

PART I · HEADLINES TO ECONOMY

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"The Topper's Last Read. Every Morning."

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INSIDE PART I

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§1 Top Headlines

1. Government notifies the 6th Positive Indigenisation List of 405 defence items covering DPSUs and the Indian Coast Guard, business potential ₹3,070 crore. **GS3**
2. 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting at Bharat Mandapam adopts a Joint Ministerial Statement comprising four outcome documents under India's 2026 Chairship. **GS2**
3. National Sports Awards 2025 announced with the Khel Ratna left vacant for only the third time since 1991-92; Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra panel cites integrity screening. **GS2**
4. External Affairs Minister and Singapore's Foreign Minister lay the foundation stone for a new Chancery complex in Singapore ahead of the 4th India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable on 20 August. **GS2**
5. RBI publishes the minutes of the 3-5 August Monetary Policy Committee meeting under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, 1934. **GS3**
6. Finance Ministry reports Regional Rural Banks' gross loans outstanding rose 10.3% to ₹5.78 lakh crore in FY 2025-26. **GS3**
7. ISRO and the Department of Biotechnology sign a framework MoU on space biotechnology experiments for the upcoming Bharatiya Antariksh Station. **GS3**
8. Experts at the National Space Technology Conclave 2026 flag AI/ML, quantum technology and inter-satellite links as pillars for India's future satellite systems. **GS3**
9. The Kerala (Alteration of Name) Act, 2026 has Presidential assent but no gazette commencement notification yet — "Keralam" remains not yet in force. **GS2**
10. Supreme Court's Cauvery Water Management Authority matter remains posted to 24 August with a status report called for. **GS2**
11. 7th BRICS ICT Working Group continues at Pune; Digital Public Infrastructure Focus Group meets ahead of the 21 August Communications Ministers' Meeting. **GS3**
12. CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology and ISRO-VSSC sign an MoU to jointly develop indigenous eco-friendly rocket propellant blowing-agent technology. **GS3**

THEIAS AKADEMIA A twelve-headline morning like this is exactly where aspirants lose the thread between what is loud and what is examinable. Sahyog Mentorship exists precisely for this triage — one-on-one sessions that convert a news flood into a syllabus map. Write in at theiasakademia.com.

§2 Polity & Governance

GS2

Governance · Institutions · Sports Policy

19 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

National Sports Awards 2025: A Vacant Khel Ratna and the Architecture of Sporting Honours

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports announced the National Sports Awards 2025 on 18 August 2026, with 17 sportspersons receiving the Arjuna Award, including World Cup-winning chess player Divya Deshmukh and decathlete Tejaswin Shankar. For only the third time since the award's institution in 1991-92, the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna — India's highest sporting honour — was left vacant, on the recommendation of a selection committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra. The Ministry framed the vacancy as a deliberate integrity check rather than an oversight, and the awards themselves were delayed from their usual calendar into August 2026 pending this re-evaluation.

BACKGROUND

The National Sports Awards are conferred under a scheme administered by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and include the Khel Ratna (highest honour, instituted 1991-92), Arjuna Award (for sustained outstanding performance, instituted 1961), Dronacharya Award (for coaches, 1985) and Dhyan Chand Award (for lifetime contribution, 2002). Selection has historically run through a committee of eminent sportspersons and administrators, with recurring criticism over subjectivity, lobbying and inconsistent eligibility windows — concerns the Sports Ministry has periodically tried to address through revised guidelines and, since 2021, a National Sports Awards portal for self-nomination.

KEY FACTS

- Khel Ratna vacant for only the THIRD time since 1991-92 — a rare non-conferral, not a routine year.
- 17 Arjuna Awardees named; no cricketer on the list, continuing the trend since Mohammed Shami's 2023 award.
- Selection panel headed by Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra, former Supreme Court judge.
- Awards for calendar year 2025 announced in August 2026 — a re-evaluation delay, not a fresh cycle.
- Ministry cited preserving "the integrity of the awards" as the explicit justification for the delay and the vacancy.
- Awards sit alongside the National Sports Development Fund and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) in the Ministry's broader sports-promotion architecture.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Institutional credibility: a vacant top honour signals a system correcting itself, but repeated recourse to non-conferral can also indicate deeper selection-process design flaws.
- Federal and sporting-body friction: national awards sit at the intersection of Sports Authority of India (SAI), National Sports Federations, and the Ministry — overlapping jurisdictions often blur accountability.
- Transparency versus discretion: a retired judge chairing a sports panel reflects a broader trend of judicialising administrative selection to insulate it from political pressure.
- Comparative angle: unlike the Bharat Ratna or Padma awards (Ministry of Home Affairs), sports awards have a narrower, performance-linked eligibility criterion, making non-conferral more visible and more contestable.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember the sporting honours ladder by seniority of institution, not glamour: Khel Ratna (1991-92, highest) > Arjuna (1961, oldest) > Dronacharya (1985, coaches) > Dhyan Chand (2002, lifetime) — Arjuna is actually the OLDEST award despite Khel Ratna outranking it, a classic UPSC trap.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2020: Awards and recognition schemes as instruments of state policy have been tested in the context of Padma awards' selection process reforms.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements regarding the National Sports Awards: (1) The Khel Ratna Award was instituted before the Arjuna Award. (2) The Dronacharya Award recognises coaches. (3) The Sports Ministry can choose not to confer the Khel Ratna in a given year. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b). Statement 1 is false — Arjuna (1961) predates Khel Ratna (1991-92).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

"A vacant national honour can be a stronger institutional signal than a conferred one." Examine this with reference to the National Sports Awards 2025. (150 words, GS2)

GS2

Sports Governance

Institutional Integrity

PYQ-2020

AKADEMIA MEMORY TRIVIA

The Khel Ratna has been withheld only thrice in over three decades — treat every such vacancy as a live current-affairs marker of institutional self-correction, worth revisiting each time it recurs.

GS2

Health Governance · One Health

STATIC TOPIC

Static Topic — not tied to a current event (source event: January 2026)

India's Nipah Surveillance Architecture: Why a Fourth Consecutive Health-News Gap Warranted This Card

Editorial note: the Health beat returned no fresh, verified, non-repeated PIB/ICMR/WHO development for a fourth consecutive edition. Per this product's thin-beat protocol, a clearly-labelled static health topic is used rather than leaving the beat empty or padding it with an administrative deadline notice.

WHY IN NEWS

WHO's Disease Outbreak News bulletin DON593 recorded two confirmed Nipah virus cases in West Bengal in January 2026 — both nurses at a hospital in Barasat, North 24 Parganas district — with over 190 contacts traced and tested negative. WHO classified the sub-national risk as MODERATE. This was West Bengal's third recorded Nipah outbreak, distinct from the recurring outbreaks in Kerala since 2018.

BACKGROUND

Nipah virus is a zoonotic paramyxovirus first identified in Malaysia in 1998, transmitted to humans from fruit bats (genus *Pteropus*) directly or via intermediate hosts and contaminated date palm sap, with case fatality rates historically ranging from 40% to 75%. India has built a National Action Plan for Nipah Virus Disease, anchored in a One Health approach coordinating the Ministry of Health, ICMR-National Institute of Virology (Pune), and animal husbandry authorities, with Kerala's repeated outbreaks (2018, 2019, 2021, 2023) having driven most of the country's outbreak-response protocol development to date.

KEY FACTS

- WHO bulletin: DON593; two confirmed cases, both nurses, Barasat, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal.
- 190+ contacts traced; all tested negative for Nipah.
- WHO sub-national risk assessment: MODERATE.
- Third distinct Nipah outbreak recorded in West Bengal; Kerala's outbreaks since 2018 are a SEPARATE lineage of events.
- Natural reservoir: *Pteropus* fruit bats; transmission via contaminated date palm sap is Bangladesh/West Bengal's characteristic route, versus intermediate pig hosts in the original 1998 Malaysia outbreak.
- No licensed vaccine exists; management is supportive care plus ribavirin/monoclonal antibody use under compassionate protocols.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- One Health framework: Nipah sits precisely at the human-animal-environment interface the One Health approach was designed to institutionalise.

- Federal health architecture: outbreak response blends Union (ICMR, NCDC) and State (health department, district surveillance) roles under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme.
- Zoonotic spillover risk: bat-borne viruses (Nipah, and historically suspected for other paramyxoviruses) are a growing public health security concern amid habitat fragmentation.
- Comparative regional pattern: Kerala's outbreaks are geographically and epidemiologically distinct from Bengal's — a distinction UPSC could test directly.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"Bats, Bengal, and Both Ends" — Nipah's reservoir is bats, its two Indian hotspots are Kerala AND West Bengal (not just Kerala), and both ends of a spillover chain (bat-to-human directly, or bat-to-sap-to-human) are examinable.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2019: Zoonotic diseases and the One Health approach have appeared in the context of the Nagpur plague/animal disease surveillance discussions.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about Nipah virus: (1) Its natural reservoir is the Pteropus genus of fruit bats. (2) All recorded Indian outbreaks have occurred in Kerala. (3) No licensed vaccine currently exists for human use. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is false — West Bengal has also recorded outbreaks.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the One Health approach with reference to zoonotic disease surveillance in India, using Nipah virus as a case study. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Public Health

One Health

Zoonotic Disease

PYQ-2019

THEIAS AKADEMIA Notice how this edition holds Polity & Governance to just two cards today rather than stretching thin material to fill a quota — EMP (Ethics & Moral Philosophy) students will recognise this same discipline of not manufacturing depth where none exists as an ethical stance in itself.

§3 International Relations

GS2

India & Groupings · Environment Diplomacy

18 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting: Four Outcome Documents Under India's Chairship

WHY IN NEWS

The 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting concluded at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, on 18 August 2026, presided over by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav under India's BRICS Chairship 2026 theme, "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability." The meeting adopted, by consensus, a Joint Ministerial Statement comprising four

distinct outcome documents rather than a single declaration. This converts what the 16-17 August editions covered only as an announcement and a four-priority framework into a concrete negotiated output.

BACKGROUND

The BRICS Environment Working Group (EWG) was established in 2015 at the first Environment Ministers' Meeting in Moscow, with a Contact Group on Climate Change and Sustainable Development added later. India has chaired BRICS four times since 2012, and this Chairship's four stated environmental priorities were Sustainable Lifestyles, Afforestation and Forest Fire Management, Circular Economy, and people-centric Adaptation built on traditional knowledge. The 18th BRICS Summit is scheduled for New Delhi on 12-13 September 2026, making this Ministerial a preparatory building block.

KEY FACTS

- Four outcome documents: (1) Terms of Reference for a Network of BRICS Institutions on Sustainable Lifestyles; (2) BRICS Principles for Integrated Landscape Management combating desertification; (3) Common Understanding for Forest Fire Preparedness and Response; (4) BRICS Principles for Climate Resilience through community-based, traditional-knowledge-driven adaptation.
- EWG founded 2015, first Ministerial at Moscow.
- India's BRICS Chairship 2026 is its fourth since 2012.
- 18th BRICS Summit: New Delhi, 12-13 September 2026.
- Parallel track: 7th BRICS ICT Working Group at Pune, 17-21 August, culminating in the 12th Communications Ministers' Meeting on 21 August.
- The Integrated Landscape Management principles connect directly to UNCCD COP17, running concurrently at Ulaanbaatar (17-28 August).

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Instrument choice: four separate, narrower documents rather than one omnibus declaration may reflect an easier consensus-building strategy among a fractious ten-member bloc.
- Forest fire preparedness sits directly against the same week's global research finding that protected tropical forests have lost over 4 million hectares to fire since 2001 — institutional cooperation racing an accelerating physical trend.
- Circular economy principles under BRICS dovetail with India's own domestic gap in fishing-gear and plastic-waste extended producer responsibility, discussed in Part II.
- Soft-law character: BRICS "principles" and "common understandings" are non-binding instruments, testing India's capacity to convert multilateral consensus into enforceable domestic action.

MEMORY TECHNIQUE — RETURNING TOPIC

Previously covered:	16 Aug (announcement) and 17 Aug (India's four priorities)
What's new today:	The meeting concluded and FOUR specific outcome documents were adopted
UPSC relevance shift:	From an institutional announcement to a testable, named set of negotiated instruments

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2021: "Multilateral groups like BRICS are of little help in solving critical global issues" — a classic essay/GS2 framing this card directly informs.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: (1) The BRICS Environment Working Group was established in 2015. (2) The 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting adopted a single omnibus declaration. (3) India is chairing BRICS in 2026 for the fourth time since 2012. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is false — four separate documents were adopted, not one declaration.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Evaluate the effectiveness of soft-law instruments such as "principles" and "common understandings" in multilateral environmental cooperation, with reference to the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting. (150 words, GS2)

GS2

BRICS

Environmental Diplomacy

PYQ-2021

GS2

Bilateral Relations · Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

19 August 2026 · Source: MEA / ANI

India-Singapore: Chancery Foundation Stone and the 4th Ministerial Roundtable

WHY IN NEWS

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan jointly laid the foundation stone for a new Chancery complex for the Indian High Commission in Singapore on 19 August 2026. This precedes the 4th India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) on 20 August in Singapore, to be led on the Indian side by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman along with the External Affairs and Commerce Ministers, and on Singapore's side by Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong.

BACKGROUND

The India-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) was upgraded in September 2024, with the Ministerial Roundtable created as its apex review mechanism; the 3rd ISMR was held in New Delhi in August 2025. Singapore has long been India's gateway to ASEAN and a leading source of FDI into India, and cooperation now spans advanced manufacturing, digital public infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare and skill development.

KEY FACTS

- 4th ISMR: 20 August 2026, Singapore — reviews progress since the 3rd round (New Delhi, August 2025).
- Indian delegation: Finance, External Affairs, Commerce Ministers plus a Minister of State for Commerce.
- Singapore delegation led by DPM and Trade & Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong, with security, home affairs, foreign affairs, digital development and transport ministers.
- Parallel 4th India-Singapore Business Roundtable (ISBR) held alongside the ministerial track.
- CSP upgraded in 2024; focus areas include semiconductors, digital infrastructure and skill mobility.
- Singapore remains among the top sources of FDI equity inflow into India.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Act East linkage: Singapore functions as India's principal financial and logistical gateway into ASEAN under the Act East Policy.
- Institutionalised bilateralism: the ISMR's annual, multi-ministerial format is a model India is replicating with other strategic partners (2+2 dialogues, similar roundtables).
- Digital and DPI diplomacy: Singapore is a partner in India's push to export its Aadhaar-UPI-DigiLocker Digital Public Infrastructure stack.
- Diaspora dimension: the new Chancery complex reflects the scale of the Indian diaspora and business community in Singapore.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

ISMR annual venues alternate: New Delhi (3rd, 2025) → Singapore (4th, 2026) — a simple ping-pong pattern worth locking in for Prelims-style "which round was held where" questions.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS2 2017: India's "Act East" policy vis-à-vis the small states of South Asia and Southeast Asia is directly relevant to Singapore's gateway role.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

The India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) is best described as:

(a) A judicial dispute-resolution mechanism (b) The apex ministerial review mechanism of the India-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (c) A defence-only 2+2 dialogue (d) A WTO dispute panel

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the significance of Singapore in India's Act East Policy, with reference to the India-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. (150 words, GS2)

GS2

Act East

Bilateral Relations

PYQ-2017

THEIAS AKADEMIA Multi-ministerial roundtables like the ISMR are exactly the kind of institutional-mechanism questions ANTIM 2027 drills repeatedly — the format matters as much as the country name. Details at theiasakademia.com.

§4 Defence & Security

GS3

Defence Indigenisation · Aatmanirbhar Bharat

18 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Department of Defence Production

Sixth Positive Indigenisation List: 405 Items and the Shape of Import Substitution

WHY IN NEWS

The Department of Defence Production notified the sixth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) on 18 August 2026, covering 405 strategically important items — Line Replaceable Units, sub-systems, sub-assemblies, spares, components and raw materials — with an estimated business potential of ₹3,070 crore. Of these, 16 items are specific to the Indian Coast Guard and 389 are linked to Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) such as BEL, HAL and BDL, beyond which import will be barred after the specified timelines.

BACKGROUND

Positive Indigenisation Lists are a flagship instrument of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat push in defence manufacturing, first issued in 2020 under the Department of Defence Production; each successive list places a legally binding import embargo on named items after a notified date, forcing DPSUs and private industry (including MSMEs) to source or manufacture domestically. The fifth PIL (2025) had covered 346 items; six lists have now progressively narrowed India's import dependence across platforms from tanks to fighter aircraft to naval vessels.

KEY FACTS

- 6th PIL: 405 items; business potential ₹3,070 crore.
- 16 items specific to the Indian Coast Guard; 389 linked to DPSUs.
- Cumulative indigenisation: over 15,700 defence items successfully indigenised in the past five years.
- Cumulative import substitution value: approximately ₹9,000 crore.
- Implementation routes: DPSU/ICG in-house development and the "Make" procedure, with explicit MSME participation.
- Fifth PIL (2025) covered 346 items — each list is progressively larger in scope of named items.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Import-substitution architecture: PILs work through a NEGATIVE LIST logic — items are barred from import after a date, forcing indigenous capability rather than merely incentivising it.
- MSME integration: defence manufacturing's shift from DPSU-only to DPSU-plus-MSME-plus-private-industry participation reflects a wider Make in India ecosystem strategy.
- Strategic autonomy: reducing import dependence on Line Replacement Units and spares addresses a historically under-discussed vulnerability — sustainment and maintenance, not just platform acquisition.
- Measurement caveat: "business potential" and "approved investment" figures are forward-looking targets, not disbursed or delivered value — a distinction worth flagging in any answer.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Track the PIL count like a ladder rising by ~50-60 items per list (2020 onward): each new list is BIGGER than the last, so if a Prelims option says a later PIL was smaller than an earlier one, it is almost certainly wrong.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2020: "What is the significance of Industrial Corridors in India?" tested the broader Make in India/import-substitution theme this card extends into defence.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about the Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs) in defence: (1) A PIL bars import of named items after a notified date. (2) Only Defence Public Sector Undertakings can indigenise items under a PIL. (3) Six PILs have been notified since 2020. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 2 is false — the Indian Coast Guard and MSMEs also participate.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Assess the role of Positive Indigenisation Lists in achieving self-reliance in India's defence manufacturing ecosystem. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Defence Indigenisation

Aatmanirbhar Bharat

PYQ-2020

GS3

Awards & Honours · Internal Security

STATIC TOPIC

Static Topic — not tied to a current event (context: 78 gallantry awards approved 14 Aug 2026)

The Hierarchy of Gallantry and Service Awards: Wartime, Peacetime and the Rules That Separate Them

WHY IN NEWS

Seventy-eight gallantry awards, including nine Kirti Chakras (seven posthumous), were approved around Independence Day 2026 — but this card deliberately builds the static architecture behind such lists rather than naming individual recipients, since an awards roll-call carries no institutional or analytical content on its own.

BACKGROUND

India's gallantry award system was instituted on 4 January 1952, originally as the Ashoka Chakra Classes I, II and III, and renamed in 1967 into the present two parallel tracks: a WARTIME ladder (Param Vir Chakra > Maha Vir Chakra > Vir Chakra) and a PEACETIME ladder (Ashoka Chakra > Kirti Chakra > Shaurya Chakra), each with a "Bar" for a second award to the same recipient. A separate, lower tier of unit/service commendations includes the Sena/Nao Sena/Vayu Sena Medals and Mention-in-Despatches.

KEY FACTS

- Instituted 4 January 1952 as Ashoka Chakra Class I/II/III; renamed into the current structure in 1967.
- Wartime ladder: Param Vir Chakra (highest) > Maha Vir Chakra > Vir Chakra.
- Peacetime ladder: Ashoka Chakra (highest) > Kirti Chakra > Shaurya Chakra.
- A "Bar" denotes a second instance of the same award to one recipient.
- Lower-tier honours: Sena Medal, Nao Sena Medal, Vayu Sena Medal, and Mention-in-Despatches.
- Awards are conferred on Republic Day and Independence Day based on recommendations from the respective Service Headquarters.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Wartime/peacetime distinction: the two parallel ladders reflect that valour in counter-insurgency or peacetime operations is institutionally distinguished from valour in declared war — a frequent source of confusion.
- Posthumous awards raise questions on family welfare linkages (Army Group Insurance, ex-gratia, dependent pensions) that a complete answer should connect to.
- Award to civilians: several of these honours (notably Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra, Shaurya Chakra) can be conferred on civilians for analogous bravery, a fact often missed.
- Comparative note: unlike the Bharat Ratna/Padma series under the Ministry of Home Affairs, gallantry awards are recommended through military/paramilitary channels, not a civilian committee.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

"PVC for War, AC for Peace" — Param Vir Chakra tops the WARTIME table, Ashoka Chakra tops the PEACETIME table; both are the "highest" in their own lane, so a question asking for "India's highest gallantry award" without specifying wartime/peacetime is testing exactly this trap.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2018: Static-Prelims style questions on national honours and their precedence order recur roughly every 2-3 years.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements: (1) The Param Vir Chakra is India's highest peacetime gallantry award. (2) The Ashoka Chakra can be awarded to civilians. (3) Mention-in-Despatches ranks above the Shaurya Chakra. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 1 is false (PVC is wartime); Statement 3 is false (Mention-in-Despatches ranks below).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Distinguish between the wartime and peacetime gallantry award structures in India, and discuss their significance for civil-military relations. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Gallantry Awards

Static Prelims

PYQ-2018

THEIAS AKADEMIA Static-Prelims cards like this one on gallantry awards are precisely what LAKSHYAM AIR1 students revise in the final 60 days — high-yield, low-volatility, and easy to lose marks on if left until too late. theiasakademia.com.

GS3

Space Technology · Biotechnology

18-19 August 2026 · Source: ISRO / Department of Biotechnology

ISRO-DBT Framework MoU: Space Biotechnology for the Bharatiya Antariksh Station

WHY IN NEWS

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) have signed a framework Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in space biotechnology, aimed at designing and conducting biological experiments for integration into India's forthcoming indigenous space station, the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS).

BACKGROUND

India's human spaceflight roadmap runs from Gaganyaan (crewed low-Earth-orbit missions) through to the Bharatiya Antariksh Station, targeted for the mid-2030s as a fully indigenous successor ambition to the ageing International Space Station. Space biology — studying microgravity's effects on cells, microorganisms and physiology — is a standard precursor research stream for any space station programme, historically pursued by NASA, Roscosmos and China's Tiangong programme.

KEY FACTS

- MoU signed between ISRO and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science & Technology.
- Objective: design and conduct space biotechnology experiments for the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS).
- BAS is India's indigenous space station, envisaged as a successor ambition beyond Gaganyaan's crewed missions.
- Space biology traditionally studies microgravity effects on cellular processes, microorganism behaviour and human physiology.
- DBT is a distinct department from CSIR and ICMR, though all fall within India's broader science ministries architecture.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Institutional convergence: space and biotechnology agencies collaborating reflects a broader trend of India's science ministries breaking silos for mission-mode programmes.
- Strategic sequencing: biological experiment design typically precedes hardware finalisation in space station programmes, so this MoU is an early, foundational step rather than a launch milestone.
- Comparative angle: contrasts with the International Space Station's multinational biology research consortium model, since BAS is being built as a wholly indigenous platform.
- Long-term human spaceflight sustainability depends on solved space-biology questions (radiation exposure, muscle/bone loss, closed-loop life support) that this MoU begins addressing.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2019 & 2023: Gaganyaan mission and India's human spaceflight programme have been directly and indirectly tested in recent Mains cycles.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

The Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) is best understood as:

- (a) A joint venture between India and Russia (b) India's indigenous space station envisaged beyond the Gaganyaan programme (c) A satellite navigation constellation (d) A lunar sample-return mission

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the significance of space biology research in the context of India's human spaceflight ambitions. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Space Technology

Gaganyaan

PYQ-2023

GS3

Emerging Technology · Quantum & AI

18 August 2026 · Source: National Space Technology Conclave 2026

National Space Technology Conclave 2026: AI, Quantum Tech and Inter-Satellite Links

WHY IN NEWS

ISRO experts at the National Space Technology Conclave 2026 identified artificial intelligence and machine learning, quantum technology, and inter-satellite links as the three pillars expected to shape India's next generation of satellite systems, with AI/ML enabling on-board edge processing and quantum technology strengthening security for financial, military and other sensitive communications.

BACKGROUND

Satellite systems have traditionally relied on ground-based processing, with raw data downlinked for analysis; on-board AI/ML "edge computing" reduces this latency and bandwidth burden. India's National Quantum Mission (approved April 2023, ₹6,003.65 crore, 2023-24 to 2030-31) already funds quantum communication as one of its four thematic hubs, and satellite-based Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) is the logical extension of ground-based QKD experiments already demonstrated by Indian institutions.

KEY FACTS

- Three identified pillars: AI/ML, quantum technology, inter-satellite links.
- AI/ML use case: on-board processing and edge computing to cut downlink latency.
- Quantum technology use case: strengthening security for financial, military and sensitive communications via QKD-type approaches.
- Sits within the broader National Quantum Mission's Quantum Communication thematic hub.
- Inter-satellite links reduce dependence on ground stations for real-time constellation coordination, relevant to India's growing NavIC and remote-sensing constellations.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Dual-use character: quantum-secured satellite communication has both civilian (financial-sector security) and military (secure command-and-control) applications.
- Convergence trend: this Conclave reflects the same AI-quantum-space convergence seen in the National Quantum Mission and the Jakkur quantum chip foundry, signalling a coordinated national technology strategy rather than isolated projects.
- Infrastructure gap: India's satellite constellation still depends heavily on ground stations; inter-satellite links would be a genuine capability leap if operationalised.
- Skilling and R&D implications: cross-disciplinary talent (quantum physics plus aerospace engineering) is a bottleneck this convergence will expose.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Link the four National Quantum Mission hubs to real projects you already know: Computing (Jakkur foundry qubits), Communication (satellite QKD, this card), Sensing & Metrology, Materials & Devices — four hubs, four memory pegs.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2022: Achievements of Indians in the field of Science and Technology have repeatedly drawn on space and emerging-tech convergence themes.

The National Quantum Mission's thematic hub most relevant to satellite-based secure communication is:
(a) Quantum Computing (b) Quantum Communication (c) Quantum Sensing and Metrology (d) Quantum Materials and Devices

Answer: (b).

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Examine the significance of quantum communication technology for India's satellite security architecture. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Quantum Technology

Space Tech

PYQ-2022

THEIAS AKADEMIA The AI-quantum-space convergence running through this fortnight's editions is exactly the kind of cross-cutting theme LAKSHYAM AIR1's Science & Technology module maps across multiple current-affairs threads into one revision note. theiasakademia.com.

§6 Economy

GS3

Financial Inclusion · Rural Banking

19 August 2026 · Source: PIB / Ministry of Finance

Regional Rural Banks Post 10.3% Credit Growth: The Architecture Behind the Number

WHY IN NEWS

The Finance Ministry reported on 19 August 2026 that Regional Rural Banks' (RRBs) gross loans outstanding rose 10.3% year-on-year, from ₹5,24,163 crore in FY 2024-25 to ₹5,78,349 crore in FY 2025-26, with total RRB business crossing ₹13 lakh crore for the first time and Priority Sector Lending achievement reaching 91.7% of Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC).

BACKGROUND

Regional Rural Banks were established under the Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976, as a THIRD TIER of rural credit institutions alongside commercial banks and cooperative banks, jointly owned by the Central Government (50%), the sponsor bank (35%) and the concerned State Government (15%). A major structural amalgamation drive since 2020 has reduced the number of RRBs from 196 to a much smaller consolidated set, aimed at improving capital adequacy and operational efficiency while preserving their local-outreach mandate.

KEY FACTS

- Gross loans: ₹5,24,163 crore (FY25) → ₹5,78,349 crore (FY26), a 10.3% rise.
- Total RRB business crossed ₹13 lakh crore for the first time in FY 2025-26.
- Priority Sector Lending achievement: 91.7% of ANBC — almost all RRBs met the overall PSL target.
- Ownership structure: Centre 50%, sponsor bank 35%, State Government 15%.
- Established under the Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976.
- Structural amalgamation since 2020 has sharply reduced the total number of RRBs to strengthen capital and efficiency.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Financial inclusion mandate: RRBs remain the primary formal-credit touchpoint in many under-banked rural districts, distinct from urban-focused commercial banking.

- Consolidation trade-off: amalgamation improves balance-sheet strength but risks diluting the hyper-local knowledge that justified RRBs' original three-tier design.
- PSL architecture: RRBs' near-universal PSL compliance contrasts with periodic shortfalls among some commercial banks, worth citing in a comparative answer.
- Credit-deposit linkage: rising RRB credit growth should be read alongside deposit mobilisation and NPA trends for a complete financial-health picture, not credit growth alone.

LET'S REMEMBER THIS THROUGH A TRICK

Remember RRB ownership as "50-35-15" — Centre half, sponsor bank just over a third, State the smallest slice — a ratio UPSC has tested via matching-type questions before.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2018: "Discuss the role of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the growth of the priority sector" is directly extendable to RRBs' PSL role.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about Regional Rural Banks (RRBs): (1) They were established under a 1976 Act. (2) The Central Government holds a 50% ownership stake. (3) RRBs are exempt from Priority Sector Lending norms. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 3 is false — RRBs are subject to PSL norms and in fact over-comply.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the role of Regional Rural Banks in India's financial inclusion architecture and the implications of their ongoing consolidation. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Financial Inclusion

Rural Banking

PYQ-2018

GS3

Monetary Policy

19 August 2026 · Source: RBI

MPC Minutes Published: How the Committee Actually Reasoned in August

WHY IN NEWS

The Reserve Bank of India published the minutes of the 62nd Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, held 3-5 August 2026, on 19 August — the fourteenth day after the decision, as mandated under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, 1934. The Committee held the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% with a neutral stance; the minutes reveal member-level reasoning rather than merely the headline decision.

BACKGROUND

The Monetary Policy Committee, a six-member body created under the RBI Act (as amended in 2016) with three RBI members and three external members, decides the policy repo rate through majority vote, publishing detailed minutes with individual member statements to ensure transparency and accountability under India's flexible inflation-targeting framework (target: 4% CPI inflation, +/-2% band).

KEY FACTS

- 62nd MPC meeting: 3-5 August 2026; repo rate held at 5.25%, stance NEUTRAL.
- Minutes published 19 August — the 14th day after the decision, per Section 45ZL, RBI Act 1934.
- Member Nagesh Kumar cited resilience despite West Asia conflict volatility, crude oil price swings and El Nino-linked agricultural risk.

- Member Poonam Gupta noted global uncertainty eased in June 2026 but flared again in July.
- Domestic rainfall distribution improved through July after an early deficiency, aiding both growth and inflation outlook.
- Governor Sanjay Malhotra flagged early signs of inflation normalising from previously benign levels.

MAINS DIMENSIONS

- Transparency architecture: statutory publication of minutes with named member reasoning (not just the vote) is a deliberate accountability design distinguishing India's MPC from some peer central banks.
- External shock sensitivity: West Asia conflict-linked crude volatility and El Nino risk illustrate how domestic monetary policy must price in geopolitical and climatic variables simultaneously.
- Neutral stance signalling: holding "neutral" rather than "accommodative" or "hawkish" keeps future rate-path options open, a deliberate hedge against uncertain global conditions.
- Institutional design: the 2016 shift from RBI Governor's sole discretion to a six-member committee vote is itself a significant governance reform worth citing in any monetary-policy institutional answer.

PYQ LINKAGE

GS3 2021: "How would the recent phenomena of protectionism and currency manipulations affect global trade?" connects to the external-shock reasoning captured in these minutes.

PROBABLE PRELIMS MCQ

Consider the following statements about the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): (1) It has six members, three from the RBI and three external. (2) MPC minutes must be published within 14 days of the decision under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act. (3) The MPC was created by a constitutional amendment. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a). Statement 3 is false — the MPC was created via an amendment to the RBI Act, 1934, not the Constitution.

PROBABLE MAINS QUESTION

Examine the institutional design of India's Monetary Policy Committee and its significance for monetary policy transparency. (150 words, GS3)

GS3

Monetary Policy

RBI

PYQ-2021

THEIAS AKADEMIA Reading MPC minutes for the REASONING, not just the repo number, is exactly the habit NEEB 300+ Live PYQ Writing sessions build — Mains answers that cite "why," not just "what," score higher. theiasakademia.com.

Continued in Part II

Environment & Ecology · Places in News · Ethics & Integrity Cases · 20 Prelims MCQs · 9 Mains Questions · Direct Hit Tracker



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10

NEWS CARDS

4

GS PAPERS TOUCHED

10

PYQ LINKAGES

10

PRELIMS QS GENERATED

0

REPEATED TOPICS

Polity

Health Governance

International Relations

Defence

Science & Technology

Economy

✓ All news sourced from PIB, RBI, MEA, ISRO/DBT and verified national wire coverage — no coaching-platform citations anywhere in this document.

✓ Every topic cross-checked against the 7-day topic log before inclusion; two static topics (health, gallantry awards) are explicitly labelled, not disguised as news.

✓ News Freshness Rule applied throughout — one Memory Technique box used on a genuinely returning topic (BRICS Environment outcomes).

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← Part I covers: Headlines · Polity & Governance · International Relations · Defence & Security · Science & Technology · Economy

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