Western image.

Prelims Previous Year Question

Q. With reference to the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)', consider the following statements:

1. The SCO was established in 2001 in Shanghai, China, and was preceded by the 'Shanghai Five' mechanism.
2. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO is headquartered in Beijing, China.
3. The SCO accounts for approximately 40% of the world's population and 25% of the global GDP.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only.

India's 7.8% GDP Growth Debate

7.8% or 2.6%?

India's Q1 GDP Row:

Ex-Finance Secretary

Subhash Garg Takes On MoSPI

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) rejected claims that India's Q1 FY 2026–27 real GDP growth of 7.8% was inflated.

MoSPI stated that the estimates use the 2022–23 base year, Producer Price Indices (PPI), and the double-deflation methodology.

What GDP and Double Deflation Mean

- GDP measures the value of final goods and services produced within a country.
- Under the Double Deflation Method, output and intermediate inputs are deflated separately using appropriate price indices.

Real GVA = Deflated Gross Output – Deflated Intermediate Consumption

- This provides a more accurate measure of real manufacturing growth, especially when input and output prices move differently.

Successive Updates to Q1 2025–26 GDP at Current Prices

- August 2025:** ₹86.05 lakh crore - initial estimate under the 2011–12 base-year series.
- February 2026:** ₹80.32 lakh crore - revised estimate under the new 2022–23 base-year series.
- June 2026:** ₹80.44 lakh crore - revised based on availability and updation of indicators and data.
- August 2026:** ₹80.00 lakh crore - incorporated the new IP and PPI series.

Key Data and Economic Indicators

- Real vs. Nominal GDP:** Real GDP reached ₹81.36 lakh crore, recording 7.8% year-on-year growth; nominal GDP reached ₹88.27 lakh crore, recording



10.3% year-on-year growth.

- Real GVA Outturn:** Real GVA expanded by 8.2% to ₹73.82 lakh crore; nominal GVA grew by 11.5% to ₹80.53 lakh crore.

Sectoral Drivers

- Manufacturing GVA:** Grew 9.2% in real terms compared with 7.7% nominal growth, yielding a negative implicit GVA deflator of –1.5%.
- Tertiary / Services:** Grew 10.0%, anchored by Financial, Real Estate and Professional Services at 12.1%.
- Primary Sector:** Grew 2.9%, with Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing expanding at

3.6%.

- Mining & Quarrying:** Contracted 2.4% in volume terms (IIP-based), but posted 22.3% nominal growth due to high global crude-oil and metal-ore price inflation; PPI rose by more than 60%.
- Demand-Side Strength:** Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) expanded by 11.9%, up from 5.8% in Q1 FY26, while Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) grew by 7.1%.

Core Criticisms and MoSPI's Clarification

1. Claim: Growth is only 2.6% due to

base manipulation

Criticism: Last year's Q1 FY26 nominal GDP was allegedly reduced from ₹86.05 lakh crore to ₹80.00 lakh crore to artificially boost growth.

MoSPI clarification - Apples-to-Oranges Comparison: ₹86.05 lakh crore belonged to the superseded 2011–12 base series. Under the 2022–23 series, Q1 FY26 was initially estimated at ₹80.32 lakh crore in February 2026 and was subsequently revised through standard data cycles. Growth must be evaluated within the same series.

2. Claim: A negative manufacturing deflator (–1.5%) is impossible

Criticism: The deflator appears inconsistent when consumer and wholesale prices are rising. **MoSPI clarification** - Double Deflation Dynamics: Input prices such as cotton, basic metals and polymers rose faster than factory-gate output prices. Higher intermediate costs compressed nominal value added even while real physical output expanded.

3. Claim: GDP deflator of 2.5% contradicts CPI of 3.9% and WPI above 9%

Criticism: Large divergence among price indices is presented as evidence of flawed inflation accounting. **MoSPI clarification** - Coverage & Weight Variations: CPI tracks household retail baskets, while WPI tracks bulk physical goods and excludes services. The GDP deflator covers the whole economy, including low-inflation IT, telecom and banking,

through more than 300 item-level deflators.

4. Claim: Double deflation skews PFCE

Criticism: Consumption expenditure estimates are alleged to be distorted by production-side adjustments. **MoSPI clarification** - Methodological Isolation: Double deflation is applied strictly to production-side GVA. PFCE is estimated independently using consumer-demand indicators and detailed retail CPI baskets.

5. Claim: Discrepancies indicate major future revisions

Criticism: Large statistical discrepancies between expenditure and production approaches are said to undermine credibility.

MoSPI clarification - Routine Balancing Mechanism: Discrepancies are statistical balancing items across high-frequency indicator models and tend to converge toward zero as annual corporate MCA21 and tax filings become available.

Significance of the 2022–23 Base-Year Revision

Granular Price Capture: Broad WPI proxies were replaced with the Producer Price Index (PPI), expanding individual sector deflators from about 180 to more than 300 and aligning India with UN System of National Accounts (SNA) standards. **Inclusion of Modern Services:** The Banking Services Price Index and modernized digital/fintech weights were introduced to capture structural shifts in India's services-led economy. **Enhanced Real-Time Tracking:** The bench-

mark-indicator framework uses high-frequency real-economy proxies rather than outdated sample surveys.

Way forward

Accelerating High-Frequency Input Price Tracking: Deepen survey coverage of intermediate industrial inputs to reduce volatility in quarterly double-deflated manufacturing estimates.

Harmonizing Enterprise MCA21 Portals: Integrate real-time corporate financial filings with National Accounts compilation to narrow discrepancies between production and expenditure approaches.

Public Dissemination & Technical Workshops: Conduct technical briefings for academic economists, financial institutions and policy analysts to improve understanding of double-deflation mechanics and PPI linkages.

Institutionalizing Regular 5-Year Base Revisions: Establish a predictable schedule for updating national-account and inflation baselines to prevent data shocks caused by delayed revisions.

Conclusion

The controversy over Q1 FY 2026–27 GDP numbers reflects the transition challenges involved in adopting global statistical standards such as double deflation. By distinguishing output prices from intermediate-cost shocks, the revised 2022–23 series seeks to provide a more accurate picture of industrial value addition. Absolute transparency and stronger granular data infrastructure remain essential for safeguarding institutional trust in India's macroeconomic growth narrative.

EOS-05: India's 1st Dedicated Geosynchronous Earth Observation Satellite

Why in News?

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the Earth Observation Satellite-05 (EOS-05) aboard the GSLV-F17 launch vehicle from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. This mission marks a historic milestone as it is India's first dedicated imaging satellite designed to operate from a geosynchronous orbit (GEO). Dubbed the "Eye in the Sky," EOS-05 is a state-of-the-art spacecraft equipped with advanced optical and infrared imaging payloads.



What is the EOS-05 Mission?

About the Satellite

- Purpose: EOS-05 is designed to provide continuous, real-time imagery of the Indian subcontinent and adjoining regions.
- Weight: Weighing 2,367 kg, it represents the heaviest payload successfully injected into orbit by a standard GSLV configuration.
- Orbit: It is India's first imaging satellite to operate from a Geosynchronous Orbit (GEO), roughly 36,000 km above the Earth.
- Successor Mission: EOS-05 serves as a replacement for the earlier GISAT-1 (EOS-03) mission, which was lost during a launch attempt in August 2021 due to a cryogenic stage malfunction.

The Launch Vehicle:

GSLV-F17

- Flight Number: 19th operational flight of India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle.
- Height: 51.7 metres tall.
- Liftoff Mass: 420.5 tonnes.
- Three-Stage Architecture

Understanding Satellite Orbits

Low Earth Orbit (LEO) 160 km to 2,000 km Passes over a specific area in minutes; leaves blind spots of hours or days before the next pass. Conventional Earth observation satellites (~600 km).

Geosynchronous Orbit (GSO) ~36,000 km Matches Earth's rotational speed; remains over broadly the same part of the planet. EOS-05 (slightly elliptical GSO).

Geostationary Orbit (GEO) ~35,786 km (circular) A subset of GSO with zero eccentricity and zero inclination; remains fixed over one location on the equator. Communication and weather satellites.

Payload & Imaging Capabilities

- Multi-band Sensor Payload: Equipped with advanced optical and infrared imaging payloads.
- Rapid Revisit Capability:

- Imagery of broad areas at roughly 30-minute intervals.
- Priority targets can be revisited in as little as five minutes.
- Continuous Monitoring: Provides an "unblinking, wide-area view" enabling persistent, high-frequency tracking of rapidly evolving events.

Applications & Significance

Civilian Applications

- Disaster Management: Real-time monitoring of cyclones, cloudbursts, flash floods, and forest fires, where hourly updates are vital for disaster relief.
- Agriculture: Monitoring crop health, obtaining spectral signatures, and assessing agricultural conditions.
- Environmental Assessment: Tracking changes in land, water bodies, and natural resources.
- Weather Monitoring: Tracking cloud formations, thunderstorms, and developing weather systems.

Strategic Applications

- Border Surveillance: High-resolution camera for constant border protection.
- Maritime Domain Awareness: Indian Navy is expected to be a user for strategic data.
- Persistent Monitoring: Provides continuous watch over India's territory and coastline.

Why is EOS-05 a Milestone for India? Technological Leap

- First of its Kind: India's first dedicated imaging satellite from geosynchronous orbit.
- Heaviest GSLV Payload: 2,367 kg — a testament to incremental gains in structural mass optimisation and propulsion system upgrades.
- GSLV Platform Strengthening: Demonstrates the capability to carry heavier geosynchronous payloads.

Strategic Advantage

- From Snapshots to Surveillance: Unlike LEO satellites that provide brief snapshots, EOS-05 offers a continuous "bird's eye view" of the nation.
- Rapid Response: Enables near-real-time imaging during fast-changing events, significantly enhancing India's disaster response capabilities.
- Reduced Blind Spots: Eliminates the hours-long gaps between LEO satellite passes.

Redemption Mission

- The successful launch of EOS-05 comes five years after the GISAT-1 failure in 2021, marking a crucial comeback for ISRO's geosynchronous imaging programme.

Challenges

High Altitude Imaging Capturing detailed imagery from 36,000 km away presents major technological challenges in precise pointing and stable operations.

Orbit Maintenance Maintaining the satellite's position in GSO requires regular station-keeping manoeuvres using on-board fuel.

Atmospheric Interference Imaging through the atmosphere from such a distance can be affected by weather conditions and atmospheric distortion.

Data Volume & Processing Continuous imaging generates massive data volumes requiring advanced processing and down-link capabilities.



Conclusion

The successful launch and orbital placement of EOS-05 marks a transformative moment for India's space programme. As the nation's first dedicated imaging satellite in geosynchronous orbit, it bridges a critical gap between episodic satellite passes and the need for persistent, real-time surveillance of the Indian subcontinent. For a country frequently vulnerable to cyclones, floods, and security challenges, EOS-05 represents not just a technological achievement but a strategic necessity.

Prelims Previous Year

Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Earth Observation Satellite-05 (EOS-05) launched by ISRO:

1. It is India's first dedicated imaging satellite designed to operate from a Geosynchronous Orbit (GEO).



2. It was launched aboard the GSLV-F17 and is the heaviest payload ever carried by a GSLV.

3. It can revisit priority targets in as little as five minutes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3.

Why in News?

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) organised Swachh Vayu Diwas 2026 on the occasion of the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies (7th September). During the event, the 5th Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Awards were conferred on the best-performing cities and wards under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Additionally, a Compendium of Best Management Practices under NCAP was released to facilitate the replication of successful air quality interventions across states.

Note: The International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies was designated by the UN General Assembly in 2019 to promote global action and public awareness against air pollution. India observes it as Swachh Vayu Diwas. The 2026 theme is "Clean Air for Climate Action."

What is the Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan Framework?

About

- Introduced in 2022-23, the framework evaluates cities on specific measures taken to curb air pollution.
- These include managing road dust, solid waste management (SWM), vehicular and industrial emissions, construction and demolition (C&D) waste, and commercial emissions (like DG sets), alongside public outreach activities.

City Categorisation

- The assessment covers all 130 NCAP cities, dividing them into three distinct groups based on population size:
 - Category 1: Population above 10 Lakh
 - Category 2: Population between 3 to 10 Lakh
 - Category 3: Population below 3 Lakh

Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan 2026 :



Highlights of the 5th Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan (2026)

Top Performing Cities

Category 1st Rank 2nd Rank 3rd Rank
 Category 1 (Population > 10 Lakh) Lucknow Indore Jabalpur
 Category 2 (Population 3-10 Lakh) Rourkela (Odisha) – –
 Category 3 (Population < 3 Lakh) Kalinganagar (Odisha) – –
 Lucknow secured the top rank for proactive measures like inducting EVs into municipal fleets, mechanised road sweeping, and remediating legacy waste.

Bottom Performers (Category 1):

Chennai, Jamshedpur, Kota, Kolkata, and

Madurai ranked in the bottom five. Delhi stood at the 30th spot.

Progress under NCAP

Data from 2025-26 indicates measurable progress compared to the 2017-18 baseline:

- Out of 130 NCAP cities, 108 recorded reduced PM10 levels.
- 72 cities achieved reductions of over 20%.
- 26 cities achieved reductions exceeding 40%.
- 14 cities successfully met the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

Compendium of Best Practices

- The released document aggregates successful mitigation strategies in road dust control, vehicular/industrial pollution,

solid waste, and C&D waste management.
 • Acts as a blueprint for State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs).

What is the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)? About

• Launched in 2019 by the MoEFCC, NCAP is a long-term, time-bound, national-level strategy designed to tackle air pollution comprehensively across India.

Coverage

• Encompasses 130 Non-Attainment Cities — cities that consistently failed to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for five consecutive years — alongside Million Plus Cities.

Statutory Status

• NCAP operates as a collaborative, multi-sectoral initiative but lacks statutory backing.
 • It is not legally binding, meaning there are no penal provisions for states or Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) that fail to meet targets.

Convergence

• Designed to synergise with existing government initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), Smart Cities Mission, FAME-II, and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

Target

• Initially aimed for a 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter (PM10 and PM2.5) concentrations by 2024, with 2017 as the base year.
 • The target was subsequently revised to achieve a 40% reduction in particulate matter concentration by 2026.
 • On a national aggregate scale, the 2026 target remains largely unachieved. Only 26 out of 130 cities (20%) successfully recorded 40% reduction in particulate matter.

Implementation and Tracking Mechanisms :

Financial Framework A performance-linked grant of ₹16,425 crore has been provisioned as critical gap funding for air-pollution mitigation.
Digital Monitoring The PRANA (Portal for Regulation of Air-pollution in Non-Attainment cities) portal tracks the physical and financial progress of city-specific air action plans.

Source Apportionment (SA) A core operational mandate requires all 130 cities to conduct scientific SA studies and develop Emission Inventories to target specific lo-



cal polluters rather than relying on generic interventions.

Governance Structure

Implementation is overseen by a three-tier framework:

1. Apex Committee — Ministry level
2. Steering Committee — Chief Secretary level
3. Monitoring Committee - District Magistrate level

Progress & Challenges

Recorded Achievements (2025–26 Data vs 2017–18 Baseline)

- 108 cities demonstrated an overall improvement in their PM10 levels.
- 72 cities achieved a reduction in PM concentrations of more than 20%.
- 26 cities recorded reductions exceeding 40%.
- 14 cities successfully met the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

Challenges

- **Non-Binding Nature:** Lack of statutory backing means no penal provisions for non-compliance.
- **Target Shortfall:** Only 20% of cities achieved the 40% reduction target.
- **Urban Challenges:** Rapid urbanisation,

- vehicular growth, and industrial expansion continue to offset gains.
- **Data Gaps:** Inconsistent monitoring infrastructure and delayed source apportionment studies in many cities.
- **Funding Utilisation:** Performance-linked grants need efficient utilisation at the city level.

Conclusion

The Swachh Vayu Sarvekshan 2026, held on the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, highlights both the progress and persistent challenges in India's fight against air pollution. While 108 of 130 NCAP cities have shown improvement in PM10 levels and cities like Lucknow, Rourkela, and Kalinganagar have emerged as role models through innovative measures,

For India to achieve its clean air ambitions, there is an urgent need to provide statutory backing to NCAP, strengthen city-level institutions, and integrate air quality management with urban planning and climate action.

Prelims Previous Year Question

With reference to the 'National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)' in India, consider the following statements:

1. NCAP was launched in 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
2. The programme covers only cities with a population of more than one million.
3. The PRANA portal is used to track the physical and financial progress of city-specific air action plans under NCAP.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only.

Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari

Context

- Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari is a nationwide initiative launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India.
- It was launched on 6th September 2024 in Surat, Gujarat, as part of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain campaign.
- The programme aims to make water conservation a mass movement (Jan Andolan) by actively involving local communities, industries, NGOs, and government agencies.
- The recent news analysis highlights its progress, features, and significance in addressing India's growing water challenges.

Main Features of the Initiative

- **Community-Led Approach:** Encourages people's participation in creating and maintaining water harvesting structures such as rooftop rainwater harvesting systems, recharge pits, and check dams.
- **Targeted Structures:** Focuses on constructing 50,000 rainwater harvesting structures in rural and urban areas across the country.
- **Integration with Existing Schemes:** Works in convergence with programmes like MGNREGA, AMRUT, Jal Jeevan Mission, and Atal Bhujal Yojana.
- **Role of Stakeholders:** Involves Gram Panchayats, Urban Local Bodies, industries (under Corporate Social Responsibility), NGOs, and resident welfare associations.
- **Technology Use:** Promotes the use of geo-tagging and mobile applications for monitoring and transparency.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducts public outreach through rallies, seminars, and media to spread the message of water conservation.



Objectives

- To promote community participation in water conservation and management.
- To enhance groundwater recharge and improve water availability for drinking and irrigation.
- To reduce water scarcity and build climate resilience in water-stressed regions.
- To create a people's movement for water security, aligning with the vision of "Sabka Prayas" (collective effort).
- To support the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation.

Implementation Framework

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- **Implementation Levels:** Village level (Gram Panchayats), block level, district level, and urban local bodies.
- **Funding:** Converged funds from various central and state schemes, CSR contributions, and community donations.
- **Monitoring:** A dedicated dashboard and

regular reviews by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

- **Partners:** State governments, NGOs, corporates, and international organisations like UNICEF and World Bank.

Significance

- **Water Security:** Addresses the critical issue of depleting groundwater levels in many parts of India.
- **Participatory Governance:** Strengthens democracy at the grassroots by involving citizens in decision-making.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Helps communities cope with erratic rainfall and droughts.
- **Economic Benefits:** Reduces water costs for farmers and industries, and creates rural employment.
- **Environmental Impact:** Recharges aquifers, improves soil moisture, and supports biodiversity.

Challenges

- **Sustained Participation:** Maintaining community enthusiasm over the long

term is difficult.

- Maintenance of Structures: Poor upkeep of rainwater harvesting systems can render them useless.
- Coordination: Ensuring smooth coordination among multiple agencies and departments.
- Funding Gaps: Delays in release of funds and inadequate financial resources at local levels.
- Awareness: Lack of awareness in remote and marginalised areas.
- Urban Challenges: Limited space for rainwater harvesting in densely populated cities.

Measures to Strengthen the Initiative

- Incentivise Participation: Provide tax rebates or awards to communities and industries that excel in water conservation.
- Strengthen Local Institutions: Build

capacity of Gram Panchayats and ULBs for better planning and execution.

- Leverage Technology: Use satellite imagery and IoT sensors for real-time monitoring.
- Public-Private Partnership: Encourage more corporate investment under CSR.
- Education and Awareness: Integrate water conservation into school curricula and conduct regular campaigns.
- Robust Monitoring: Ensure third-party audits and social audits for transparency.

Conclusion

Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari is a commendable step towards making water conservation a collective responsibility. By combining government efforts with community action, it aims to create a water-secure India. However, its success depends on sustained participation, proper maintenance, and strong local institutions. If implemented effectively, it can serve as

a model for participatory environmental governance.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to the 'Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari' initiative, consider the following statements:

1. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
2. It aims to promote water conservation through community participation.
3. It is a component of the Jal Jeevan Mission.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only



India–China Military Talks at the LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL (LAC)

Context

- India and China held Corps Commander-level military talks in the Eastern Sector on 6–7 September 2026 at the Wacha–Damai Border Personnel Meeting area in the Kibithoo sector of Arunachal Pradesh. The talks focused on maintaining peace and tranquillity and managing issues along the eastern stretch of the LAC.
- The meeting came after the 25th round of the India–China Special Representatives'

dialogue on the boundary question and amid efforts to strengthen military communication mechanisms along the frontier.

- The 2026 engagement is significant because Corps Commander-level talks had been associated mainly with the eastern Ladakh crisis after 2020; their use in the Eastern Sector indicates an attempt to institutionalise senior military dialogue across a wider part of the disputed boundary.

What is the Line of Actual

Control?

- The LAC is the line separating territories under Indian and Chinese control. It is a de facto military control line, not a mutually agreed and legally demarcated international boundary.
- India and China have different perceptions of the LAC at several locations. The absence of a commonly accepted alignment creates patrolling overlaps, face-offs and the risk of local incidents escalating.

- The LAC is conventionally discussed in three sectors: Western Sector (Ladakh), Middle/Central Sector (mainly Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), and Eastern Sector (Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh).
- In the Eastern Sector, the McMahon Line is central to India's boundary position. China disputes Indian sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh and refers to parts of the State by names not accepted by India.

Background: From Border Agreements to the 2020 Crisis

- The 1993 Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC was an early post-Cold War framework for managing the disputed frontier pending a final boundary settlement.
- The 1996 agreement introduced confidence-building measures in the military field, including restraints relating to troop levels, exercises and use of force near the LAC.
- Additional protocols and agreements in 2005, 2012 and 2013 sought to improve border management, consultation and incident prevention.
- The 2020 eastern Ladakh standoff, followed by the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020, severely damaged mutual trust and led to prolonged military and diplomatic negotiations.
- Disengagement at multiple friction points reduced immediate confrontation, but the broader boundary dispute, differing LAC perceptions, force deployments and infrastructure competition remain unresolved.

Mechanisms for India–China Border Management

- Corps Commander-level talks: senior military commanders discuss disengagement, patrolling, local incidents and measures to prevent escalation.
- Border Personnel Meetings (BPMs): local

Major Challenges

- Different perceptions of the LAC remain the structural cause of recurring face-offs.
- The boundary has not been fully clarified, delineated and demarcated; therefore, tactical disengagement cannot be equated with settlement of the boundary question.
- Rapid construction of roads, bridges, airfields, surveillance systems and forward infrastructure on both sides can create a security dilemma.
- Large-scale deployments and improved mobilisation capacity shorten reaction time during crises.
- The legacy of the 2020 crisis has produced a trust deficit, making verification and implementation of agreements more difficult.

military interaction points used for flag meetings, ceremonial contacts and operational communication.

- Hotlines: direct communication between military headquarters reduces delay and misunderstanding during incidents.
- Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India–China Border Affairs (WMCC): a diplomatic-official mechanism for consultation and coordination on border affairs.

Why the September 2026 Talks Matter

- Eastern-sector focus: senior military dialogue in Arunachal Pradesh expands crisis-management mechanisms beyond eastern Ladakh.
- De-escalation value: direct commander-level contact can clarify patrol movements, infrastructure activity and local

tactical misunderstandings before they become confrontations.

- Confidence-building: regular communication can create predictability even when the territorial dispute remains unresolved.
- Support to diplomatic negotiations: military stability provides political space for the SR mechanism and broader bilateral engagement.
- Operational signalling: talks demonstrate that both sides recognise the costs of unmanaged escalation along a high-altitude, heavily deployed frontier.

Way Forward

- Increase frequency and predictability of military and WMCC meetings rather than waiting for a crisis.
- Work towards clarification of LAC perceptions sector by sector, even if a final boundary settlement remains difficult.
- Create stronger incident-management protocols for patrol encounters, drones, construction activity and temporary deployments.
- Expand secure hotlines and BPM mechanisms across Western, Middle and Eastern sectors.
- Continue border infrastructure development on the Indian side with emphasis on all-weather connectivity, logistics redundancy and surveillance.

Conclusion

- The September 2026 military talks show an effort by India and China to widen institutional communication and reduce the risk of confrontation along the LAC. Their real value lies in crisis prevention and confidence-building, but lasting stability requires clarification of differing LAC perceptions, credible deterrence, verifiable border arrangements and sustained political negotiations on the unresolved boundary.

Global 6G Initiative & India's Participation

Context

- India endorsed the "Call to Action for 6G Leadership and Security" in September 2026, joining more than 20 like-minded governments seeking open, interoperable, secure and resilient next-generation telecommunications networks. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will coordinate India's follow-up engagement. [3]
- The announcement was made around the G20 Innovation Ministerial in North Carolina. India's participation complements its domestic Bharat 6G Vision and the Bharat 6G Alliance. [3][4]

India has stated an ambition to contribute about 10% of global 6G standards and patents, reflecting a shift from being mainly a technology adopter toward becoming a technology developer and standard-setter.

What is 6G?

- 6G refers to the next generation of mobile and wireless communication expected to develop under the ITU's IMT-2030 framework.
- It is expected to go beyond faster mobile broadband by integrating communication, sensing, artificial intelligence, positioning, massive machine connecti-

ty and ubiquitous coverage.

- ITU's IMT-2030 framework identifies six broad usage scenarios: immersive communication; hyper-reliable and low-latency communication; massive communication; ubiquitous connectivity; AI and communication; and integrated sensing and communication. [5][6]
- Draft technical requirements developed in 2026 envisage very high peak data rates, much lower latency, very high connection density, improved mobility support, high-precision positioning, sensing, AI integration, sustainability and interoperability.

Global 6G Call to Action:

Core Principles

- Open networks: avoid closed ecosystems that lock countries into a single vendor or proprietary architecture.
- Interoperability: equipment and networks from different suppliers should work together under common standards.
- Security and resilience: cybersecurity and continuity of critical communications are treated as national-security priorities.
- Resource efficiency and sustainability: future networks should reduce energy and resource costs per unit of data and support greener digital infrastructure.
- Innovation-led competition: standards and markets should encourage multiple suppliers, research institutions and startups.

Time-Bound Cooperation under the Initiative

- Within one month, participating governments are expected to identify expert 6G points of contact, responsible agencies and relevant industry/academic stakeholders.
- Within three months, governments are expected to map the emerging secure and interoperable 6G landscape, identify barriers and examine resources required for competitiveness.
- Within six months, expert-level work is expected on secure, resilient, sustainable and innovative 6G supply chains and possible reflection of these priorities in national or regional strategies.
- Within twelve months, participants are expected to meet in 2027 to review progress, exchange lessons and set future priorities.

India's Domestic 6G Ecosystem

- Bharat 6G Alliance (B6GA): an industry- and academia-led platform created to strengthen research, innovation, intellectual property and international collaboration.
- As of 15 July 2026, B6GA had expanded to 90 members from telecom service providers, equipment manufacturers, startups, R&D institutions and academia.
- B6GA has seven working groups covering technologies, spectrum, applications/use cases/revenue streams, devices/components, green and sustainability aspects, and outreach.
- Spectrum Roadmap: DoT has released a roadmap for 6G spectrum after stakeholder consultation.
- 6G Terahertz testbed: a three-year



project supported through the Telecom Technology Development Fund under Digital Bharat Nidhi involves SAMEER Kolkata with IIT Madras, IIT Guwahati and IIT Patna.

- India has participated in ITU work on IMT-2030 and has advocated "ubiquitous connectivity" as a major 6G usage scenario, along with coverage, interoperability and sustainability as important capabilities.

Why 6G Matters for India

- Strategic technology sovereignty: telecom networks are critical infrastructure; domestic intellectual property and standards participation reduce external dependence.
- Standard-setting power: countries and firms that contribute essential patents and technical standards can gain long-term economic and strategic advantages.
- Digital inclusion: ubiquitous connectivity can improve coverage in remote, rural, mountainous and maritime areas, especially when terrestrial and non-terrestrial networks are integrated.

- Industrial transformation: 6G could support autonomous systems, smart factories, digital twins, precision agriculture, connected mobility and advanced healthcare.
- Defence and security: high-reliability communications, sensing and positioning may have dual-use and defence applications.

Key Challenges

- Spectrum: 6G may use a mix of low, mid, millimetre-wave and potentially sub-terahertz/terahertz bands; balancing coverage and capacity will be complex.
- Semiconductor dependence: advanced radios, AI accelerators and network equipment require sophisticated chip design and fabrication ecosystems.
- R&D intensity: 6G leadership needs sustained long-term funding, high-quality laboratories, testbeds and industry-academia collaboration.
- Standards fragmentation: geopolitical blocs could produce competing technical ecosystems, increasing costs and reducing interoperability.
- Cybersecurity: AI-native networks and software-defined architectures increase the attack surface.

Way Forward

- Increase competitive grants for universities, startups and industry consortia working on radio, photonics, terahertz, AI-native networking, satellite integration and cybersecurity.
- Strengthen Indian participation in ITU, 3GPP, oneM2M and other standards bodies.
- Develop shared national testbeds and affordable access for startups and academic researchers.
- Promote trusted and diversified telecom supply chains while supporting indigenous design and manufacturing.

Conclusion

India's entry into the global 6G leadership and security initiative gives it an opportunity to influence the technological rules of the next communications era. The strategic objective should be to convert early participation into indigenous intellectual property, secure supply chains, global standards influence, affordable connectivity and commercially viable Indian technologies.

Defence Acquisition Proposals Worth About ₹1.10 Lakh Crore

Context

- On 7 September 2026, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to capital acquisition proposals estimated at about ₹1.10 lakh crore for the Armed Forces.
- About 98% of the approved procurement value is expected to be sourced from Indian industry, reinforcing the policy emphasis on indigenisation and Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence. [7][8]
- AoN is an in-principle administrative approval. It should not be confused with final contract signing, delivery or induction into service.

Defence Acquisition Council

- The DAC is the apex decision-making body in the Ministry of Defence for major capital acquisition matters.
- It is chaired by the Defence Minister.
- Its role includes consideration of capability requirements and granting Acceptance of Necessity for acquisition proposals under the defence procurement framework.
- The DAC emerged from post-Kargil defence-management reforms and is central to balancing operational urgency, financial prudence and indigenisation.

Major Army Proposals Approved

- Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Reconnaissance Vehicles: designed to detect, identify, monitor and mark areas contaminated by CBRN agents.
- High Mobility Vehicles: intended to improve troop mobility, logistics and operational flexibility in difficult terrain.
- Self-Propelled Mechanical Mine Layers: support rapid battlefield mine-laying and area-denial operations.
- Advanced Light Helicopters: improve rotary-wing capability for missions across varied terrain and operational conditions.
- Trawl Tanks: specialised armoured systems used for breaching minefields and creating safe lanes for combat formations.
- Sarvatra Bridge System: mobile bridging



- capability enabling forces to cross obstacles and water channels rapidly.
- Major Navy Proposals Approved
- Arudhra surveillance radars: intended to replace existing Air Route Surveillance Radars at naval air stations and improve surveillance capability.
- Marine Gas Turbines: design, development and subsequent procurement are intended to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers for warship propulsion systems.
- The marine gas-turbine programme is strategically important because propulsion is a high-value technological dependency in naval shipbuilding.

Major Air Force / Joint Capability Proposals

- Ground-Based Multi-Purpose Jammers: intended to disrupt or degrade adversary radar systems and strengthen electronic warfare capability.
- Defence Forces Secure Access Card system: an interoperable RFID-based smart-card architecture intended to replace paper-based identity cards/passes and improve secure access management.
- The package also supports capabilities associated with aircraft, transport fleets and helicopters, reflecting a broad rather than single-platform modernisation

approach.

Why the ₹1.10 Lakh Crore Package is Important

- Operational readiness: equipment addresses mobility, bridging, mine warfare, CBRN defence, surveillance and electronic warfare—capabilities directly relevant to high-intensity conflict.
- Multi-domain warfare: modern conflicts require integration of physical manoeuvre, electronic warfare, sensors, communications, air power and logistics.
- Indigenisation: 98% domestic sourcing can create long-term orders for public and private Indian defence firms and strengthen supply-chain depth.
- Technology absorption: domestic orders can encourage design capability in radars, propulsion, jammers, vehicles and aerospace systems.
- Import-risk reduction: indigenous capability reduces vulnerability to sanctions, geopolitical disruptions, foreign exchange pressures and wartime supply constraints.
- Employment and industrial spillovers: defence manufacturing can support advanced materials, electronics, precision engineering, software and MSME supply chains.

Understanding Acceptance

of Necessity (AoN)

- AoN establishes that the service requirement is necessary and allows the acquisition process to move forward.
- AoN does not mean that the government has immediately paid the entire approved amount.
- Subsequent stages can include preparation of procurement documents, solicitation of bids, technical evaluation, trials, commercial negotiations, competent financial approval and contract signing, depending on the acquisition category.
- For Prelims, distinguish clearly among AoN, contract award, delivery and operational induction.
- Link with Defence Indigenisation
- India has increasingly used positive indigenisation lists, domestic procurement categories, innovation programmes and procurement reforms to expand local defence production.
- Large domestic orders can provide economies of scale and allow Indian firms to invest in R&D and manufacturing capacity.
- Indigenisation should be measured not

only by final assembly in India but also by indigenous design, critical components, intellectual property, maintenance capability and supply-chain resilience.

- Export potential improves when Indian systems gain credible operational use, certification and sustained production lines.

Challenges

- Procurement delays can reduce the operational relevance of systems by the time they are inducted.
- Cost escalation may arise from long development cycles, inflation, changing specifications and low production volumes.
- Domestic sourcing targets can be undermined if critical engines, sensors, chips or subsystems remain import-dependent.
- Technology gaps persist in areas such as aero-engines, advanced semiconductors, propulsion, seekers and some high-end materials.

Way Forward

- Compress procurement timelines while

retaining technical and financial accountability.

- Prioritise critical technology gaps through mission-mode programmes and international co-development where useful.
- Strengthen testing, certification and quality-assurance infrastructure accessible to private firms and MSMEs.
- Provide long-term order visibility to support investment in capacity and R&D.
- Increase commonality and joint procurement across services where operationally feasible.

Conclusion

- The ₹1.10 lakh crore DAC approvals combine immediate military capability needs with a broader strategy of defence indigenisation. Their long-term significance will depend on whether approvals translate into timely contracts, indigenous critical technologies, reliable life-cycle support and a competitive defence industrial ecosystem capable of meeting both Indian and export requirements.

Chief Justices Appointed to Eight High Courts

Context

- On 5 September 2026, the President appointed eight High Court judges as Chief Justices of different High Courts after the constitutional consultation process and recommendations of the Supreme Court Collegium.
- The appointments are important for judicial administration because a Chief Justice leads the High Court institutionally, constitutes Benches, allocates judicial work and exercises major administrative responsibilities.

The Eight Appointments

- Justice Valluri Kameswar Rao, then of the Delhi High Court—Chief Justice of the Patna High Court.
- Justice Ravindra V. Ghuge, then of the Bombay High Court—Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court.
- Justice Sanjay Kumar Agrawal, then of the Chhattisgarh High Court—Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court.
- Justice Mahesh Chandra Tripathi, then of the Allahabad High Court—Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court.
- Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra, then of

the Punjab and Haryana High Court—Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

- Justice Krushna Ram Mohapatra, then of the Orissa High Court—Chief Justice of the Chhattisgarh High Court.
- Justice Alpesh Yeshwant Kogje, then of the Gujarat High Court—Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court.
- Justice Pushpendra Singh Bhati, then of the Rajasthan High Court—Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Constitutional Framework for High Court Judges

- Article 214: provides for a High Court for each State, subject to constitutional arrangements for common High Courts.
- Article 216: a High Court consists of a Chief Justice and such other judges as the President may deem necessary to appoint.
- Article 217: appointment and conditions of the office of a High Court judge. A High Court judge is appointed by the President.
- For appointment of a High Court judge,

the constitutional consultation involves the Chief Justice of India, the Governor of the State and, in the case of appointment of a judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of that High Court.

- Article 222: provides for transfer of a judge from one High Court to another by the President after consultation with the Chief Justice of India.
- Article 223: provides for appointment of an Acting Chief Justice when the office of Chief Justice is vacant or the Chief Justice is unable to perform duties.
- Article 224: deals with additional and acting judges.
- Article 224A: permits appointment of retired judges at sittings of High Courts under specified conditions.

How the Collegium System Fits In

- The Constitution uses the language of presidential appointment and consultation. The present collegium system evolved through Supreme Court judgments, especially the Second Judges Case (1993) and the Third Judges Case/

Presidential Reference (1998).

- For High Court appointments and transfers, recommendations move through the judicial collegium and the executive process before formal presidential appointment.
- The National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) constitutional amendment and law were struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015, restoring the collegium framework.
- The Memorandum of Procedure provides the administrative framework used in processing higher-judiciary appointments, although debate continues over transparency, timelines and accountability.

Role of a High Court Chief Justice

- Acts as the administrative head of the High Court.
- Constitutes Benches and allocates judicial work through the roster system.
- Plays an important role in recommendations concerning appointment of judges to the High Court.
- Oversees court administration, registry functioning and institutional management.
- Exercises judicial powers as a judge while also carrying significant administrative responsibilities.
- The Chief Justice is generally regarded as master of the roster within the High Court, subject to constitutional and judicial principles

Judicial Independence and Accountability

- Security of tenure, difficult removal procedures, protected service conditions



and constitutional status support judicial independence.

- Judicial independence is essential to rule of law, fundamental-rights enforcement and review of executive/legislative action.
- At the same time, the appointments system faces demands for greater transparency, objective criteria, diversity and timely processing.
- A balanced system must protect decisional independence from political pressure while ensuring institutional accountability and public legitimacy.

Major Proposed Changes

A. Timelines under Prior Permission

- The Bill proposes amendments to Section 12 to provide timelines for receipt and utilisation of foreign contribution received under the prior-permission route.
- This is intended to make one-time/specific-source permissions more time-bound and administratively trackable.

B. Assets During Suspension

- The Bill proposes changes to Section 13 to regulate how assets are dealt with when an organisation's registration is suspended.
- The policy concern is to prevent transfer, disposal or misuse of assets while regulatory proceedings are pending.

C. Cessation of FCRA Certificate

tures, including social-media accounts and activity/funding details.

- They define 'key functionaries' to include specified directors, partners, trustees, kartas and office bearers/persons managing the entity.
- PRS has raised delegated-legislation questions about whether some substantive conditions should be in the parent Act rather than Rules.

Important Background: 2020 FCRA Amendment

- The 2020 amendment prohibited transfer of foreign contribution to another person.
- It required receipt of foreign contribution

- A proposed new Section 14B provides for cessation of a certificate on expiry, non-renewal or VCC refusal of renewal.
- This creates an express legal framework for situations in which registration ends without a cancellation or voluntary surrender.

D. Designated Authority and Asset Vesting

- The Bill proposes omission of the existing Section 15 and insertion of a new Chapter IIIA creating a comprehensive framework for provisional and permanent vesting, supervision, management and disposal of foreign contribution and assets in a Designated Authority.
- PRS notes that the framework applies when an organisation ceases to have an FCRA certificate in specified circumstances.
- Where an asset is a place of worship, the Designated Authority is required to ensure that its religious character is maintained.

E. Penalties

- The Bill proposes substitution of Section 35 to rationalise penalties. PRS notes that the maximum imprisonment for violation is proposed to be reduced from five years to one year. [12]
- This reflects a move toward restructuring criminal consequences even while regulatory control over funds and assets is strengthened.

F. Prior Approval for Investigation

The Bill proposes amendment of Section-43 to require prior approval of the Central Government for initiation of investigation. This provision raises an important governance question: how to prevent fragmented or unnecessary investigations while preserving independent and effective enforcement.

FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026

- The June 2026 Rules specify approved purposes under cultural, economic, educational, religious and social categories.
- Organisations must indicate purposes and States/Union Territories of operation in applications, with additional procedural/fee requirements.
- The Rules define 'reasonable activity' for certain purposes as utilisation of at least ₹10 lakh of foreign contribution during the previous two financial years.
- The Rules expand information disclosure

through a designated FCRA account at the specified State Bank of India branch in New Delhi, while allowing utilisation accounts as permitted.

- It reduced the permissible ceiling for administrative expenses from 50% to 20% of foreign contribution.
- It strengthened identification requirements and provided for surrender of registration, among other changes.
- For Prelims, do not mix the 2020 enacted provisions with the 2026 Bill's proposed asset-management framework.

Arguments Supporting the 2026 Bill

- National security: foreign funding can

create vulnerabilities if it is diverted toward activities harmful to sovereignty, public order or security.

- Asset accountability: assets created from foreign donations require clear legal treatment after registration ceases.
- Regulatory certainty: explicit rules for cessation, suspension and asset management may reduce administrative ambiguity.
- Financial transparency: time-bound utilisation and stronger supervision can improve traceability of foreign funds.
- Uniform enforcement: a designated framework may reduce inconsistent treatment across cases.

Concerns and Criticisms

- Civil-society autonomy: organisations argue that excessive control over foreign-funded assets can impair charitable, educational, developmental and religious work.
- Property and proportionality: permanent vesting of assets after non-renewal may raise questions about proportionality, procedural safeguards and the rights of organisations.
- Natural justice: PRS has highlighted concerns around the absence of an appeal



mechanism in certain non-renewal situations and the opportunity to be heard.

- Executive discretion: extensive regulatory powers require clear standards to avoid arbitrary or selective application.

Constitutional & Governance Dimensions

- Article 19: associations and expression-related activities can be affected indirectly by funding restrictions, though receipt of foreign contribution is subject to statutory regulation.
- Article 14: regulatory classification and executive discretion must satisfy equality and non-arbitrariness principles.
- Article 25 and religious institutions: regulation of funds and assets may interact with freedom of religion, subject to public order, morality, health and other constitutional provisions.
- Doctrine of proportionality: restrictions should have a legitimate aim, rational

connection, necessity and adequate balancing of rights and public interest.

What is a Joint Parliamentary Committee?

A JPC is an ad hoc committee consisting of members from both Houses of Parliament, constituted for a specific purpose.

It can examine a Bill or a matter in detail, call for evidence, consult experts and stakeholders, and submit a report to Parliament.

Its recommendations are persuasive and politically significant but do not themselves enact law.

Referral to a JPC does not mean that a Bill has been rejected; the Bill remains within the parliamentary legislative process.

Conclusion

The FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026 seeks to close legal gaps in the treatment of foreign contributions and assets after an organisation's registration ceases, while restructuring penalties and investigation procedures. Its constitutional and governance test will be whether stronger regulatory control is accompanied by clear standards, proportionality, natural-justice safeguards, effective review and protection of legitimate civil-society activity.

Why in News?

- A landmark ecological-economic study has estimated the Total Economic Value (TEV) of Tamil Nadu's Pichavaram Mangrove Forest at ₹2,485.38 crore (approximately \$289 million), with a per-hectare value of ₹1.83 crore. This valuation, conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru, and funded by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, underscores the immense but often overlooked role of mangroves in ecological balance, climate regulation, and coastal protection.

Total Economic Value (TEV) Breakdown

- What are the Study's Findings? Ecosystem Service Economic Value (₹Crore)
- Soil Organic Carbon 1,224.63
- Recreational & Tourism Value 484.25
- Carbon Stock (Vegetation) 387.77
- Oxygen Regulation 181.22
- Coastal Protection 147.17
- Carbon Sequestration (Annual Flow) 26.86
- Biodiversity Conservation 19.48
- Nutrient Cycling 10.53
- Provisioning Services (Fish, Crab, Shrimp) 3.47

Pichavaram Mangrove Forest



Why in News?

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Total 2,485.38

Blue Carbon Assessment

- Vegetation Carbon Stock: 79.45 tonnes of carbon per hectare, equivalent to approximately 291 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare, valued at roughly ₹28 lakh per hectare (total: ₹387 crore).
- Soil Organic Carbon Stock: 251.14 tonnes of carbon per hectare — nearly three times the above-ground storage — valued at ₹90.24 lakh per hectare (total: ₹1,224.63 crore).
- Total Blue Carbon Asset Value: Approximately ₹1,612 crore (about ₹1.19 crore per hectare), with most carbon stored below ground in sediments.

Global Conservation Context

- The 2024 IUCN Red List of Ecosystems warns that 50% of global mangrove ecosystems are at risk of collapse. Pichavaram is among the critically endangered mangrove zones. This valuation comes at a critical time for integrating mangrove conservation into global climate action frameworks.

What are the Key Facts About

Pichavaram Mangrove Forest? Geographical Location & Hydrography

- Location: Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, near Chidambaram.
- Coordinates: 11°26'17"N 79°47'11"E.
- Estuarine Setting: Strategically situated between two prominent estuaries — the Vellar estuary to the north and the Coleroon (Kollidam) estuary to the south.
- These river systems, along with the Uppanar river, interconnect to form the highly productive Killai backwater complex.

Area & Designations

- Total Area: 1,478.6 hectares.
- Ramsar Site: Designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance on 8 April 2022 (Site No. 2482).
- Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA): Recognised by BirdLife International.
- Reserve Forest: Declared a Reserve Forest since 1893 (Government Notification B.P. No. 98 and 430).

Geomorphology

- Classified as an intertidal forested wetland.
- Forms a complex labyrinth of roughly 4,400 large and small canals connecting river mouths, the Killai backwaters, and the Bay of Bengal through a narrow littoral sandbar channel.
- Features numerous small islands, creeks, mudflats, and sandflats.

Unique Feature

Unlike many dry tidal flats, Pichavaram's mangrove trees are permanently rooted in a few feet of shallow, brackish water, a rare sight globally.

Flora

- Dominated by a dense network of *Rhizophora apiculata* (featuring prominent stilt roots) and *Avicennia marina* (characterised by pneumatophores or breathing roots).
- 13 species of mangroves found in Pichavaram.
- Hosts a natural hybrid species, *Rhizophora annamalayana*, derived from *R. apiculata* and *R. mucronata*.
- Vegetation profile encompasses mangrove vegetation, salt marshes, and Dry Evergreen Forests.

Fauna

- Pichavaram supports 840 species of flora and fauna:
- Birds: 115 species (including 177 species of resident and migratory birds)

- Mammals: 16 species
- Amphibians: 11 species
- Finfish: 177 species
- Zooplanktons: 95 species
- Phytoplanktons: 82 species
- Butterflies: 35 species
- Snakes: 17 species
- Seagrass: 3 species
- Prawns: 20 species

Threatened Species

Supported:

- Critically Endangered: Great white-bellied heron (*Ardea insignis*), Spoon-billed sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*)
- Endangered: Spotted greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*)
- Vulnerable: Olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

Livelihood Support

The mangrove supports the livelihoods of over 1,000 families through:

- Artisanal fishing
- Firewood collection
- Non-timber forest product harvesting
- Grazing lands for livestock

Spiritual & Cultural Value

The mangroves are revered by local communities due to the significant spiritual value associated with *Excoecaria agallocha*, a mangrove with toxic properties commonly known as "Tillai" (also called Thillai Vanam).

Ecosystem Services of Pichavaram

Service Category Specific Services
Provisioning Fisheries (fish, crab, shrimp), firewood, non-timber forest products
Regulating Carbon sequestration, coastal protection, oxygen regulation, nutrient cycling

Supporting Biodiversity conservation, nursery grounds for marine life, soil formation
Cultural Eco-tourism, recreation, spiritual value, aesthetic appreciation

Threats to Pichavaram Mangroves :

Anthropogenic Threats

- Plastic Pollution & Microplastic Contamination: Microplastics (particles smaller than 5 mm) are infiltrating sediments and aquatic species. Monsoon season records the highest levels due to runoff from nearby settlements. Common polymers include polypropylene, polyethylene and PET.
- Shrimp Farming / Aquaculture Expansion: Converting mangrove areas into aquaculture ponds.
- Land Conversion: Encroachment for agriculture and settlements.

- Unregulated Tourism: Increasing boat traffic and waste generation.
- Degradation near Settlements: Degraded zones are usually close to settlements, roads, and aquaculture areas.

Climate Change Threats

- Sea Level Rise: A recent study warns that rising sea levels could result in the loss of thousands of hectares of mangrove cover in Pichavaram and Muthupet regions.
- Prolonged Saline Water Intrusion: Affecting seedling mortality.
- High Soil Salinity: Due to irregular flushing and low tidal amplitude.

Current Degradation Status

Of the 36 mangrove ecosystems assessed in the IUCN Red List, Pichavaram is among the critically endangered zones.

Land Use Distribution in Pichavaram

- Waterbodies 21%
- Healthy Mangrove Vegetation 27%
- Mudflats with Sparse Mangroves 38%
- Sand Dunes Rest of the area

Conservation & Protection Measures : Government Initiatives

Mangrove Cover Expansion

- Tamil Nadu Forest Department plans to restore degraded areas and increase mangrove cover by 100 hectares in 2023-24.
- Restoration of about 350 hectares of degraded patches planned over the next three years.
- New mangrove plantations taken up in the Uppanar River in Kudikadu village on 25 hectares.

Centre for Mangrove Conservation

- Tamil Nadu government will set up a Centre for Mangrove Conservation in Pichavaram to promote wetland conservation through research, education, awareness, and eco-tourism.
- The centre will be a model for green infrastructure and sustainable development in coastal ecosystems.
- Supports India's commitment to the Ramsar Convention and wetland conservation goals.

Green Tamil Nadu Mission

- Rehabilitation of coastal habitats and creation of bio-shields being implemented under this mission.
- Major portion of work taken up in Killai and Pichavaram.

Scientific Restoration Methods

- Regeneration of rare species like Lum-

nitzera racemosa and Rhizophora annam-layana using scientific methods such as canal bank planting by modified fishbone design.

Climate Resilient Village Initiative

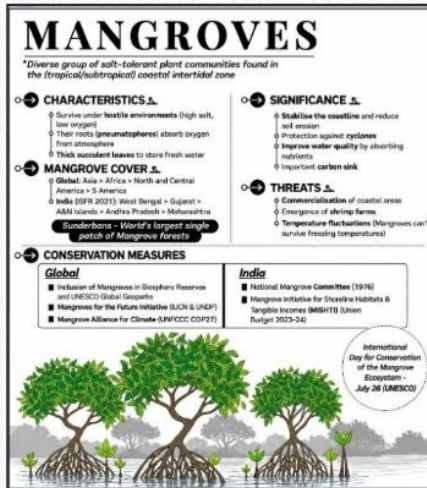
- Killai became Tamil Nadu's first fully operational climate-resilient village.
- Improved hydrological connectivity enhanced wetland health and strengthened fish breeding habitats.
- Extensive mangrove planting reinforced natural coastal defence against cyclones and storm surges.

Tamil Nadu's Mangrove Expansion

- Tamil Nadu has added over 2,400 hectares and restored 1,200 hectares of mangrove forests since 2021.
- 17 mangrove species are found, with Avicennia and Rhizophora being the most common.

Policy Instruments Needed

- Natural Capital Accounting: Integrate ecosystem values into national accounts.
- Green GDP: Reflect environmental degradation and depletion in economic growth metrics.
- Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES): Incentivise conservation through direct



payments to local communities.

- Blue Carbon Financing: Tap into international climate finance mechanisms for mangrove conservation.

Role as a Bio-Shield

Pichavaram mangroves function as a critical bio-shield:

- Hold and stabilise shorelines
- Retard coastal erosion
- Aid in climate change adaptation against extreme weather events
- Act as a formidable buffer zone between

land and sea

2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Areas shielded by dense mangrove cover experienced comparatively less damage, demonstrating the life-saving potential of these ecosystems.

Conclusion

The establishment of a Mangrove Conservation Centre, expansion of mangrove cover, and integration of ecosystem values into natural capital accounting are positive steps. For India, conserving Pichavaram is not just an environmental imperative but an economic necessity,

Prelims Previous Year

Question

With reference to India, what is common to the places known as Pichavaram, Chorao, and Baratang?

- They are mangroves.
- These are famous uranium deposits.
- These are mud volcanoes present in Lakshadweep.
- They are lignite coal deposits in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Answer: (a) They are mangroves.

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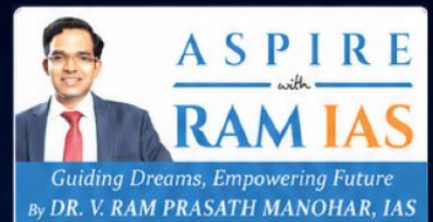


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