

UPSC with SAURABH KAUSHIK

Current Affairs Notes · 17 June 2026

The Hindu · Indian Express · PIB Highlights | GS 1 · 2 · 3 + CME + Prelims + Mapping

[TH] The Hindu

[IE] Indian Express

[PIB] PIB Highlights

PIB HIGHLIGHTS — 16 JUNE 2026 (Press Information Bureau)

🔔 1. Yoga Park Portal — Transforming Public Spaces into Community Wellness Venues

- ✓ Launched by Ministry of Ayush; transforms existing parks across India into community wellness hubs for yoga, meditation, and healthy living.
- ✓ Encourages participation of PRIs, urban bodies, RWAs, NGOs, corporates, and institutions.
- ✓ Includes dedicated yoga platforms, meditation zones, green landscapes, and awareness facilities.
- ✓ Aligns with International Day of Yoga 2026 theme: 'Yoga for Healthy Ageing' (June 21).
- ✓ A digital platform provides guidelines, concepts, registration, and stakeholder participation.
- ✓ Vision: Inclusive wellness spaces integrating yoga into daily life. Builds healthier communities. Strengthens India.

🔔 2. India–Japan Adopt Rules of Implementation for Joint Crediting Mechanism (Article 6.2)

- ✓ Rules of Implementation adopted on 08.06.2026 under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC).
- ✓ India and Japan had signed MoC for Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) last year.
- ✓ JCM: Framework for collaboration on mitigation activities delivering GHG emission reductions/removals with sustainable development in India.
- ✓ Supports achievement of NDCs of both countries.
- ✓ Governance: Joint Committee, transparent project approval, third-party validation and verification, safeguards, national registries.
- ✓ Will catalyse investment, technology transfer, and capacity-building for low-carbon projects in India.
- ✓ GS 3 Angle: Article 6.2 of Paris Agreement — bilateral carbon markets, ITMOs (Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes); India gaining access to Japanese climate finance and technology.

🔔 3. Nasha Mukh Bharat Saptah — 17 to 26 June 2026

- ✓ Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment under 'Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan – Viksit Bharat Ki Pehchaan' from 17–26 June 2026.
- ✓ Virtual inauguration on 17th June by Dr. Virendra Kumar, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- ✓ Launch of Personal Dashboard for Nasha Mukh Mitra (NMM) — a digital tool for community-level anti-narcotics volunteers.
- ✓ Key activities: mass pledge drives, cycle rallies, poster-making, webinars, street plays, folk performances, social media outreach.

- ✓ Engagement through schools, colleges, PRIs, NSS, NYP Bharat volunteers, Anganwadi and ASHA workers.
- ✓ International Day of Yoga (June 21): Yoga and wellness activities under the message 'Yoga for Wellness, Say No to Drugs.'

4. Iconic Bridges — Pillars of New India's Infrastructure Transformation

- ✓ Bridge over Brahmaputra River, Guwahati (1.49 km): Parallel to Old Saraighat Bridge; eases congestion; strengthens East–West Corridor on NH-27.
- ✓ Bridge over Chambal River, Kota (1.4 km): Rajasthan's first hanging cable-stayed bridge; wildlife-friendly (no pier in riverbed); protects National Chambal Ghariyal Wildlife Sanctuary.
- ✓ Bridge over Narmada River, Bharuch (1.34 km): Extra-dosed bridge with one of the longest spans; completed in 34 months (opened March 2017); part of Ahmedabad–Mumbai section of NH-8.
- ✓ Bridge over River Ganga, Bihar (1.8 km): Six-lane extradosed bridge on NH-31 (Aunta–Simaria); built parallel to old Begusarai Setu; direct link between North & South Bihar; inaugurated by PM in August 2025.
- ✓ Dhola–Sadiya Bridge (9.15 km): India's longest river bridge; first permanent road link between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh; built to withstand 60-tonne military tanks; strategically vital; beam bridge over Lohit River.
- ✓ GS 3 Angle: Bharatmala Pariyojana infrastructure; strategic connectivity for NE India and defence logistics; wildlife-compatible infrastructure design.

GS PAPER 1 — Geography · History · Society

1. India's Rainfall Deficit Hits 35% as Southwest Monsoon Stalls

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GS 1 / GS 3: Physical Geography: Monsoon, Indian climate, weather events; Agriculture: Kharif sowing, food security, water resources; Disaster Management: drought preparedness.

- ▶ India's national rainfall deficit reached 35% of LPA as of June 16, 2026 — the monsoon stalled after an early entry over Kerala on June 4.
- ▶ Central India: 65% deficit; Northwest India: 77% deficit; South Peninsula: 36% deficit; Only NE India has surplus (+14%).
- ▶ Monsoon's northern and western advance has nearly halted since June 10 — a 'break monsoon' pattern setting in early.
- ▶ Key states for Kharif: Madhya Pradesh (96% deficit), Delhi-NCR (92% deficit), Haryana (92%), UP (96%) — sowing severely impacted.

Why the Monsoon Stalled

- **Break monsoon:** A temporary pause in monsoon activity — usually occurs in late July or August; unusually early in 2026. Characterised by clear skies over the plains but heavy rain in the Himalayas and NE India. Caused by a northward shift of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) over the Gangetic foothills.
- **El Niño reinforcement:** Weak El Niño conditions (as per the 90% LPA May forecast) are suppressing the Walker Circulation — which drives monsoon moisture flow from the Indian Ocean to the subcontinent. El Niño years have a higher probability of break monsoon spells occurring earlier.
- **Western disturbance interference:** An unusual western disturbance (WD) — a mid-latitude cyclonic circulation normally active in winter — is disrupting the eastward progression of monsoon winds across Rajasthan and MP.

- **Bay of Bengal arm weakened:** The Bay of Bengal branch of the monsoon (which feeds Bihar, UP, and eastern India) has been sluggish; normally this branch reaches the Gangetic plains by June 15.

Agricultural Impact: Kharif Sowing

- **Kharif sowing:** The critical window for major Kharif crops — paddy (June 15 – July 15), soybean (June 20 – July 10), cotton (June 15 – July 5), pulses (June 20 – July 20) — is opening right now. The deficit threatens delayed planting, reduced acreage, and yield losses.
- **Paddy exposure:** The most water-intensive Kharif crop — delays of 2 weeks in transplanting reduce yield by 10–15%. States affected: Bihar, UP, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha (all in rain-shadow zone of the stalled monsoon).
- **Alternative crops:** Farmers in rain-deficient areas are being advised to sow drought-tolerant crops — millets (Bajra, Jowar), pulses (Arhar, Moong), and oilseeds (Groundnut) instead of water-intensive paddy.
- **Reservoir levels:** India's 150 major reservoirs at 17% of full capacity — significantly below 10-year average of 22%; monsoon revival is critical before the end of June to ensure water security for the Kharif season.

IMD Forecast: Recovery Expected

- IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra: 'Deficiency is 35% nationally; if rain picks up as expected in next 15 days, agriculture will not be impacted.'
- **La Niña conditions** developing in the Pacific Ocean from August 2026 onwards — La Niña enhances Indian monsoon. La Niña's positive influence is expected to compensate for El Niño's current suppressive effect in the July–September period.
- **IOD (Indian Ocean Dipole):** Currently neutral; a positive IOD developing from July would additionally strengthen the monsoon by warming the western Indian Ocean.

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- **Break Monsoon vs. Drought:** Not every break leads to drought — if July–September are strong (La Niña), the season can recover. UPSC distinguishes between 'break monsoon' (temporary) and 'drought' (sustained deficit through the season).
- **Agriculture-Climate nexus:** The monsoon's behaviour directly affects: food inflation (Kharif crop output), rural employment (MGNREGS demand surges in drought years), rural credit (Kisan Credit Card demand), power (hydropower generation), and macroeconomics (farm GDP ~14% of total GDP).
- **El Niño-La Niña cycle:** India's 2026 season begins under El Niño influence but may end under La Niña — a 'transitional year' with mixed patterns is the most complex agricultural planning environment.

- **✦ Break Monsoon** — A phase during the monsoon season when rainfall over most of India nearly ceases while the Himalayan and NE region receive heavy rain; the ITCZ shifts northward; can last days to weeks; if sustained through August, turns into drought.
- **✦ ITCZ (Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone)** — A belt near the equator where trade winds converge and cause heavy rainfall; its northward seasonal migration drives the Indian monsoon; break monsoon occurs when ITCZ shifts too far north.
- **✦ LPA (Long Period Average)** — India's average June–September rainfall calculated over 50 years; currently 87 cm; the benchmark against which monsoon deficit/surplus is measured.

2. How a Mohenjo-daro Figurine Became a 'Dancer' — and Associated With Vulgarity

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GS 1: Indian Heritage and Culture: Indus Valley Civilisation, art and iconography, post-colonial interpretation of ancient artefacts, museum diplomacy and repatriation.

- The 'Dancing Girl' of Mohenjo-daro — a bronze figurine ~4,500 years old — is at the centre of a controversy about how Western archaeologists named, described, and sexualised ancient Indian artefacts.
- Discovered 1926 by archaeologist Ernest Mackay; named 'Dancing Girl' by Marshall — despite no evidence she was a dancer.

- ▶ Recent BJP MP demands to rename it to a more 'respectful' designation; broader debate about the colonial gaze on IVC artefacts.
- ▶ Relevant context: Pakistan claims ownership; India asserts legitimate possession through pre-Partition excavation protocols.

The Figurine: Facts

- Material: Bronze (copper-tin alloy); cast using the lost-wax (cire perdue) technique — one of the most sophisticated metalworking methods of the ancient world.
- Dimensions: ~10.5 cm tall; depicts a girl in a contrapposto stance (weight on one leg, naturalistic tilt); right arm resting on hip; left arm adorned with bangles nearly to the shoulder; wearing only a necklace and bangles.
- Age: ~2300–1750 BCE (Mature Harappan period) — over 4,000 years old.
- Discovery: Mohenjo-daro (now in Sindh, Pakistan) in 1926 during British-era excavations; taken to New Delhi; now at National Museum of India.

How It Became the 'Dancing Girl'

- John Marshall (Director-General of the Archaeological Survey, British colonial officer) assigned the name 'Dancing Girl' in his 1931 excavation report — based purely on the figure's confident posture and nudity; no iconographic evidence of dance.
- The colonial gaze: The Western naming tradition projected existing ideas about 'exotic' Indian women and 'nautch' (dance/entertainment) traditions onto an ancient artefact whose actual identity and function is unknown. She could have been a deity, a votive figure, or an aristocratic person.
- Association with vulgarity: The combination of nudity and the 'dancer' label created an association with entertainment and sexuality that modern scholars argue is a colonial imposition — not indigenous to IVC culture or iconography.

Modern Controversies

- Pakistani claim: The Mohenjo-daro site is in Pakistan; Pakistan claims the figurine should be returned as part of Pakistan's cultural heritage. India argues it was properly excavated under British India's rules and the item is legitimately held.
- Renaming debate: Scholars suggest alternative names: 'Bronze figure of a woman' (descriptive); 'Young woman of Mohenjo-daro' (neutral); some argue for a name reflecting her possible devotional or social status rather than occupational or entertainment role.
- IVC religious iconography: The bangles (copper/bronze bangles from shoulder to wrist) suggest wealth, ritual significance, or a specific cultural role; similar bangles are found in IVC archaeological contexts in ritual settings.

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- IVC and UPSC: One of India's most important archaeological civilisations (~3300–1300 BCE); key sites: Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan), Mohenjo-daro (Sindh, Pakistan), Dholavira (Gujarat — UNESCO WHS 2021), Rakhigarhi (Haryana — largest IVC site), Lothal (Gujarat — dock/granary).
- Repatriation relevance: The 'Dancing Girl' repatriation debate links to India's broader cultural property diplomacy — Chola copper plates (Netherlands, June 2026), Nataraja statues, and other colonial-era removals.
- Colonial Archaeology Critique: Growing academic recognition that British-era naming, categorisation, and interpretation of Indian artefacts reflects Orientalist biases — a UPSC-relevant theme in heritage conservation.

- ✂ **Cire Perdue (Lost-Wax Casting)** — An ancient metalworking technique where a wax model is encased in clay, fired (melting the wax out), and molten metal poured in; produces detailed figurines; used in IVC, Greek, and African metalwork.
- ✂ **Contrapposto** — An artistic stance where the figure's weight rests on one leg, causing a natural S-curve tilt of the body; associated with naturalistic sculpture; its presence in the Dancing Girl suggests sophisticated sculptural understanding.
- ✂ **Mohenjo-daro** — 'Mound of the Dead' in Sindh; major IVC site in Sindh province, Pakistan; estimated population 40,000+; UNESCO World Heritage Site; features the Great Bath, grid-pattern streets, advanced drainage systems.

GS PAPER 2 — Governance · Polity · International Relations

1. Govt. Orders Blocking of Telegram Until June 22 — NEET Re-Exam Shield

[TH] Page 1

GS 2 / GS 3: Governance: e-Governance, Digital India, examination regulation, cyber law; GS 3: Information Technology, cybersecurity, platform regulation; Prelims: Section 69A IT Act.

- ▶ June 16, 2026: MeitY ordered temporary blocking of Telegram in India under Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000.
- ▶ Duration: Until June 22, 2026 (day after NEET-UG 2026 re-examination on June 21).
- ▶ Telegram's message-editing feature also disabled in India until June 30, 2026.
- ▶ Reason: Telegram channels were being used to disseminate fake/real NEET question papers and manipulate timestamps to create false 'leak' narratives.

Why Telegram Is the Platform of Choice for Exam Rackets

- **Large public channels:** Telegram allows channels with unlimited subscribers — broadcasts reach millions without mutual contact requirements; ideal for distributing exam papers to thousands of students simultaneously.
- **Message editing feature:** Unlike WhatsApp (which shows 'edited' tag), Telegram allows editing of old messages without visible notification — exam fraudsters were using this to retroactively alter timestamps, making it appear a paper was leaked before the exam.
- **No India office / jurisdiction gap:** Telegram is registered in Dubai; has no physical India office; this makes legal compliance orders and voluntary content removal slow and difficult; law enforcement cannot serve notices easily.
- **Encryption and anonymity:** Telegram supports secret chats with E2E encryption; bots can be deployed to forward exam content anonymously; channel admins are hard to identify.

Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000

- Section 69A: Empowers the Central Government to issue directions to block public access to any online content/platform 'in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, or for preventing incitement to any cognizable offence.'
- Procedure: Government issues blocking order → intermediary must comply within prescribed time; non-compliance is penalised; the blocking order and reasons are kept confidential (not shared publicly or with the blocked party, per Shreya Singhal judgement's procedural safeguards).
- Previous uses: Blocking of TikTok (2020, national security grounds); blocking of 59 Chinese apps (2020, June); blocking of VPN services (partial, 2022); blocking of Twitter/X content orders.
- Concerns: India has one of the highest number of internet shutdowns and platform blocks globally (Freedom House data); critics argue Section 69A is used without adequate judicial oversight — the blocking order is executive, not judicial; intermediaries cannot contest in advance.

The Proportionality Question

- Blocking all of Telegram (instead of targeted channel/content removal) to protect a single exam raises proportionality questions — Telegram is used by 800+ million users globally; millions of Indians use it for news, business, education, and personal communication.
- Less restrictive alternatives: Government could have ordered Telegram to remove specific channels; deployed AI-based content monitoring; required digital paper delivery (which eliminates physical paper and prevents photos being shared).
- Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF): Called the blocking 'disproportionate'; argued that even a temporary platform block violates user rights and India's commitments to an open internet.

- Section 69A IT Act: A very frequently tested UPSC topic. Remember: Executive power (no judicial pre-approval); intermediaries must comply; reasons can be kept confidential; basis: sovereignty, security, public order.
- Intermediary Liability: IT Act rules 2021 (intermediary guidelines) require platforms to appoint resident grievance officers in India; Telegram's non-compliance with these rules is the legal underpinning for action against it.
- Digital India paradox: India simultaneously promotes Digital India and Digital payment ecosystem while being one of the world's most aggressive internet shutdown states — a contradiction worth discussing in essays.

- **Section 69A (IT Act 2000)** — Empowers the Central Government to block any online content/platform on grounds of sovereignty, security, public order, etc.; executive (not judicial) action; used extensively since 2020.
- **Intermediary** — A digital entity that transmits or stores third-party content — includes social media platforms, ISPs, search engines; subject to IT Act intermediary liability rules.

2. World Suffers From a Shortage of Trust — PM Modi Tells G7 Leaders

[TH] Page 1

GS 2: International Relations: India and the World; G7 Summit; multilateralism; India's voice in global governance; Global South representation; India's foreign policy.

- ▶ June 16, 2026: PM Modi addressed G7 leaders at the 52nd G7 Summit in Évian-les-Bains, France.
- ▶ Core message: 'The world suffers from a shortage of trust — we need to restore mutual trust between nations, between governments and citizens, between technology and humanity.'
- ▶ Modi called for reformed multilateralism, UNSC expansion, AI governance frameworks, and debt relief for developing nations.
- ▶ India presented its MANAV AI framework as a global model for responsible AI governance.

India's Key Positions at G7

- **Global South advocacy:** Modi: 'India speaks at G7 not just for 1.4 billion Indians, but for billions in the Global South who are not represented at this table.' Called for G20 African Union seat to be made permanent (building on India's G20 Presidency achievement in 2023).
- **UNSC reform:** Reiterated India's claim for a permanent UNSC seat; 'A Security Council that doesn't reflect today's world cannot provide tomorrow's security.' G7 members are split — France and UK support India; USA and others are cautious.
- **AI governance — MANAV:** India's framework calls for: AI development aligned with human values; open-source foundation models for developing countries; technology transfer for AI infrastructure; digital public goods as global commons.
- **Debt for development:** Called for G7 to lead reform of multilateral development banks (World Bank, IMF, ADB) to increase financing for developing countries at lower rates; Bridgetown Initiative alignment (Barbados PM Mia Mottley's proposal for MDB reform).
- **West Asia + Hormuz:** Strongly endorsed the US-Iran MoU; called for a permanent resolution that 'ends war, opens Hormuz, and begins the nuclear deal'; India's position: 'Dialogue is the only path — weapons are not answers.'
- **Food and energy security:** Highlighted the Hormuz disruption's impact on developing country food and energy access; called G7 to fund alternative supply chains for developing nations.

India at G7: The Anomaly and the Opportunity

- India is the world's 5th largest economy but NOT a G7 member — it is regularly invited as a 'partner'. India's GDP at PPP is larger than any individual European G7 member.
- India's G7 strategy: Use the invitation platform to advocate Global South positions; build trust with existing G7 members for eventual G8 or expanded format; use G7 as complement to BRICS presence.
- Trust deficit theme: Modi's 'shortage of trust' framing resonates amid: US-Iran war doubts; US-China trade tensions; Western disillusionment with multilateralism; Global South dissatisfaction with unequal vaccine, finance, and technology access.

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- G7 vs G20 vs BRICS: India participates in all three; this multi-alignment is central to India's foreign policy strategy — India is the only major country with such overlapping memberships in both Western (G7 invite, Quad) and alternative (BRICS, SCO) formats.
- Bridgetown Initiative: A key reference for India's MDB reform advocacy; proposed by Barbados PM Mia Mottley; calls for tripling MDB lending capacity, linking SDRs to climate finance, and reforming IMF lending facilities.
- Global South: India's self-positioning as the 'voice of the Global South' — confirmed at G20 2023 — is its diplomatic brand. G7 participation reinforces this by letting India translate Southern interests into G7 agenda items.

- 🗝️ **G7** — Group of Seven: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, USA + EU; represents ~45% of global GDP; annual summit; India not a member but invited as partner; 2026 host: France.
- 🗝️ **MANAV** — Multinational AI Governance for Accountability and Values — India's proposed global AI governance framework; emphasises inclusivity, transparency, human-centric AI, and technology access for developing countries.
- 🗝️ **Bridgetown Initiative** — A reform framework for multilateral development banks proposed by Barbados PM Mia Mottley; calls for increased MDB lending capacity, climate-linked debt relief, and IMF SDR reallocations — India is a strong supporter.

3. Supreme Court Seeks Response on Aadhaar 'Misuse' From Centre and States

[TH] Page 4

GS 2: Polity & Governance: Aadhaar, Right to Privacy (Article 21), digital identity governance, welfare delivery, data protection, Supreme Court judgements.

- ▶ A SC bench (Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan) issued notices to the Centre and all State governments seeking response to allegations of Aadhaar data 'misuse' in the delivery of welfare benefits.
- ▶ Petition: Filed by a consortium of civil society organisations; alleges that Aadhaar-linked welfare delivery excludes genuine beneficiaries (fingerprint authentication failures) while enabling wrongful inclusion and data privacy violations.
- ▶ The SC Aadhaar bench has been periodically reviewing the implementation of the 2018 Puttaswamy-II (Aadhaar) judgment for 6 years.
- ▶ Specifically: Petitioners cite instances where Aadhaar database errors led to exclusion from MGNREGS, PDS, and pension schemes.

The Aadhaar System: UPSC Core

- Aadhaar: A 12-digit unique identification number issued by UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) to every Indian resident; based on biometric (fingerprint + iris) and demographic data; world's largest biometric identity system (~1.4 billion enrolments).
- Legal basis: Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016. Passed as a Money Bill — a constitutional controversy.
- Puttaswamy-I (2017): SC (9-judge bench) unanimously held that the Right to Privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21; set the stage for scrutiny of Aadhaar.
- Puttaswamy-II / Aadhaar Judgment (2018): SC (5-judge bench) upheld Aadhaar's constitutional validity (3:2 majority) for welfare benefits delivery; struck down: (a) mandatory Aadhaar for mobile SIM verification; (b) mandatory Aadhaar for bank accounts; (c) Section 57 (allowing private entities to use Aadhaar); upheld: Aadhaar for welfare benefits and tax filing.

Alleged Misuses Being Challenged

- **Exclusion errors:** Biometric authentication failures (worn fingerprints, wet fingers, elderly) deny welfare benefits to genuine beneficiaries; MGNREGS workers, PDS ration recipients, and pensioners report exclusion due to authentication failures.

- **Data breaches:** Aadhaar data has been linked to multiple breaches — UIDAI portals have been found to expose data; telecom companies have been caught in Aadhaar misuse; dark-web sales of Aadhaar data have been reported.
- **Mission creep:** Despite SC prohibiting private entity use of Aadhaar, businesses continue to demand Aadhaar as KYC — often informally; the DPDP Act 2023 is expected to address this more comprehensively.
- **Aadhaar-Voter ID seeding:** The Election Laws (Amendment) Act 2021 allowed voluntary linking of Aadhaar with Voter ID; petitions argue this has become de facto mandatory and disenfranchises those without Aadhaar or with errors.

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- DPDP Act 2023 relevance: India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 places new consent and data-use obligations on data fiduciaries — including government agencies using Aadhaar; implementation will affect the Aadhaar ecosystem significantly.
- Right to Food and Aadhaar: SC in Swaraj Abhiyan case (2016) had recognised that Aadhaar cannot be used to deny food entitlements; new petition reinforces this — starvation deaths linked to Aadhaar-based PDS denial are documented.
- Technology and Inclusion Paradox: JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) has saved Rs 2.73 lakh crore in subsidy leakages (DBT data) — yet excluded ~40–50 million genuinely poor beneficiaries; the inclusion-exclusion trade-off is a central UPSC essay theme.

- ✂ **UIDAI** — Unique Identification Authority of India — statutory authority under Aadhaar Act 2016; issues Aadhaar numbers; manages UIDAI database; under MeitY.
- ✂ **DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer)** — Government programme that transfers subsidies directly to beneficiaries' Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, eliminating intermediaries; claimed savings of Rs 2.73 lakh crore in leakages (cumulative).
- ✂ **Biometric Exclusion** — When an Aadhaar-linked welfare system denies a genuine beneficiary due to fingerprint/iris matching failure; a documented human rights concern especially for manual labourers and the elderly.

4. Iran Won the War by Merely Denying the United States a Victory

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GS 2: International Relations: West Asia; US Foreign Policy; non-state and state conflict dynamics; nuclear non-proliferation; India's energy security and strategic interests.

- Analysis: Despite massive US-Israeli military strikes on Iran (Feb 28–April 8, 2026), Iran achieved its strategic objective without 'winning' militarily.
- Iran's strategic success: It denied the US a 'victory' — the US military action did NOT: dismantle Iran's nuclear programme, remove the Khamenei regime, end Hezbollah's operational capacity, or reopen Hormuz without concessions.
- The MoU (June 14): US lifted its naval blockade, suspended sanctions, released frozen assets — all Iranian demands — while nuclear question is deferred.
- The article argues: In asymmetric conflict, survival IS victory; Iran's 'victory' is the precedent it sets for future nuclear-armed resistance to US military pressure.

Strategic Outcome Analysis

- **What the US achieved:** Degraded Iran's air defences and some missile infrastructure; disrupted Iranian oil exports (~3 months of blockade); demonstrated US conventional military superiority; maintained Israeli security during the conflict period.
- **What the US did not achieve:** Did not dismantle the nuclear programme (Fordow and Natanz underground facilities survived); did not topple the regime (IRGC and Khamenei remain firmly in control); did not secure Iran's renunciation of enrichment (nuclear question deferred 60 days); did not secure Abraham Accords expansion to Saudi Arabia.

- **What Iran achieved:** Survived massive US-Israeli strikes; protected its nuclear infrastructure (essential for strategic deterrence); reopened Hormuz — but on terms that included lifting of the US blockade; demonstrated that military action cannot easily coerce a nuclear-threshold state; secured an MoU that suspends sanctions and releases frozen assets.
- **The 'denial' theory:** In strategic studies, 'denial victory' means preventing the adversary from achieving their war aims — without necessarily achieving your own. Iran's strategy was attrition and cost-imposition (Hormuz closure disrupting global economy) rather than military defeat of the US.

Implications for Nuclear Non-Proliferation

- The most dangerous lesson from the Iran war: Countries without nuclear weapons are more vulnerable to US military action than threshold nuclear states. Iran's survival despite massive US strikes strengthens the incentive for other countries to pursue nuclear programmes.
- North Korea: The parallel is stark — Kim Jong-Un has explicitly argued that giving up nuclear weapons (as Libya did in 2003, then was overthrown in 2011) leads to regime destruction. Iran's experience confirms this lesson.
- Saudi Arabia's warning (repeated): If Iran retains enrichment, Saudi Arabia will pursue its own nuclear programme. The 60-day window failure would likely trigger this.

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- Asymmetric Conflict Theory: UPSC GS3 security essays — Iran's strategy is a textbook case of asymmetric conflict where the weaker party uses economic disruption (Hormuz) to impose costs rather than military engagement.
- NPT credibility: If Iran retains enrichment capability despite 5 years of JCPOA negotiations and a war, the NPT's non-proliferation norm is severely weakened — a critical international security issue.
- India's lesson: India's strategic interests require a nuclear deal that verifiably caps Iran's programme; but India cannot substitute for US diplomatic leverage; India's role is as a voice for dialogue and a beneficiary of whatever deal emerges.

- **Threshold Nuclear State** — A country that has the technical capability to build a nuclear weapon but has not done so; Iran is considered a threshold state — with <2 weeks 'breakout time'; distinguished from acknowledged nuclear states and non-nuclear states.
- **Denial Victory** — A strategic concept where success is defined as preventing the adversary from achieving its goals, rather than achieving one's own objectives; Iran's strategy in the 2026 war follows this framework.

5. Kerala's Nipah Containment Strategy Has Lessons for Pandemic Preparedness

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GS 2 / GS 3: Health: Pandemic preparedness, One Health approach, zoonotic disease management, contact tracing, community health systems; GS 3: Science and Technology: Nipah virus, biosafety, disease surveillance.

- A Nipah virus case cluster was detected in Kozhikode, Kerala (June 2026) — the 5th Nipah outbreak in Kerala since 2018.
- Kerala contained the cluster to 4 cases (1 death, 3 recovered) with no secondary spread — within 12 days of case detection.
- The article analyses Kerala's model: community health infrastructure + rapid response + science-based communication + pre-prepared protocols.
- Global significance: WHO has listed Nipah as a Priority Pathogen for pandemic preparedness; India has the world's most real-world experience containing Nipah.

Nipah Virus: Basic Profile

- Nipah virus (NiV): A zoonotic paramyxovirus (family Paramyxoviridae); reservoir: fruit bats (Pteropus species — flying foxes); transmitted to humans via: direct contact with infected bats or bat droppings; consumption of bat-contaminated date palm sap; person-to-person transmission (through body fluids).

- Case fatality rate: 40–75% (highly lethal; higher than Ebola Zaire in some outbreaks); causes acute encephalitis and respiratory illness; no approved vaccine or antiviral (m102.4 monoclonal antibody in compassionate use; Favipiravir experimental).
- India's Nipah history: First Indian outbreak — Siliguri, West Bengal (2001, 66 deaths); Kerala outbreaks — 2018 (Kozhikode, 17 deaths), 2019 (Ernakulam, 1 death, 1 recovery), 2021 (Kozhikode, 1 death), 2023 (Kozhikode, 2 deaths), 2026 (Kozhikode, 1 death, 3 recovered).

Kerala's Containment Model: 5 Elements

- **1. Rapid case detection:** Kerala's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) integrates community health workers (ASHAs, Accredited Social Health Activists) as the first alert system; any unusual cluster of encephalitis is immediately flagged to district health officers.
- **2. Pre-prepared Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Kerala has a Nipah SOP document revised after every outbreak; it pre-assigns roles, isolates protocols, PPE requirements, contact tracing frameworks, and sample collection procedures — reducing response time from detection to containment.
- **3. Aggressive contact tracing:** Kerala traced all contacts to within 3–4 generations of the index case within 72 hours; used mobile phone location data (with privacy safeguards) and community health worker networks.
- **4. Science-based communication:** Kerala Health Minister and district health officers held daily press briefings using scientists and epidemiologists as communicators — reducing misinformation and panic.
- **5. One Health approach:** Simultaneous veterinary and bat surveillance alongside human contact tracing; samples from bat populations near the index case site were collected to identify the source and break the zoonotic chain.

Lessons for National Pandemic Preparedness

- National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC): India's apex public health surveillance agency; must replicate Kerala's model for rapid response across all states — currently, only a few states (Odisha, Tamil Nadu) have similar preparedness depth.
- ICMR's role: ICMR developed the Nipah antibody test and is conducting animal challenge studies for vaccine candidates; India's NIV (National Institute of Virology, Pune) is the WHO-designated Collaborating Centre for Nipah — a global asset.
- WHO Priority Pathogen: Nipah is on WHO's Priority Pathogen list alongside Ebola, MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV — diseases with epidemic/pandemic potential and no adequate countermeasures. India's containment success is globally important.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- One Health Approach: Human-animal-environment health interface; Nipah is a One Health problem (bats → humans via contaminated food/contact); India's National Action Plan for Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR) and National One Health Framework are relevant policy documents.
- Biocontainment: Kerala has a designated state-level High Security Animal Disease Laboratory (HSADL); India has only one BSL-4 (Biosafety Level 4 — highest containment) lab: NIV Pune. More BSL-4 capacity is needed for zoonotic disease research.
- COVID-19 lessons applied: Contact tracing apps (Aarogya Setu experience), WhatsApp-based community surveillance, RT-PCR lab networks — all repurposed from COVID for Nipah response; India's pandemic infrastructure from COVID is now a public health asset.

- **Nipah Virus (NiV)** — Zoonotic paramyxovirus; reservoir: fruit bats; CFR 40–75%; no approved vaccine/antiviral; WHO Priority Pathogen; India has had 5 outbreaks in Kerala since 2018.
- **One Health** — An integrated approach recognising that human, animal, and environmental health are interconnected; essential for managing zoonotic diseases like Nipah, COVID-19, and Ebola.
- **IDSP (Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme)** — India's disease surveillance network under MoHFW; links district, state, and national disease data; ASHA workers are the community-level surveillance nodes.

6. Why Trump's H-1B Fee Was Struck Down by US Court

[TH] Page 10

GS 2: International Relations: India-US Relations; Indian diaspora and skilled professionals abroad; immigration policy and its impact on India; bilateral economic relations.

- ▶ A US federal court struck down the Trump administration's additional H-1B visa fee (\$5,000 per petition, imposed in 2025) as unlawfully imposed without proper Congressional authorisation.
- ▶ The fee was projected to cost Indian IT companies (TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL) an additional \$300–400 million annually.
- ▶ Court ruling: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) exceeded its authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) by imposing the fee without Congressional action.
- ▶ India is the largest H-1B beneficiary nation — ~70–75% of all H-1B approvals go to Indian nationals.

The H-1B Visa: India's Gateway to the US

- H-1B: Non-immigrant visa allowing US employers to hire foreign workers in 'specialty occupations' — requiring at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent; typically issued for 3 years, renewable to 6 years.
- Annual cap: 65,000 H-1B visas per year (plus 20,000 for US master's or higher degree holders) — total 85,000. Demand vastly exceeds supply; USCIS conducts a lottery among eligible petitions.
- India's dominance: ~70–75% of H-1B approvals go to Indian nationals; the bulk go to employees of major IT outsourcing companies (TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL) and to individual employees of US tech firms (Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta hire large numbers on H-1B).
- FY2025: 74.1% of H-1B approvals to Indian nationals; median salary \$136,000; software developers (45%) and software quality assurance (15%) are the top occupation categories.

Trump's Anti-H-1B Policy and the Court Challenge

- Trump 2.0 H-1B measures: Raised fees (the struck-down \$5,000 fee); tightened 'specialty occupation' definitions; increased RFE (Requests for Evidence) — approval rates fell from 98% (Biden era) to 87% (early Trump 2.0); banned H-4 EAD (work authorisation for H-1B spouses).
- The fee challenge: A consortium of US companies (including Indian IT firms' US subsidiaries) challenged the \$5,000 fee in the DC Circuit Court; the court ruled DHS must have Congressional authorisation — the INA does not grant DHS the power to impose supplemental fees unilaterally.
- Impact of the ruling: Indian IT companies recover \$300–400 million annually; petitioning costs fall; approval rates likely to normalise; however, Trump may seek Congressional legislation to reimpose fees.

India-US H-1B Geopolitics

- H-1B is a diplomatic issue: India's EAM Jaishankar has consistently raised H-1B concerns in US meetings; the India-US BTA (under negotiation) includes provisions on 'mobility' of skilled professionals.
- US political dynamics: Republican base is opposed to H-1B (favours 'American first' employment); but US tech industry (strongly Republican-donating) depends on H-1B talent; Trump himself has oscillated on H-1B — calling it 'wonderful' in some statements.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- H-1B and Indian Economy: \$26+ billion in Indian IT exports to the US; Indian IT companies employ 450,000+ H-1B workers in the US; restrictions harm both Indian IT firms and US tech companies that rely on Indian talent.
- Remittances: India receives \$125+ billion in annual remittances; Indian tech professionals in the US are among the highest-earning remitters; H-1B restrictions directly reduce remittance inflows.
- India-US BTA mobility: The pending India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement has a 'mobility' chapter; India is seeking better H-1B access in exchange for market access in goods sectors.

- ✦ **H-1B Visa** — US non-immigrant work visa for specialty occupations; annual cap 85,000; lottery-based; 70–75% granted to Indian nationals; 3-year term, renewable to 6 years.
- ✦ **INA (Immigration and Nationality Act)** — The primary US legislation governing immigration and nationality law; enacted 1952; DHS must have INA authorisation to impose fees, change categories, or modify visa terms.
- ✦ **RFE (Request for Evidence)** — A USCIS tool to request additional information from H-1B petitioners; high RFE rates signal increased scrutiny and reduce effective approval rates.

7. What Does the Tenth Schedule Provide on Party Mergers?

GS 2: Indian Polity: Anti-defection law, Tenth Schedule, role of the Speaker, constitutional amendments; party mergers and splits; coalition politics and floor management.

- ▶ Context: A 2-member legislative group in a state assembly has claimed to 'merge' with a larger party to avoid anti-defection disqualification.
- ▶ The Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law, inserted by 52nd Constitutional Amendment, 1985) provides a specific, narrow exception for 'mergers'.
- ▶ The Speaker's role as the disqualification authority under the Tenth Schedule has itself been challenged — SC has held Speakers are not impartial enough.
- ▶ Current status: Kihoto Hollohan (1992) upheld Tenth Schedule's constitutional validity but held Speaker's order is judicially reviewable.

The Tenth Schedule: Core Structure

- The Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law) was inserted by the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985; designed to curb political defections that cause governmental instability ('Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' syndrome).
- Disqualification grounds: A member of a House belonging to a political party is disqualified if they: (a) voluntarily give up membership of their party; or (b) vote against their party's direction or abstain without permission (whipping violation).
- Exception 1 — Merger: A legislator is NOT disqualified if they merge with another political party, provided at least 2/3 of the original party's legislative members agree to the merger. This is the only surviving exemption (the 'split' exemption was abolished by the 91st Amendment, 2003).
- The Speaker's role: Disqualification questions are decided by the Speaker (in Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha/Vidhan Parishad); SC has held this is judicially reviewable.

The Merger Provision in Practice

- 2/3 requirement: If a party has 3 MLAs, at least 2 must agree to the merger for it to be valid — a single MLA or 2 out of 3 (66.7%) meets the requirement. The confusion: if a party has only 2 legislators, both must agree (100%) for the merger to be valid.
- 'Merger' defined: The 10th Schedule uses the term 'merger of the original political party with another political party' — the merger must be at the party level, not just the legislative group level; this has led to complex litigation about whether a state-level legislative group's merger without the parent national party's merger is valid.
- Recent SC guidance: In the Maharashtra Maha Vikas Aghadi case (Subhash Desai v Principal Secretary, 2023), the SC held that: (a) the floor of the House (legislative wing's decision) cannot constitute a 'party merger' under the Tenth Schedule without the organisational wing (party) also merging; (b) the Speaker cannot ignore a rival faction's claim of being the 'real' party.

Current Challenges to the Tenth Schedule

- Speaker's impartiality: The Speaker typically belongs to the ruling party — creating a structural conflict of interest when disqualification petitions involve ruling party dissenters. SC has called for an independent authority to replace the Speaker in disqualification cases.
- Pending question: Is the Speaker's delay in deciding disqualification petitions itself a constitutional violation? SC in Rajendra Singh Rana (2007) and subsequent cases has held that unreasonable delay by the Speaker is reviewable — but has not set a fixed timeline.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- 52nd Constitutional Amendment (1985): Inserted the Tenth Schedule; also inserted Articles 102(2) and 191(2) providing the framework; passed under Rajiv Gandhi's government post-1984 landslide — a moment of political unity on anti-defection.
- 91st Amendment (2003): Abolished the 'split' exemption (which required 1/3 of the legislative party to split to avoid disqualification); now only 'merger' (with 2/3 consent) is exempt.
- Kihoto Hollohan v Zachillhu (1992): SC 5-judge bench upheld Tenth Schedule's constitutional validity; established: Speaker's decision is final but judicially reviewable; decisions are not protected by Schedule IX.

- **✂ Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law)** — Inserted by 52nd Amendment 1985; provides for disqualification of legislators who defect from their party; exceptions: merger (2/3 consent); Speaker/Chairman decides disqualification questions.
- **✂ Merger (Tenth Schedule)** — When at least 2/3 of the original party's legislative members agree to merge with another party — the only surviving exemption from anti-defection disqualification; split exemption was abolished in 2003.
- **✂ Kihoto Hollohan (1992)** — SC 5-judge bench ruling upholding Tenth Schedule's constitutional validity; established that Speaker's orders are judicially reviewable by High Courts and SC under Articles 226 and 136.

8. How Herat Defied the Taliban Regime: 'Women, Work, and Freedom'

[TH] Page 15

GS 2 / GS 1: International Relations: Afghanistan, Taliban governance, women's rights, South Asia security; Social Issues: Gender equality, freedom of expression, fundamentalism and resistance.

- In June 2026, sustained protests by women in Herat (Afghanistan's 3rd largest city and historic cultural capital) against the Taliban's gender apartheid drew global media attention.
- Chants: 'Women, Work, and Freedom' — a triple demand directly challenging Taliban bans on women's education (above 6th grade), employment, and public presence.
- Trigger: The Taliban's June 2026 decree banning women from all vocational training institutes and NGO workplaces — the latest in a series of gender restrictions since August 2021.
- Herat's significance: The city has historically been the most cosmopolitan, culturally liberal Afghan city — known as the 'Paris of Afghanistan'; it had the highest female education and employment rates pre-Taliban.

Taliban's Gender Apartheid: A Timeline

- August 2021: Taliban takeover; immediate reversal of 20 years of progress — girls' secondary schools closed; women required to wear hijab in public; gender mixing banned.
- November 2022: Ban on women studying at universities (effective December 2022); 6,000+ female students expelled from universities across Afghanistan.
- April 2023: Ban on Afghan women working for UN agencies in Afghanistan.
- May 2024: Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued the 'Virtue and Vice' decree — requiring women to cover their faces and voices completely in public; travel restrictions without male guardian.
- June 2026: Decree banning women from all vocational training institutes and NGO employment — removing the last significant employment pathways for urban Afghan women.

The Herat Resistance

- Herat women have organised periodic street protests despite the risk of arrest, beatings, and disappearance; protest organisers coordinate through encrypted messaging apps.
- Herat's civil society: Pre-Taliban, Herat had 64 NGOs; 12 female-run businesses; a thriving arts scene (Herat Biennial); universities with 40%+ female enrolment; carpet and textile industries employing thousands of women.
- International reaction: UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, US Congress, EU Parliament, and regional CSOs have condemned the decree; India has also raised concerns in UN forums.

India's Afghanistan Policy

- India was the Taliban's most significant silent economic partner — India resumed wheat donations and medical aid to Afghanistan in 2022; India opened a technical office in Kabul in January 2023 (not formal diplomatic recognition).
- India's interests: Prevent Afghanistan from becoming a terrorism export hub (anti-India groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Haqqani network have Afghan presence); maintain connectivity to Central Asia via Afghanistan; humanitarian concerns for Afghan population.
- The Herat protests are diplomatically awkward for India — India's economic engagement with the Taliban without formal human rights conditionality has been criticised by Afghan civil society.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- UN Security Council Resolution 2593 (2021): Called on Taliban to not use Afghan territory for terrorism and to respect human rights; has not been enforced.
- Gender Apartheid: UN Special Rapporteurs have described Taliban's treatment of women as 'gender apartheid' — a crime against humanity under evolving international law; UN Convention on Non-Discrimination (CERD) and CEDAW are the normative frameworks.
- India's Chabahar + Afghanistan: Chabahar Port gives India land access to Afghanistan via Iran; this makes India's economic interest in Afghanistan (trade, reconstruction) both humanitarian and strategic; the Taliban's gender policies complicate this engagement.

- 🗝️ **Taliban (2.0)** — The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), which seized power in August 2021; governed by the Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada based in Kandahar; implements strict Deobandi interpretation of Sharia; not formally recognised by any UN member state.
- 🗝️ **UN Security Council Resolution 2593 (2021)** — Adopted post-Taliban takeover; demanded Taliban not allow Afghanistan to be used for terrorism and respect human rights; passed without veto (Russia and China abstained).

GS PAPER 3 — Science · Technology · Health · Economy

1. You Always Needed a Cough Syrup Prescription: What the New Order Changes

[IE] Page 5

GS 2 / GS 3: Health: Drug regulation, substance abuse prevention; GS 3: Science and Technology: Pharmaceutical regulation; Prelims: Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Schedule H1, Schedule K.

- ▶ The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued an order amending Schedule K of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, removing codeine-containing cough syrups from the exemption list.
- ▶ Previously, Schedule K allowed codeine-based cough syrups (Phensedyl, Corex, Ascoril) to be sold at rural/remote areas without a licensed pharmacist — this exemption is now removed.
- ▶ Effect: All codeine-containing cough syrups now require: (a) Schedule H1 prescription from a registered doctor; (b) sale only through licensed pharmacies with pharmacist supervision; (c) pharmacist record-keeping.
- ▶ Context: Bihar's prohibition (and the cough syrup substitution), Punjab's phensedyl crisis, and the NDPS Act's opioid framework are the backdrop.

The Regulatory Framework

- Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940: India's primary legislation regulating drugs — their import, manufacture, distribution, and sale. Administered by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) at the national level and State Drug Control Authorities at the state level.
- Schedule H1: Drugs that require a written prescription from a registered medical practitioner; the prescription must be retained by the pharmacist for 2 years; codeine-containing products were already Schedule H1 — but Schedule K was a loophole.
- Schedule K (the loophole): A list of drugs exempted from the requirement of being sold only by licensed pharmacists in rural/tribal areas (defined as villages with population <5,000 without a licensed pharmacy within 4 km). Codeine syrups were in Schedule K — meaning they could be sold without a licensed pharmacist in eligible areas.
- The amendment: Removes codeine-phosphate-containing syrups from Schedule K — closing the rural pharmacy exemption. These drugs now require a licensed pharmacist and prescription everywhere in India.

Why This Matters: The Codeine-Alcohol-Prohibition Connection

- Codeine abuse: In alcohol-prohibition states (Bihar, Gujarat, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram) and many rural areas, codeine-based syrups are consumed as substitutes for alcohol — providing opioid euphoria. NDPS data shows 300%+ increase in codeine syrup seizures in Bihar since 2016 (alcohol prohibition).
- Supply chain: Codeine syrups were easily accessible in remote areas under Schedule K; removing this exemption will reduce availability in the grey market.
- Pharmacovigilance: The amendment enables better tracking of codeine prescription patterns — flagging pharmacies with unusual high volumes of codeine sales to state drug controllers.

Gaps and Remaining Challenges

- The exemption removal helps — but enforcement depends on: (a) availability of licensed pharmacies in rural areas; (b) digitisation of prescriptions (e-prescriptions are not yet mandatory); (c) CDSCO and state drug controller capacity for field inspections.
- Alternative opioids: Removal of codeine does not prevent substitution with other opioids (Tramadol, Buprenorphine, pseudoephedrine tablets) that are separately regulated.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- NDPS Act 1985: India's primary narcotic drug control legislation; codeine is a scheduled substance; excess codeine (above prescription limits) is a NDPS offence; the Drugs & Cosmetics Act and NDPS Act work in parallel.
- Bihar + Prohibition: The codeine-alcohol substitution in Bihar is a policy failure of the prohibition model — removing supply of alcohol while not addressing demand creates market for harmful substitutes.
- CDSCO reforms: The Drugs and Cosmetics Amendment Bill (pending) would modernise India's drug regulatory framework; the Schedule K amendment is an administrative step within the existing Act.

- 📌 **Schedule H1** — Category of drugs requiring written prescription, pharmacist record-keeping for 2 years, and sale only through licensed pharmacy; includes antibiotics, opioids, psychotropics.
- 📌 **Schedule K** — A list of drugs exempted from normal prescription/pharmacist requirements in rural areas without licensed pharmacy access; codeine syrups have now been removed from this schedule.
- 📌 **Codeine Phosphate** — A mild opioid antitussive (cough suppressant) derived from morphine; Schedule H1 drug; abused as an alcohol substitute in prohibition areas; addictive at high doses.

2. UK Social Media Ban for Under-16s: Why Such Rules Are Needed

[IE] Page 5

GS 2 / GS 3: Governance: Social media regulation, child safety online; GS 3: Technology: platform regulation, data protection of minors, algorithmic harm; Social Issues: child development, mental health.

- ▶ UK Parliament passed the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (Royal Assent June 2026); bans children under 16 from creating social media accounts.
- ▶ Platforms must: verify users' ages using government-approved age verification technology; refuse access to under-16s; face fines up to £18 million or 10% of global turnover under the Online Safety Act for non-compliance.
- ▶ Australia (November 2023) was the first to legislate such a ban (under-16 social media restriction law).
- ▶ India is studying both laws; India's draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules 2024 require 'verifiable consent' from parents for children under 18 on digital platforms.

The Case For: Why the Ban Is Needed

- **Mental health evidence:** Multiple peer-reviewed studies (Haidt 2023, Twenge 2018, Royal Society for Public Health 2024) link social media use by adolescents with: increased rates of depression and anxiety (especially girls); sleep disruption; body image disorders; cyberbullying. Meta's own internal research (leaked 2021) showed Instagram made body image worse for ~32% of teenage girls.
- **Algorithmic design harms:** Social media platforms are designed to maximise engagement; this means they push emotionally activating (often negative) content; create echo chambers; promote social comparison and unrealistic body image through algorithmic amplification.

- **Privacy exploitation:** Children lack cognitive maturity to understand how their data is collected and used for commercial targeting; COPPA (US), GDPR Article 8 (EU), and DPDP Act (India) provide some protections — but enforcement is inadequate.
- **Brain development:** The prefrontal cortex (responsible for impulse control and long-term decision-making) develops until age 25; adolescent brains are disproportionately susceptible to social media's dopamine feedback loops.

The Case Against: Expert Criticisms

- Effectiveness doubt: Age verification is technically difficult — teens can use VPNs, borrow accounts, or use parental dates of birth; Australia's experience shows partial compliance but widespread workarounds.
- Privacy paradox: Age verification requires collecting more personal data (ID documents, biometrics) — potentially creating new privacy risks for children.
- Equity concern: For disadvantaged youth, social media is a primary tool for social support, educational resources, and peer connection — a blanket ban may isolate them from these benefits.
- Platform accountability vs. user restriction: Critics argue the problem is platform design (algorithms) — regulation should target the platforms' algorithmic choices, not restrict user access.

India's Framework

- DPDP Act 2023: Requires 'verifiable consent of parent or guardian' for processing personal data of children (under 18). Prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring, or targeted advertising directed at children.
- DPDP Rules (draft 2024): Define how 'verifiable consent' must be obtained — likely through DigiLocker/Aadhaar-based parent verification; finalisation expected 2026.
- India's scale challenge: 850+ million internet users; 70+ million children on social media; age verification at this scale requires robust technical infrastructure that India is still building.

★ UPSC ANGLE

- DPDP Act 2023 + Children: India's DPDP Act has specific children's data protection provisions (Section 9); it's a frequently tested UPSC topic — operators must not track children without consent, not target ads at children.
- Digital Rights vs. Safety: A fundamental tension in technology governance; India should balance child safety with digital access equity — especially for rural and first-generation internet users.
- Comparative: Australia's law (Nov 2023) → UK's law (June 2026) → India studying → global norm formation in child-safe internet governance; UPSC GS2 on international institutions and norm formation.

- ✦ **DPDP Act 2023 (India)** — Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023; establishes data principal rights; requires verifiable parental consent for children's data; prohibits tracking and targeted ads for children under 18.
- ✦ **Online Safety Act (UK, 2023)** — UK legislation requiring platforms to protect users from illegal and harmful content; the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (2026) builds on this by adding age verification mandate.
- ✦ **Age Verification Technology** — Technical tools to verify a user's age online; methods include: government ID upload, credit card verification, biometric checks, DigiLocker-type linked IDs; no universally effective method exists.

PRELIMS IN FOCUS

Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement

Allows countries to engage in bilateral carbon trading through 'cooperative approaches'; enables transfer of Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs) — verified emission reductions — from one country to another; India-Japan Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) operates under Article 6.2; India signed JCM MoC with Japan; Rules of Implementation adopted June 8, 2026. GS 3: Climate — Paris Agreement Article 6 is the carbon markets provision.

Dhola-Sadiya Bridge (India's Longest)

Length: 9.15 km; crosses the Lohit River (a Brahmaputra tributary) in Assam near the Arunachal Pradesh border; built to withstand 60-tonne military tanks (strategic defence significance); first permanent road link between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (earlier only)

ferry service); beam bridge design; inaugurated by PM Modi in May 2017. Not to be confused with the Bogibeel Bridge (4.94 km) across the Brahmaputra.

Chambal Ghariyal Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh along the Chambal River; one of the few remaining habitats of the Critically Endangered Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) and the Endangered Indian Mugger Crocodile; also home to Gangetic River Dolphin. The new cable-stayed bridge over Chambal (Kota) has a wildlife-friendly design with no pier in the riverbed — protecting the Gharial habitat. GS 3: Biodiversity Conservation.

Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000

Empowers the Central Government to issue directions to block public access to any information on the internet; grounds: sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, or prevention of cognizable offence; Intermediaries must comply; the blocking order and its reasons are kept confidential; used to block Telegram (June 2026), TikTok (June 2020), and 59 Chinese apps (2020).

Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) — India-Japan

A bilateral carbon credit framework under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement; India and Japan signed MoC for JCM; Rules of Implementation adopted June 8, 2026; JCM enables Japanese companies to invest in GHG-reducing projects in India and receive carbon credits; these credits count toward Japan's NDC targets while India gets technology transfer and finance. A similar JCM exists between Japan and 29 other countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam, etc.).

Kihoto Hollohan v Zachillhu (1992)

SC 5-judge constitution bench ruling on the validity of the Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law); held: (1) Tenth Schedule is constitutionally valid; (2) The Speaker's/Chairman's decision on disqualification is a 'final' decision of a constitutional authority but is judicially reviewable under Articles 136 and 226; (3) The decision is not entitled to Schedule IX protection. Named after a Nagaland MLA case.

MAPPING — PLACES IN NEWS

Place	Why in News / Location / Key Facts
Kozhikode (Calicut), Kerala	5th Nipah virus outbreak (June 2026); contained to 4 cases; located on the Malabar Coast of North Kerala; historic Zamorin city; first European contact point (Vasco da Gama landed here, 1498); 4th largest city in Kerala.
Herat, Afghanistan	Protests by women against Taliban gender bans (June 2026); 3rd largest Afghan city; located near the Iran-Afghanistan border (Herat Province, western Afghanistan); known as 'City of Literature'; UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art. On the ancient Silk Road.
Évian-les-Bains, France	Host city of 52nd G7 Summit, June 15–17, 2026; located in Haute-Savoie, southeastern France, on the southern shore of Lake Geneva; famous for Évian mineral water (Cachat Spring); ~80 km from Geneva.
Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan	'Dancing Girl' origin site; located in Sindh Province, southern Pakistan; on the west bank of the Indus River; UNESCO World Heritage Site; one of the two major centres of the Indus Valley Civilisation (alongside Harappa); peak population ~40,000.
Lohit River, Assam-Arunachal Pradesh	Dhola-Sadiya Bridge spans the Lohit — a major tributary of the Brahmaputra; originates in Tibet (as Zayü Chu/Nageng); enters India through Arunachal Pradesh; joins Brahmaputra near Dibrugarh, Assam; 793 km long.
Chambal River, Rajasthan-MP-UP	Kota cable-stayed bridge spans the Chambal; originates at Janapav hills near Mhow (MP); flows through Rajasthan (Kota, Sawai Madhopur) and UP before joining Yamuna near Etawah; total length 960 km; National Chambal Ghariyal Sanctuary along its length.

Fordow and Natanz, Iran	Iran's primary uranium enrichment facilities; Fordow: built inside a mountain near Qom (hardened against air strikes); Natanz: Ardakan district, Isfahan Province; main site of advanced centrifuges; IAEA monitors these sites under NPT safeguards (last inspection: February 28, 2026, the day war began).
Bratislava, Slovakia	PM Modi's visit June 14–15; capital of Slovakia; on the Danube River near Austria and Hungary borders; strategic location in central Europe; once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Czechoslovakia.

End of Notes · 17 June 2026 · UPSC with Saurabh Kaushik

UPSC with Saurabh Kaushik