

THE DAILY UPSC BRIEF

HIGH-YIELD DAILY SOURCES & ANALYSIS | 23 OCTOBER 2026

TODAY'S COVERAGE

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PRELIMS POINTERS — TODAY IN ONE LINE EACH

1. **SACU** — Southern African Customs Union (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa), set up in 1910, the world's oldest customs union; HQ Windhoek.
2. **ZCZP instrument** — NSDC's first Zero Coupon Zero Principal issue (₹4 crore, subscribed by NABARD) listed on NSE's Social Stock Exchange.
3. **SIMBEX-2026** — 33rd India–Singapore maritime exercise at Visakhapatnam (21–26 Oct); it began in 1994 as 'Exercise Lion King'.
4. **Kashi Tamil Sangamam 5.0** — 28 Nov–12 Dec 2026, theme 'Thirukkural Payilvom'; part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat spirit of cultural linkage.
5. **BRICS Parliamentary Forum** — India hosts the 12th edition on 26–27 Oct 2026 in the Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan, New Delhi.

HOW TO READ THIS BRIEF

- ☐ Why in News ☐ Target Prelims MCQ ☒ How to Use in UPSC Mains ☐ Mains Practice / Case Study Question

GS PAPER 1: INDIAN HERITAGE & CULTURE

Sanskrit on the Silk Road: A 970 CE Phrasebook from Khotan

Why in news: A Sanskrit–Khotanese phrasebook, written on the back of a 970 CE letter from Khotan's king Viśa' Śūra, shows how Indian monks travelled and talked along Buddhist Silk Road networks.

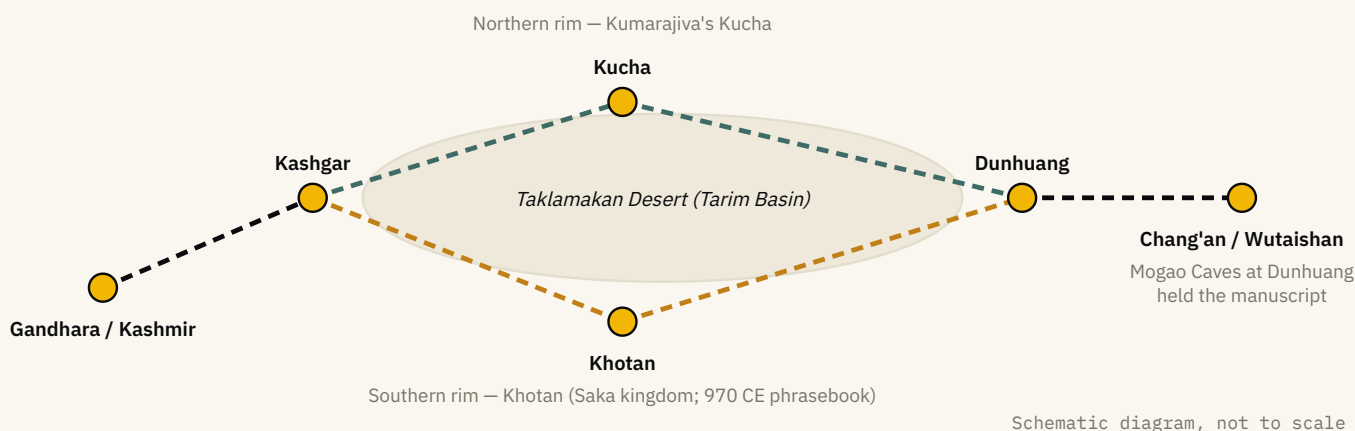
Key Details:

- **Manuscript:** Pelliot chinois 5538 (BnF, Paris), from Dunhuang's Library Cave: the front is a royal letter; the back is a bilingual dialogue for an Indian monk bound for Wutaishan in China.
- **Living Sanskrit:** Entries cover where a traveller came from, where he stayed and where he was going; Sanskrit worked as a spoken language of Buddhist travel, not only of texts.
- **Deep Indian reach:** Gandhari Prakrit, written in Kharosthi, served as an administrative language in Kroraina, Kucha and Khotan, oasis kingdoms of the Tarim Basin.
- **End of an era:** About three decades later (c. 1006) the Kara-Khanid Turks conquered Khotan, ending its Buddhist phase; Persianate vocabulary later displaced Sanskrit loanwords.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Mogao Caves:** Dunhuang's cave complex is a UNESCO WHS (1987) with 492 caves; its sealed Library Cave (Cave 17) was found in 1900 and visited by Aurel Stein in 1907.
- **Two-way traffic:** The route carried monks both ways: Indian teachers went east, while Chinese pilgrims came to India to collect texts.

Buddhist Silk Road: Gandhara to China via the Tarim Basin



Buddhism along the Silk Road

- **Kushan patronage:** Kanishka, the Kushan ruler, convened the Fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir; it was presided over by Vasumitra and is linked to the Sarvastivada school.
- **Kharosthi:** A script of north-west India written from right to left; it was used for Gandhari Prakrit and travelled with Buddhism into the Tarim Basin.
- **Khotan:** A Buddhist Saka kingdom on the southern edge of the Taklamakan desert; its language, Khotanese, is Eastern Iranian, not Indo-Aryan.
- **Translators:** Monk-translators carried Indian texts into Chinese; the most famous, Kumarajiva (344–413), was born in Kucha and reached Chang'an in 401.
- **Not to confuse:** Kharosthi (right to left, north-west India) vs Brahmi (left to right, ancestor of most Indian scripts, used in Ashoka's edicts).

Prelims angle: Niya, a Tarim Basin site explored by Aurel Stein, yielded hundreds of Kharosthi documents in Gandhari, administrative records of the Kroraina kingdom.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS1 answers on the spread of Indian culture abroad and Buddhism's role in Asian connectivity; reuse as civilisational soft-power evidence in GS2 answers on India–Central Asia ties.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Buddhism travelled from Gandhara to China through the Tarim oasis kingdoms, carrying Indian languages and art.
BODY	religious (councils, translators); linguistic (Sanskrit, Gandhari in Kharosthi); artistic (Gandhara to Mogao); economic (caravan trade); political (Kushan patronage, Kara-Khanid conquest).
WAY FORWARD	Manuscript digitisation and study (National Mission for Manuscripts, 2003); heritage diplomacy with Central Asia.

Mains value-add: Faxian (travelled c. 399–412 CE) passed through Khotan on his way to India and recorded its great monasteries and processions — cite to show Khotan as a hub of two-way India–China Buddhist exchange.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to the cultural history of the Silk Road, consider the following statements:

1. Khotanese, the language of the kingdom of Khotan, belongs to the Iranian branch of languages.
2. The Buddhist Council held in Kashmir during Kanishka's reign was presided over by Vasumitra.
3. Kumarajiva, the famous translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, was born in Khotan.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: Khotanese is an Eastern Iranian (Saka) language, even though Khotan used Indian scripts and Sanskrit. Statement 2 is correct: Vasumitra presided over the Fourth Council in Kashmir. Statement 3 is incorrect: Kumarajiva was born in Kucha, on the northern rim of the Tarim Basin, not in Khotan on the southern rim.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 1997: "Which one of the following scripts of ancient India was written from right to left? (a) Brahmi (b) Nandagari (c) Sharada (d) Kharosthi" — Answer: (d).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CE: Common Era | BnF: Bibliothèque nationale de France | UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization | WHS: World Heritage Site

GS PAPER 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bail, Not Punishment: SC on Prolonged Pre-Trial Detention

Why in news: On 22 Oct the SC (Datta and Nagu JJ) granted bail to former Rajasthan minister Mahesh Joshi in the Jal Jeevan Mission tender case, holding that prolonged pre-trial detention cannot "degenerate into punishment without trial".

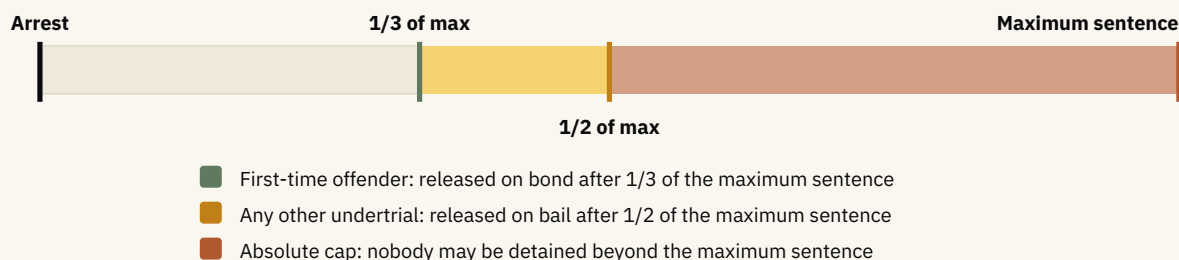
Story so far: The 17 Oct Brief flagged Joshi's bail plea as an example of pre-trial detention, and the 14 Oct Brief covered legal aid for undertrials. New today: the SC granted regular bail, holding that gravity of charges alone cannot justify continued custody.

Key Details:

- **Facts weighed:** 22 accused, 124 witnesses, about 20,000 pages, and charges not yet framed; the evidence is mainly documentary and already with the agency, so custody served no investigative purpose.
- **Holding:** Gravity of allegations "cannot by itself eclipse" other factors: likely trial delay, parity with co-accused already on bail, and tampering risk that conditions can address.
- **Constitutional root:** Art 21 includes the right to a speedy trial (Hussainara Khatoon, 1979); detention with no trial in sight turns the process itself into the punishment.
- **Social cost:** Long custody falls hardest on the poor, who cannot furnish sureties, and swells prison populations that are mostly unconvicted.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **PSI 2024 (NCRB):** 5,11,542 prisoners, of whom 3,71,440 (72.6%) were undertrials; jail occupancy stood at 112.7%.
- **BNSS S.479:** Replaces CrPC S.436A: an undertrial gets bail after half the maximum sentence, a first-time offender after one-third; the SC applied it to pre-July 2024 cases too (Aug 2024).

Section 479 BNSS: When an Undertrial Must Be Released

Not available for offences punishable with death or life imprisonment, or where several cases are pending. Schematic, not to scale.

Bail Law in India: Key Rulings and Provisions

- **Arnesh Kumar (2014):** Police must not arrest automatically for offences punishable up to 7 years; they must record reasons against a checklist (now BNSS S.35).
- **Satender Kumar Antil (2022):** The SC grouped offences into categories for bail, set timelines (bail pleas in 2 weeks, anticipatory bail in 6 weeks) and urged the Centre to consider a separate Bail Act.
- **K.A. Najeeb (2021):** Even under the strict UAPA bail bar, constitutional courts can grant bail when long custody without trial violates Part III rights.
- **Default bail:** If the police fail to file a chargesheet within 60 or 90 days, the accused gets an indefeasible right to bail (BNSS S.187, earlier CrPC S.167(2)).
- **Not to confuse:** Default bail turns on the agency's delay in filing a chargesheet; S.479 relief turns on the time the undertrial has already spent in custody.

Prelims angle: Art 39A (equal justice and free legal aid) was inserted by the 42nd Amendment, 1976; it is a DPSP, not a Fundamental Right.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on criminal-justice reform, judicial delays and Art 21; pair with the undertrial share to argue that bail delays are a structural, not individual, injustice.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	72.6% of prisoners are undertrials: for many, the process is the punishment.
BODY	legal (Art 21, S.479, Antil, Najeeb); institutional (trial delays, judge vacancies); social (poor cannot furnish sureties); economic (prison costs, lost livelihoods); rights (presumption of innocence).
WAY FORWARD	A separate Bail Act (Antil); active Undertrial Review Committees; strict S.479 compliance; video-trial and e-prisons tools.

Mains value-add: Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer in *State of Rajasthan v. Balchand* (1977): "the basic rule may perhaps be tersely put as bail, not jail" — cite to argue that liberty, not custody, is the constitutional default.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to the law on bail in India, consider the following statements:

1. Under Section 479 of the BNSS, a first-time offender undertrial is to be released on bond after undergoing one-third of the maximum imprisonment for the offence.
2. The relief under Section 479 of the BNSS is available even for offences punishable with death, if the accused is a first-time offender.
3. The right to a speedy trial was read into Article 21 in the Hussainara Khatoon case.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: S.479 sets one-third of the maximum sentence for first-time offenders (one-half for others).

Statement 2 is incorrect: S.479 excludes offences punishable with death or life imprisonment, whatever the accused's record. Statement

3 is correct: Hussainara Khatoon (1979) held speedy trial to be an essential part of Art 21.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2020: "In India, Legal Services Authorities provide free legal services to which of the following type of citizens? 1. Person with an annual income of less than ₹ 1,00,000 2. Transgender with an annual income of less than ₹ 2,00,000 3. Member of Other Backward Classes (OBC) with an annual income of less than ₹ 3,00,000 4. All Senior Citizens. Select the correct answer: (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 3 and 4 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1 and 4 only" — Answer: (a).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SC: Supreme Court | JJ: Justices | PSI: Prison Statistics India | NCRB: National Crime Records Bureau | BNSS: Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 | CrPC: Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 | UAPA: Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 | DPSP: Directive Principle of State Policy

Interim Relief for Road-Accident Victims: SC Pushes the Centre

Why in news: The SC (Pardiwala and Viswanathan JJ) has directed the Centre to publicise and gazette the Compensation to Victims (Interim Relief) Scheme, 2026, framed under S.164A of the MV Act.

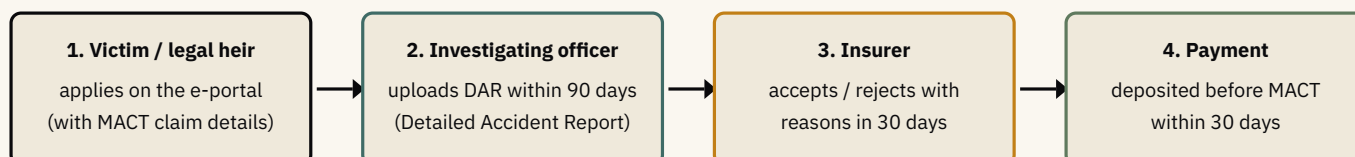
Key Details:

- **The gap:** Victims often wait years for MACT awards; S.164A (in force since 1 Apr 2022) lets the Centre pay interim relief in the meantime, but the scheme came only in 2026 after SC orders.
- **Awareness as access:** The Court stressed that an ordinary citizen may never learn of the right to interim compensation unless the State actively publicises it.
- **Open issues:** Whether victims of uninsured vehicles are covered is unclear; the Court also issued contempt notice over delays in publishing annual road-accident reports.
- **Welfare logic:** Quick cash for medical bills prevents distress borrowing and complements cashless golden-hour treatment.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Road Accidents in India 2024 (MoRTH):** 4,87,707 accidents and 1,77,175 deaths; two-wheeler riders were 46.2% of those killed.
- **Cashless Treatment Scheme, 2025:** Up to ₹1.5 lakh per victim for up to 7 days at designated hospitals, implemented by the NHA.

Interim Relief Scheme, 2026 (S.164A MV Act): The Claim Path



Open issue flagged by the SC: whether victims of uninsured vehicles are covered.

The Motor Vehicles Act: Victim-Relief Provisions

- **Golden hour:** S.2(12A) defines it as the one hour after a traumatic injury when prompt care is most likely to prevent death; S.162 provides for a cashless treatment scheme for it.
- **Hit-and-run:** Since the 2019 amendment, S.161 pays ₹2 lakh for death and ₹50,000 for grievous hurt when the vehicle cannot be traced.
- **Good Samaritans:** S.134A protects anyone who helps a victim in good faith from civil or criminal liability; disclosing their identity is voluntary.
- **Interim relief:** S.164A lets the Centre frame schemes for interim relief to claimants, with recovery of funds from vehicle owners or other sources.
- **Not to confuse:** No-fault compensation under S.164 (₹5 lakh for death, ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt) vs hit-and-run compensation under S.161, where the vehicle is untraced.

Prelims angle: The Stockholm Declaration (2020) seeks to halve road-traffic deaths and injuries by 2030; the UNGA proclaimed a Second Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2021–2030.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on welfare delivery and the judiciary's role in enforcing statutory duties; also in GS3 disaster/road-safety answers on post-crash care.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	1.77 lakh deaths in 2024: India's roads cause a public-health and welfare crisis.
BODY	legal (S.161, 162, 164A); governance (slow MACT claims, missing data); economic (out-of-pocket health costs); social (two-wheeler riders, poor families); judicial (continuing mandamus).
WAY FORWARD	Gazette and publicise the scheme; cover uninsured vehicles; strengthen trauma care; the 4E approach (education, enforcement, engineering, emergency care).

Mains value-add: The S. Sundar Committee (2007) recommended a dedicated national road-safety lead agency; the 2019 amendment now provides for a National Road Safety Board (S.215B) — cite to argue for a statutory lead agency with real powers.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, as amended, consider the following statements:

1. The Act defines 'golden hour' as the one hour following a traumatic injury during which prompt medical care is most likely to prevent death.
2. Compensation for death in a hit-and-run accident is ₹ 2 lakh.
3. A Good Samaritan who helps an accident victim must disclose his or her identity to the police and the hospital.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: S.2(12A) defines the golden hour this way. Statement 2 is correct: the 2019 amendment raised hit-and-run death compensation under S.161 to ₹2 lakh. Statement 3 is incorrect: S.134A protects Good Samaritans, and disclosing identity is voluntary, not mandatory.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SC: Supreme Court | JJ: Justices | MV Act: Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 | MACT: Motor Accident Claims Tribunal | MoRTH: Ministry of Road Transport and Highways | NHA: National Health Authority | DAR: Detailed Accident Report | UNGA: UN General Assembly

Data Before AI: Fixing State Records for Welfare Delivery

Why in news: A TBI report (19 Oct) warns that AI run on fragmented State administrative data could automate existing errors and cause wrongful mass exclusions from welfare.

Story so far: The 12 Oct Brief covered the Kerala HC asking for a functional Data Protection Board under the DPDP Act. New today: the focus moves from data protection to data quality, as States rush to deploy AI.

Key Details:

- **Core risk:** Models trained on incomplete records repeat their gaps; an AI fraud flag alone should never suspend a benefit without human review and a right to contest.
- **Evidence of error:** Moving school data to student-level records in 2022-23 removed about 1.4 crore duplicate entries; the report cites NITI Aayog for 4–7% welfare leakage from data errors.
- **Silos:** Data moves between departments by file and email, and each scheme tokenises Aadhaar separately, so one citizen's records rarely link across schemes.
- **Reform asks:** State data offices empowered to compel sharing, named owners for the top 20–50 datasets, an independent audit body and a published "State Data Balance Sheet".

Data/Facts/Example:

- **MoSPI's AI interface:** A beta MCP server on the eSankhyiki portal (Feb 2026) lets AI tools query 7 datasets such as PLFS, CPI and IIP; TBI calls it an interface, not a governance model.
- **DPDP Act S.7(b):** Allows the State to process personal data for a prescribed subsidy, benefit, service, licence or permit without fresh consent.

Data Governance in India: The Framework

- **Personal data:** The DPDP Act, 2023 governs digital personal data, sets duties for Data Fiduciaries and creates the Data Protection Board of India to adjudicate breaches.
- **Open data:** NDSAP (2012) set up the data.gov.in platform for proactive release of non-sensitive government data.
- **Non-personal data:** The draft National Data Governance Framework Policy (2022) proposes standards for sharing anonymised government data; it is still a draft.
- **Statistics system:** MoSPI is the nodal ministry for official statistics such as PLFS and CPI; its NSO now releases data in machine-readable form.
- **Not to confuse:** Data protection (privacy and consent, DPDP Act) vs data governance (quality, ownership, sharing and standards across departments).

Prelims angle: Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 allows Aadhaar authentication to be made a condition for subsidies and benefits paid from the Consolidated Fund of India.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on e-governance, AI in public service delivery and exclusion errors; reuse in GS4 answers on accountability for algorithmic decisions.

Answer skeleton

INTRO AI magnifies whatever errors sit in government records — "garbage in, exclusion out".

BODY governance (silos, no data ownership); legal (DPDP S.7, proportionality); social (exclusion of the poor); technological (record linking, transliteration); ethical (contestability, human review).

WAY FORWARD State data offices; human-in-the-loop with grievance redress; data audits before AI; open standards and exit clauses in vendor contracts.

Mains value-add: *K.S. Puttaswamy (Aadhaar)*, 2018: the SC upheld Aadhaar for welfare under S.7 but struck down its mandatory linking with bank accounts and mobile numbers — cite to argue that data-driven welfare must pass the proportionality test.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, consider the following statements:

1. The State may process personal data without fresh consent to provide a prescribed subsidy or benefit in certain cases.
2. The Act applies only to processing of personal data within India and never to processing outside India.
3. The Act establishes the Data Protection Board of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: S.7(b) lists this as a 'legitimate use'. Statement 2 is incorrect: the Act also covers processing outside India if it is connected with offering goods or services to people in India. Statement 3 is correct: the Act creates the Data Protection Board of India.

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2020, GS-II: "The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Digital Revolution) has initiated e-Governance as an integral part of government. Discuss." (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** TBI: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change | AI: Artificial Intelligence | HC: High Court | DPDP: Digital Personal Data Protection | NITI: National Institution for Transforming India | MoSPI: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation | MCP: Model Context Protocol | PLFS: Periodic Labour Force Survey | CPI: Consumer Price Index | IIP: Index of Industrial Production | NDSAP: National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy | NSO: National Statistics Office | SC: Supreme Court

Empty Chairs: Leadership and Faculty Vacancies in Central Higher Education

Why in news: Official figures show a quarter of central-university teaching posts and over a third of IIT faculty posts lying vacant, while the UGC and AICTE are run by officials holding additional charge.

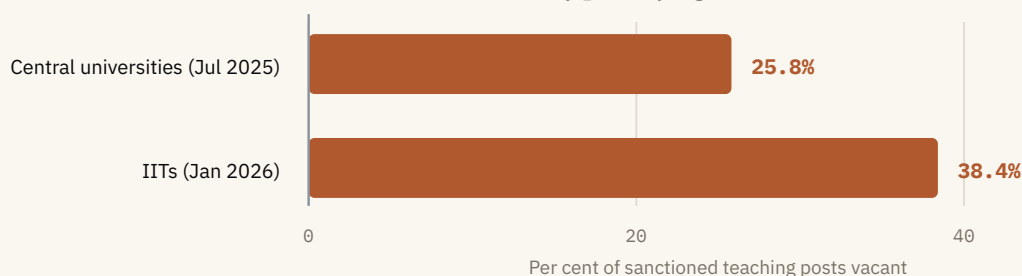
Key Details:

- **Scale:** 4,889 of 18,951 sanctioned teaching posts in central universities were vacant on 1 July 2025; 4,804 of 12,498 faculty posts across 23 IITs on 30 Jan 2026.
- **Leadership gap:** The UGC has had no regular chairperson since April 2025 and the AICTE since Dec 2025; many central universities run on acting VCs, slowing academic decisions.
- **Recruitment treadmill:** Mission-mode drives filled 17,494 faculty posts between Sept 2022 and Oct 2025 (Lok Sabha, Feb 2026), but fresh vacancies keep opening as institutions expand.
- **Quality link:** Vacancies raise student-teacher ratios, overload guest faculty and weaken research, undercutting NEP 2020's target of a 50% GER by 2035.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **AISHE:** GER in higher education was 30.0 in 2023-24, up from 29.5 in 2022-23.
- **VC eligibility:** UGC Regulations, 2018 require a VC to be a distinguished academic with at least 10 years as Professor, picked from a panel of 3–5 names by a search-cum-selection committee.

Share of sanctioned faculty posts lying vacant (%)



Regulating Higher Education: Who Does What

- **Constitutional base:** Entry 66 of the Union List covers coordination and determination of standards in higher education; education itself is in the Concurrent List (Entry 25) since the 42nd Amendment.
- **UGC:** A statutory body under the UGC Act, 1956; it funds universities and frames regulations such as those on VC appointments.
- **AICTE and NCTE:** Statutory regulators for technical education (AICTE Act, 1987) and teacher education (NCTE Act, 1993).
- **Proposed single regulator:** The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 proposes to replace the UGC, AICTE and NCTE with one body; it is still a proposal.
- **Not to confuse:** The UGC regulates and funds; NAAC, an autonomous body set up by the UGC in 1994, assesses and accredits institutions.

Prelims angle: AISHE is conducted by the Ministry of Education; GER in higher education is calculated for the 18–23 age group.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on higher-education quality and NEP 2020; the vacancy figures show that people, not buildings, are the binding constraint.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	25.8% of central-university and 38.4% of IIT faculty posts are vacant.
BODY	governance (acting heads, slow searches); academic (ratios, research output); equity (reserved-post backlogs); fiscal (expansion without staffing plans); federal (State universities face deeper gaps).
WAY FORWARD	Start VC searches 6 months early; rolling recruitment calendars; a public vacancy dashboard; staffing plans tied to every new seat; the UGC's CU-CHAYAN portal.

Mains value-add: Kothari Commission (1964–66): "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms" — cite to argue that teacher availability and quality decide national outcomes.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Faculty and leadership vacancies, rather than infrastructure, have become the binding constraint on the quality of India's higher education. Critically examine in the light of the National Education Policy, 2020. (250 words)

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2020, GS-II: "National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient education system in India. Critically examine the statement." (250 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** IIT: Indian Institute of Technology | UGC: University Grants Commission | AICTE: All India Council for Technical Education | VC: Vice-Chancellor | NEP: National Education Policy | GER: Gross Enrolment Ratio | AISHE: All India Survey on Higher Education | NCTE: National Council for Teacher Education | NAAC: National Assessment and Accreditation Council | CU-CHAYAN: UGC's recruitment portal for central universities

India–Poland: Doubling Trade and a Defence Industry Dialogue

Why in news: During Polish PM Donald Tusk's visit (21–23 Oct), India and Poland set a target to double bilateral trade by 2030 and agreed on a Defence Industry Dialogue and a counter-terrorism dialogue.

Story so far: The 16 Oct Brief covered India's contest with Tajikistan for a 2028–29 UNSC seat. New today: Poland has backed India's bid as well as its claim to permanent membership.

Key Details:

- **Strategic frame:** Ties were raised to a Strategic Partnership in Aug 2024, the first Indian PM visit in 45 years; the leaders endorsed a mid-term review of the 2024–28 Action Plan.
- **Defence and technology:** The Defence Industry Dialogue targets co-development and co-production; both want a classified-information pact soon, plus joint work on AI, semiconductors and quantum.

- **Multilateral alignment:** Poland will join CDRI and backs India at the UNSC; India invited it to the ISA, GBA and IPOI, and both called for early adoption of the CCIT.
- **Why Poland matters:** A large EU economy and gateway to CEE, it helps India as the India–EU FTA nears operation; the two differ on Russia but both seek a just peace in Ukraine.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Trade (CY2025):** US\$6.36 bn: Indian exports \$4.83 bn, imports \$1.53 bn; Poland is India's largest trade and investment partner in CEE (MEA).
- **People-to-people:** Poland helped 2,000+ Indian students stranded in Ukraine under Operation Ganga (2022); a youth exchange named after the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar has run two editions.

India–Poland, Oct 2026: What Was Agreed

Item	Status
Double bilateral trade by 2030	Target set
Defence Industry Dialogue	Agreed
Counter-terrorism dialogue	Agreed
Poland joins CDRI	Announced
Classified-information agreement	To be signed soon
Critical minerals MoU	Under negotiation

The Visegrad Group (V4)

- **Origin:** Founded on 15 Feb 1991 at Visegrád, Hungary, by Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary to coordinate their post-communist integration with the West.
- **Members:** Four since 1993, when Czechoslovakia split: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia; all four are in both the EU and NATO.
- **India link:** India held its first Foreign Ministers' meeting with the V4, welcomed in the 2026 joint statement.
- **Not to confuse:** V4 vs the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, Poland, formed in 1991) — Poland belongs to both.

Prelims angle: IPOI, launched by India at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok (Nov 2019), has seven pillars, including maritime security, maritime ecology and disaster risk reduction.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS2 answers on India–Europe ties, diversifying defence partnerships and support for UNSC reform; Poland shows India's growing reach into Central Europe.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Poland is India's largest partner in Central and Eastern Europe; the 2024 Strategic Partnership is now gaining content.
BODY	economic (trade target, Indian investment); strategic (defence industry, IMEC, EU FTA); multilateral (UNSC, CDRI, ISA); challenges (divergence on Russia, distance and logistics).
WAY FORWARD	Sign the classified-information pact; use the India–V4 format; link with EU FTA supply chains; direct flights.

Mains value-add: During WWII, Jam Saheb Digvijaysinhji of Nawanagar, the "Good Maharaja", sheltered over 1,000 Polish refugees, mostly children, at Balachadi; Warsaw unveiled a monument to him in 2014 — cite as a soft-power anchor of the relationship.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Visegrad Group, consider the following statements:

1. It was founded in 1991 by Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.
2. All its present members are members of both the European Union and NATO.
3. Romania joined the group in 2004, making it the 'Visegrad Five'.

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

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: the three founders met at Visegrád in Feb 1991. Statement 2 is correct: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are all EU and NATO members. Statement 3 is incorrect: the group has had four members since Czechoslovakia split in 1993; Romania was never a member.

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PM: Prime Minister | UNSC: UN Security Council | AI: Artificial Intelligence | CDRI: Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure | ISA: International Solar Alliance | GBA: Global Biofuels Alliance | IPOI: Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative | CCIT: Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism | EU: European Union | CEE: Central and Eastern Europe | FTA: Free Trade Agreement | CY: Calendar Year | MEA: Ministry of External Affairs | MoU: Memorandum of Understanding | V4: Visegrad Four | NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization | IMEC: India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor | WWII: Second World War

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 2

SC on child sexual abuse material (15 Oct; Pardiwala and Chandran JJ): Rejecting blanket bans on children's internet use, the Court directed the Centre to frame standard operating procedures for hash-matching and URL-blocking by significant social media intermediaries and to create a National Hash and URL List Database for such material, within the Sahyog Portal or as a standalone repository.

How to use: GS2/GS3 answers on online child safety — argue for targeted duties on intermediaries over blanket bans (proportionality).

SC on Andhra Pradesh municipal polls (21 Oct; Bagchi and Mohana JJ): Hearing the YSR Congress Party's plea that most of its candidates were blocked from filing nominations, the Court held that "free and fair election is a basic structure of the Constitution" and that deference to the State Election Commission under Art 243ZA cannot wholly exclude judicial review.

How to use: GS2 answers on local-body elections and SEC independence — shows courts can step in when the fairness of the process is at risk.

GS PAPER 3: ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & ECONOMY**Emissions Gap Report 2026: 1.5°C Without Overshoot Is Now Out of Reach**

Why in news: UNEP's 17th Emissions Gap Report, "The Point of Return" (21 Oct), says limiting warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot is no longer possible; full NDC implementation points to about 2.6°C.

Story so far: The 13 Oct Brief covered the IPCC's deadlock over the AR7 timeline. New today: UNEP puts numbers on the gap that AR7 and the 2028 global stocktake will have to confront.

Key Details:

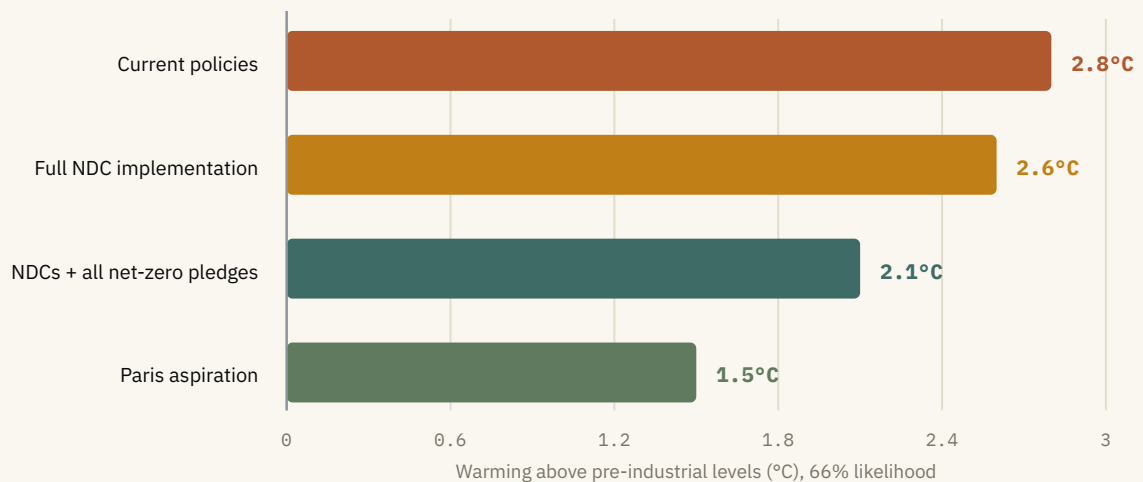
- **Emissions:** Global GHG emissions were 58.4 GtCO₂e in 2025, roughly flat; a fall of about 0.5 Gt in land-use CO₂ masked a rise in fossil CO₂, so it is "too soon" to call a peak.
- **Ambition gap:** Returning to 1.5°C by 2100 needs cuts of 18% by 2030, 45% by 2035 and 69% by 2040 (vs 2025); the new NDCs deliver only 5–8% and 11–15%.
- **Cost of overshoot:** The lowest pathway peaks at 1.7–1.8°C and needs about 320 GtCO₂ of removals this century; every 5 years at today's emissions adds about 0.1°C to peak warming.

- **Equity:** G20 members (excluding the AU) emit 76%; the US had the largest rise in 2025 while India, Russia and the EU fell; world per-capita is 6.4 tCO₂e vs India's about 3.1 t.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **India:** UNEP finds current policies "appear likely" to meet India's 2035 target, while noting that an intensity-based NDC lets total emissions keep rising.
- **US exit:** The full-NDC projection worsened from last year, partly because of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Projected warming by 2100 under different scenarios (°C)



India's NDC for 2031–35

- **Approval:** The Union Cabinet approved India's new NDC on 25 Mar 2026 and it was filed with the UNFCCC in April 2026.
- **Targets:** Cut the emissions intensity of GDP by 47% from 2005 levels by 2035, and source about 60% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuels.
- **Carbon sink:** Create an additional sink of 3.5–4.0 GtCO₂e through forest and tree cover, over 2005 levels.
- **Earlier NDC (2022):** 45% intensity cut by 2030 and about 50% non-fossil capacity by 2030; net zero by 2070 was announced at COP26 (2021).
- **Not to confuse:** An intensity target (emissions per unit of GDP) vs an absolute cap on emissions; and the NDC (Paris Art 4) vs India's LT-LEDS, submitted in Nov 2022.

Prelims angle: UNEP is headquartered in Nairobi; the Emissions Gap Report has been published annually since 2010.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on climate negotiations and India's climate commitments; the per-capita contrast (3.1 t vs 6.4 t) supports India's equity and CBDR-RC arguments.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	UNEP: the 1.5°C no-overshoot window has closed; full NDCs imply about 2.6°C.
BODY	scientific (overshoot, removals); economic (transition finance, fossil lock-in); equity (per-capita, historical emissions, CBDR-RC); geopolitical (US exit); India (intensity NDC, non-fossil growth).
WAY FORWARD	Stronger NDCs in the next cycle; methane cuts; carbon markets such as India's CCTS; removals as a supplement, never a substitute, for cuts.

Mains value-add: Paris Agreement, Art 2.1(a): hold warming "well below 2°C" and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C — cite to show that an overshoot pathway already breaches the treaty's aspiration, and Art 4.3 (progression) to demand stronger NDCs.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for 2031–35, consider the following statements:

1. It commits India to an absolute cap on its greenhouse gas emissions by 2035.
2. It targets about 60% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources.
3. It includes an additional carbon sink of 3.5–4.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent over 2005 levels.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect: India's NDC is an emissions-intensity target (47% cut per unit of GDP vs 2005), not an absolute cap; totals can still rise. Statement 2 is correct: the non-fossil capacity target is about 60%. Statement 3 is correct: the forest-based sink target is 3.5–4.0 GtCO₂e.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2016: "With reference to the Agreement at the UNFCCC Meeting in Paris in 2015, which of the following statements is/are correct? 1. The Agreement was signed by all the member countries of the UN and it will go into effect in 2017. 2. The Agreement aims to limit the greenhouse gas emissions so that the rise in average global temperature by the end of this century does not exceed 2°C or even 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. 3. Developed countries acknowledged their historical responsibility in global warming and committed to donate \$1000 billion a year from 2020 to help developing countries to cope with climate change. Select the correct answer: (a) 1 and 3 only (b) 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3" — Answer: (b).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** UNEP: UN Environment Programme | NDC: Nationally Determined Contribution | IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change | AR7: Seventh Assessment Report | GHG: Greenhouse Gas | GtCO₂e: billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent | G20: Group of Twenty | AU: African Union | UNFCCC: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change | COP: Conference of the Parties | LT-LEDS: Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy | CBDR-RC: Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities | CCTS: Carbon Credit Trading Scheme

CBD COP17 in Yerevan: The First Global Review of the Biodiversity Framework

Why in news: COP17 to the CBD (Yerevan, Armenia, 19–30 Oct) is holding the first global review of the KMGBF; Parties themselves rate fewer than half of national targets as on track.

Story so far: The 13 Oct Brief covered the Living Planet Index 2026 (73% average decline in monitored wildlife since 1970). New today: governments review how far the 2022 framework has turned such warnings into action.

Key Details:

- **Halfway check:** About 90% of Parties have set national targets and over 70% have filed national reports, but fewer than half of those targets are on track, with four years left to 2030.
- **Finance fault-line:** Rates and thresholds for the Cali Fund and capitalisation of the GBF Fund remain unresolved; India warned innovative finance must not dilute developed-country commitments.
- **Parallel meetings:** CP-MOP12 (Cartagena Protocol, biosafety) and NP-MOP6 (Nagoya Protocol, ABS) run alongside COP17.
- **India's alignment:** India's updated NBSAP (Oct 2024) has 23 national targets mirroring the 23 global ones; the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023 requires NBA registration before seeking IPR on bio-resources.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Cali Fund design:** Set up at COP16 (2024) for DSI benefit-sharing: indicative contribution of 1% of profits or 0.1% of revenue by large users; 50% of funds to go to IPLCs.
- **Finance gap:** Biodiversity finance falls short by an estimated US\$700 bn a year (ENB overview).

KMGBF: The Targets Under Most Scrutiny at COP17

Target	What it requires by 2030
Target 3 ('30x30')	At least 30% of land, inland waters and coastal and marine areas effectively conserved
Target 18 (subsidies)	Reduce harmful incentives by at least US\$500 bn a year
Target 19 (finance)	US\$200 bn a year from all sources; international flows of \$20 bn a year by 2025 and \$30 bn a year by 2030

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)

- **Adoption:** Adopted at COP15 in Montreal on 19 Dec 2022 (Decision 15/4), under China's presidency, with 4 long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030.
- **Goals:** A: protect and restore; B: prosper with nature; C: share benefits fairly; D: invest and collaborate.
- **The Convention:** The CBD opened for signature at Rio in 1992 and entered into force on 29 Dec 1993; it has 196 Parties — the US signed but never ratified; India ratified in Feb 1994.
- **Not to confuse:** KMGBF (2022, 23 targets, to 2030) replaced the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (2011–2020, 20 targets, adopted at COP10 in Nagoya, 2010).

Prelims angle: India hosted CBD COP11 in Hyderabad in 2012.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on biodiversity governance, conservation finance and benefit-sharing; India's NBSAP and 2023 amendment show domestic alignment with global targets.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	At the KMGBF's midpoint, fewer than half of national targets are on track.
BODY	ecological (habitat loss, invasives); economic (finance gap, harmful subsidies); equity (DSI benefit-sharing, IPLCs); governance (NBSAP implementation, monitoring); India (23 targets, BD Act 2023).
WAY FORWARD	Operationalise the Cali Fund; reform harmful subsidies; strengthen BMCs and People's Biodiversity Registers; integrate biodiversity into national accounts.

Mains value-add: The Dasgupta Review (UK Treasury, 2021) found that between 1992 and 2014 produced capital per person doubled while natural capital per person fell by nearly 40% — cite to argue that GDP growth is hiding the erosion of nature's capital.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE–HARD

Q. With reference to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), consider the following statements:

1. The United States is a Party to the CBD.
2. The '30x30' target of the Kunming-Montreal Framework requires every country to conserve 30% of its own land area by 2030.
3. The Nagoya Protocol under the CBD deals with access to genetic resources and the fair sharing of benefits from their use.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d) 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect: the US signed the CBD but never ratified it. Statement 2 is incorrect: Target 3 is a global, collective target — each country contributes according to its circumstances; it is not a uniform 30% quota for every country. Statement 3 is correct: the Nagoya Protocol (2010) deals with access and benefit-sharing.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2005: "Which one of the following statements is correct? (a) The first meeting of the parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was held in the Philippines in 2004 (b) India is not a signatory to the Biosafety Protocol (c) The Biosafety Protocol deals with genetically modified organisms (d) The USA is a member of the Biosafety Protocol" — Answer: (c).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity | COP: Conference of the Parties | KMGBF: Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework | GBF: Global Biodiversity Framework | CP-MOP: Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol | NP-MOP: Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol | ABS: Access and Benefit-Sharing | NBSAP: National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan | NBA: National Biodiversity Authority | IPR: Intellectual Property Rights | DSI: Digital Sequence Information | IPLCs: Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities | ENB: Earth Negotiations Bulletin | BD Act: Biological Diversity Act, 2002 | BMCs: Biodiversity Management Committees

Coal Gasification: Turning Coal into Chemicals and Import Savings

Why in news: An Alvarez & Marsal report released at Gasification India 2026 (22 Oct) estimates that coal gasification could help India avoid about ₹1.96 trillion of annual imports of gas, fertilisers and chemicals.

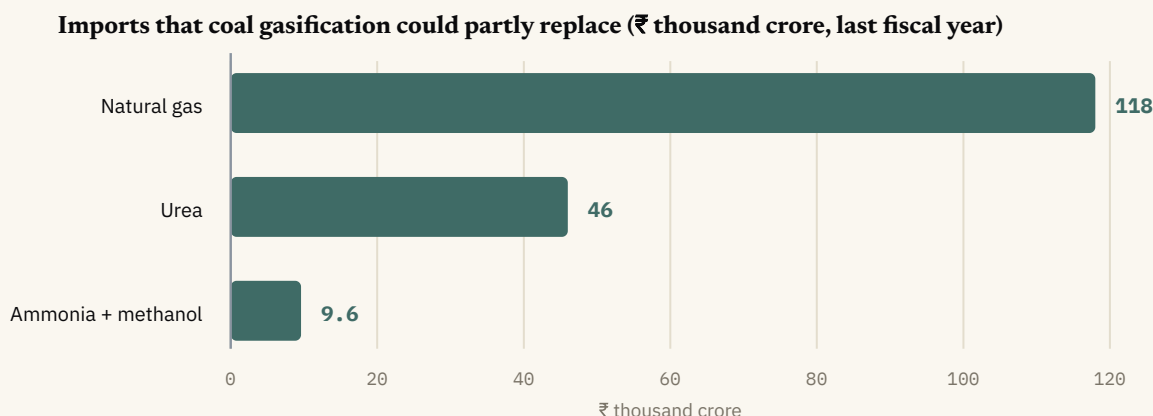
Story so far: The 6 Oct Brief covered critically low coal stocks at power plants amid record demand. New today: the focus moves from burning coal for power to converting it into gas and chemicals.

Key Details:

- **Imports in the crosshairs:** Last year's bill: natural gas ₹1.18 trillion, urea ₹46,000 crore, ammonia and methanol ₹9,600 crore; substitution will be partial and depends on cost-competitiveness.
- **Policy push:** The National Coal Gasification Mission targets 100 MT of coal gasified by 2030; schemes of ₹8,500 crore (Jan 2024) and ₹37,500 crore (May 2026) offer capital incentives.
- **Resource fit:** India has about 401 bn tonnes of coal, and roughly 44% lies below 300 m — suited to underground gasification; the first UCG pilot runs at Kasta, Jamtara (Jharkhand), since June 2024.
- **Challenges:** High-ash Indian coal needs adapted gasifiers; the process is water- and carbon-intensive, and depends on foreign technology licensors.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **2026 scheme:** Incentive of up to 20% of plant and machinery cost, capped at ₹5,000 crore per project; coal linkage for syngas projects for up to 30 years.
- **Flagship project:** BCGCL (CIL 51%, BHEL 49%) at Lakhanpur, Odisha, will make 0.66 MTPA of ammonium nitrate; its foundation stone was laid on 20 June 2026.



Coal Gasification and UCG

- **Process:** Coal is partially burnt with controlled oxygen and steam to make syngas, mainly carbon monoxide and hydrogen.
- **Products:** Syngas can be turned into methanol, ammonia and urea, synthetic natural gas (SNG) and DME, cutting imports of each.
- **Surface vs underground:** Surface gasification uses mined coal in a reactor; UCG converts coal to gas inside deep seams that are uneconomic to mine.
- **Incentives:** Coal used for gasification gets a 50% rebate on the revenue share in commercial coal-block auctions.
- **Not to confuse:** Coal gasification converts coal itself into gas; CBM is methane already trapped in coal seams that is simply extracted.

Prelims angle: Talcher Fertilizers in Odisha is India's first coal-gasification-based urea project.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on energy security, fertiliser self-reliance and the use of domestic coal; balance with the climate cost to show a nuanced view.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	Gasification could replace up to ₹1.96 trillion of annual imports.
BODY	economic (energy and fertiliser security, value addition); technological (high-ash coal, UCG); environmental (CO ₂ , water use); fiscal (capital incentives); strategic (less exposure to West Asian supply shocks).
WAY FORWARD	Pair projects with CCUS; long-term offtake contracts with PSU buyers; R&D for indigenous high-ash gasifiers; time-bound clearances.

Mains value-add: NITI Aayog's report on a CCUS policy framework (2022) treats carbon capture as essential for hard-to-abate sectors — cite to argue that gasification fits India's net-zero-2070 path only if paired with CCUS.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ EASY-MODERATE

Q. With reference to coal gasification, consider the following statements:

1. Syngas produced by coal gasification is mainly a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen.
2. In Underground Coal Gasification, coal is first mined and then gasified in surface reactors near the pithead.
3. Coal Bed Methane is produced by gasifying coal with steam and oxygen.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: syngas is mainly CO and H₂. Statement 2 is incorrect: UCG gasifies coal in place, underground, with no mining. Statement 3 is incorrect: CBM is methane naturally adsorbed in coal seams and extracted by drilling; no gasification is involved.

Related PYQ: UPSC Prelims 2014: "With reference to two non-conventional energy sources called 'coalbed methane' and 'shale gas', consider the following statements: 1. Coalbed methane is the pure methane gas extracted from coal seams, while shale gas is a mixture of propane and butane only that can be extracted from fine-grained sedimentary rocks. 2. In India abundant coalbed methane sources exist, but so far no shale gas sources have been found. Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2" — Answer: (d).

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** MT: Million Tonnes | UCG: Underground Coal Gasification | BCGCL: Bharat Coal Gasification and Chemicals Ltd | CIL: Coal India Ltd | BHEL: Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd | MTPA: Million Tonnes Per Annum | SNG: Synthetic Natural Gas | DME: Dimethyl Ether | CBM: Coal Bed Methane | CCUS: Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage | PSU: Public Sector Undertaking | NITI: National Institution for Transforming India

Old-Age Security for Gig Workers: The Unfinished Business of the Social Security Code

Why in news: A senior official said on 22 Oct that the Centre is still "grappling" with designing old-age protection for gig and platform workers, the hardest part of the Social Security Code to put into practice.

Key Details:

- **Legal base:** The Code on Social Security, 2020 (in force with the other Labour Codes since 21 Nov 2025) defines gig workers (S.2(35)) and platform workers (S.2(61)) and allows schemes including old-age protection.
- **Financing:** Aggregators are to contribute 1–2% of annual turnover, capped at 5% of what they pay gig and platform workers, into a dedicated social security fund.
- **Design dilemma:** Workers are young, multi-app and irregular earners: should pensions be contributory or mandatory, and how can benefits follow a worker across platforms?
- **Federal experimentation:** Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Jharkhand and Telangana have enacted their own gig-worker laws with welfare boards and fee or cess models.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Scale (NITI Aayog, 2022):** 77 lakh gig workers in 2020-21, projected to reach 2.35 crore by 2029-30.
- **Global standard:** The ILO adopted Convention No. 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy on 12 June 2026 (406 for, 8 against, 36 abstentions).
- **Budget 2025-26:** Identity cards, e-Shram registration and PM-JAY health cover announced for about 1 crore gig workers.

State Laws on Gig and Platform Workers

State	Law	Year
Rajasthan	Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act	2023
Karnataka	Platform Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act	2025
Bihar	Gig and Platform Based Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act	2025
Jharkhand	Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act	2025
Telangana	Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act	2026

The Labour Codes and Gig Workers

- **Four codes:** Wages (2019), Industrial Relations (2020), Social Security (2020), and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (2020) consolidate 29 central labour laws.
- **SS Code's reach:** It subsumes nine laws, including the EPF Act, 1952, the ESI Act, 1948 and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- **Board:** A National Social Security Board (S.6) advises on and monitors schemes; for gig and platform workers it includes aggregator and worker representatives.
- **Portability:** Aadhaar-linked e-Shram registration is meant to let benefits follow a worker across platforms.
- **Not to confuse:** Gig worker: earns outside a traditional employer–employee relationship; platform worker: a gig worker who finds work through an online platform.

Prelims angle: e-Shram, the national database of unorganised workers, had 31.89 crore registrations as of 18 Aug 2026.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS3 answers on employment quality and the platform economy, and in GS2 answers on social security for vulnerable sections; the Centre–State laws show cooperative federalism in labour.

Answer skeleton

INTRO Gig workers may reach 2.35 crore by 2029-30, but old-age protection is still undesigned.

BODY legal (SS Code, State Acts); economic (platform costs vs productivity, worker retention); social (no employer, income volatility, women's work); federal (State boards vs a central fund); international (ILO C193).

WAY FORWARD Notify the aggregator-funded scheme; portable contributory pensions with matching platform shares; link with Atal Pension Yojana/NPS; one registry across States.

Mains value-add: ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 (2012) calls for basic income security in old age for all — cite to argue that pensions for gig workers are a universal floor, not a favour.

TARGET PRELIMS MCQ MODERATE

Q. With reference to the Code on Social Security, 2020, consider the following statements:

1. It defines 'gig worker' and 'platform worker' in a central law.
2. Aggregators may be required to contribute up to 5% of their annual turnover to the social security fund for gig workers.
3. It subsumes the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 and the Employees' Provident Funds Act, 1952, among other laws.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is correct: S.2(35) and S.2(61) define gig and platform workers. Statement 2 is incorrect: the contribution is 1–2% of annual turnover; the 5% figure is a cap linked to the amount paid to gig and platform workers, not to turnover. Statement 3 is correct: the Code subsumes nine laws, including the ESI and EPF Acts.

Related PYQ: UPSC Mains 2021, GS-I: "Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India." (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** SS Code: Code on Social Security, 2020 | NITI: National Institution for Transforming India | ILO: International Labour Organization | PM-JAY: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana | EPF: Employees' Provident Funds | ESI: Employees' State Insurance | NPS: National Pension System

QUICK FACTS & EXAMPLES — GS PAPER 3

Simpler GST registration for small online sellers: Under a new Rule 14B of the Central GST (CGST) Rules recommended by the 57th GST Council, sellers who supply goods only through e-commerce platforms can register in other States by naming the platform's warehouse as their principal place of business; it is open to those passing on input tax credit of up to ₹2.5 lakh a month, from 1 Nov 2026.

How to use: GS3 answers on formalising small businesses (MSMEs) and ease of doing business — an example of compliance simplification widening the tax base.

Himachal Pradesh HC on forest roads (8 Oct): Hearing a public interest litigation on 55 roads allegedly built in Seraj's forests in violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, with approvals claimed under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, the Court barred any construction or tarring of roads in forest areas until further orders and flagged helipads' impact on wildlife.

How to use: GS3 answers on development vs conservation in the Himalaya — shows how community-facility provisions can be misused to bypass forest clearance.

GS PAPER 4: ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE**Police Commemoration Day: Duty Unto the Last**

Why in news: On Police Commemoration Day (21 Oct), the Union Home Minister said 154 more police personnel who died on duty in the past year were added to the National Police Memorial, which now bears 36,852 names.

Key Details:

- **Origin:** The day marks 21 Oct 1959, when ten policemen of a patrol led by Karam Singh were killed by Chinese troops at Hot Springs in Ladakh.
- **The memorial:** The National Police Memorial at Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, was dedicated to the nation by the PM on 21 Oct 2018.
- **GS4 value:** A textbook example of dedication to public service and courage of conviction, two foundational civil-service values in UPSC's syllabus, shown by personnel who put duty above safety.
- **Ethical tension:** Honouring sacrifice must go with institutional care — fair tenure, welfare, mental-health support and accountability — so that devotion to duty is never exploited.

Data/Facts/Example:

- **Prakash Singh (2006):** The SC's seven directives include a State Security Commission, a minimum 2-year tenure for DGPs, SPs and SHOs, separating investigation from law and order, and Police Complaints Authorities.
- **2nd ARC, 5th Report (Public Order, 2007):** It recommended a separate crime-investigation agency and a State Police Performance and Accountability Commission.

Duty and Courage: Ethical Lenses

- **Kant:** Duty ethics: an act has moral worth when done from duty, not from fear or reward; duty binds even when it is costly.
- **Bhagavad Gita:** Nishkama karma: do one's duty without attachment to its fruits — the inner basis of selfless public service.
- **Aristotle:** Courage is a virtue lying between cowardice and rashness; true courage is guided by reason, not bravado.
- **Not to confuse:** Physical courage (facing danger) vs moral courage (refusing an illegal order or standing up to pressure) — civil servants need both.

Prelims angle: Hot Springs lies in the Chang Chenmo valley of eastern Ladakh, near the Kongka La pass.

How to use in UPSC Mains: Use in GS4 answers on dedication to public service, courage and the ethics of uniformed services; the police reform directives give a governance angle to a values answer.

Answer skeleton

INTRO	36,852 names on the National Police Memorial stand for duty paid in full.
BODY	values (duty, courage, integrity); institutional (tenure, welfare, mental health); societal (public trust and police legitimacy); reform (Prakash Singh directives, 2nd ARC).
CONCLUSION	Honour sacrifice through reform: professional, accountable and well-cared-for police forces.

Mains value-add: Bhagavad Gita 2.47 — "Karmanye vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana" (your right is to action alone, never to its fruits) — cite to frame selfless, outcome-detached dedication to duty.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. "Courage in public service is not only physical bravery but the moral strength to do one's duty under pressure." Illustrate with reference to the police, and suggest how institutions can honour such sacrifice beyond commemoration. (150 words)

■ **[Abbreviations & Terminology]:** PM: Prime Minister | SC: Supreme Court | DGP: Director General of Police | SP: Superintendent of Police | SHO: Station House Officer | ARC: Administrative Reforms Commission