UPSC with SAURABH KAUSHIK

Current Affairs Notes · 25 June 2026

The Hindu · Indian Express · PIB | 14 Topics | GS 2 · 3 + Prelims + Mapping

[TH] The Hindu | [IE] Indian Express | [PIB] Press Info Bureau

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PIB HIGHLIGHTS — 25 JUNE 2026 (Curated for UPSC)

🔔 1. PM's 52nd PRAGATI Meeting — Infrastructure and Governance Review

✓ PM Modi chaired the 52nd PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) interaction on June 25, 2026.

✓ PRAGATI is a unique integrated, multi-purpose, multi-modal platform that combines digital data management and video-conferencing technology for the PM to personally review key programmes and projects. Launched: March 25, 2015; ICT-based system developed by PMO + NIC (National Informatics Centre).

✓ 52 PRAGATI meetings have reviewed: 340+ projects worth Rs 17+ lakh crore; flagged thousands of governance issues; resolved 1,400+ grievances.

✓ Areas reviewed in 52nd meeting: Post-Hormuz economic recovery (fuel price management, fertiliser supply restoration); PMAY Urban 2.0 progress; PMGSY road construction in NE states; National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) project delays.

✓ GS2 Angle: E-governance; PRAGATI platform; NIC; PMO's role in project monitoring; accountability in government; digital transformation of governance.

🔔 2. BRICS Space Economy + Clean Coal / Gasification Side Events

✓ Dr Jitendra Singh (MoS for Department of Space) proposed a 'BRICS Space Economy' framework — India would anchor the initiative with ISRO as the nodal agency; objective: collaborative satellite data sharing (crop monitoring, disaster response, climate) + commercial launch services for BRICS member nations.

✓ BRICS Space Economy potential: India (ISRO + IN-SPACe private sector), China (CNSA), Russia (Roscosmos), Brazil (AEB), South Africa (SANSA) + 6 new members; joint Earth observation constellation could reduce duplication and provide Global South space data access.

✓ Coal Gasification BRICS Side Event: Ministry of Coal organised a BRICS side event on Clean Coal Technologies focusing on Coal Gasification — India's goal: gasify 100 MMT of coal annually by 2030; would produce: synthesis gas (syngas) for fertiliser, methanol, hydrogen production; reduce coal transport requirements.

✓ India's Coal Gasification Mission: Rs 37,500 crore approved; BHEL, GAIL, Coal India, and NTPC as implementing agencies; 4 gasification projects underway at Talcher, Ramagundam, Zawar, Bhilai.

✓ GS3 Angle: Space cooperation; ISRO commercial; Coal Gasification Mission; clean coal technologies; BRICS economic cooperation.

3. Piyush Goyal UK Visit (June 25-27) — India-UK CETA/DCC Final Mile

✓ Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is visiting London (June 25-27) ahead of the India-UK CETA and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) implementation on July 15, 2026.

✓ Purpose: Finalising implementation frameworks — (a) establishment of India-UK CETA Joint Committee (the body that will manage the FTA, review tariff schedules, resolve disputes); (b) DCC operational details (which Indian professionals qualify for the exemption, documentation requirements, social security coordination procedures); (c) Bilateral Investment Treaty discussions.

✓ UK meetings: Goyal will meet UK Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds; separately meeting UK Financial Services Minister to discuss financial services reciprocity; meeting Indian diaspora businesses in London's 'Silicon Roundabout' (East London tech hub).

✓ The India-UK CETA effective date — July 15, 2026 — is now exactly 20 days away; this is the 'final mile' preparation visit.

✓ GS2 Angle: India-UK CETA; trade agreements implementation; Joint Committee mechanism; DCC; India-UK bilateral relations.

4. USTR Greer's BTA Talks in India — India-US Trade Final Stretch

✓ US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer concluded 2 days of trade talks in New Delhi (June 23-25) with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and his team.

✓ Progress: A joint statement released June 25 noted 'significant progress' and both sides committed to 'concluding the interim trade agreement' before India's Independence Day (August 15, 2026) — a newly announced political deadline.

✓ Key movement: US agreed to extend the 10% 'base tariff' offer to Indian goods beyond the initial February 2026 framework; India indicated flexibility on agricultural tariff phasing (with longer timelines and larger exclusion lists for politically sensitive products).

✓ Remaining sticking points: India's Equalisation Levy on digital services; H-1B mobility chapter; agricultural market access quotas for US corn and soybean.

✓ GS2/GS3 Angle: India-US BTA; USTR; trade negotiations; tariff policy; H-1B; digital services tax; trade diplomacy.

5. NCORD 10th Apex Meeting — Amit Shah's Narcotics Control Review

✓ Amit Shah to chair the 10th Apex-Level Meeting of NCORD (Narco Coordination Centre) on June 26, 2026 in New Delhi.

✓ NCORD: National-level coordination mechanism for anti-narcotics; established 2016 under MHA; 4-tier structure: (1) Apex Level (chaired by Union Home Minister); (2) Executive Level (Home Secretary); (3) State Level; (4) District Level. Brings together: NCB, DRI, CBI, State Police, Customs, NDPS enforcement agencies.

✓ Narcotics situation (2026): Post-Iran war, the Afghan drug production disruption (US operations targeted some drug routes) has temporarily reduced opium supply; but synthetic

drugs (methamphetamine, fentanyl, ketamine) are surging from Southeast Asia (Myanmar's Shan State, Thailand's Golden Triangle) via the Eastern route.

✓ India's achievements (shared at NCORD): Rs 21,000+ crore worth of narcotics seized in FY26 (highest ever); 17,000+ arrests; 3 new forensic labs established for drug testing.

✓ Key agenda: 'Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan' Phase 3; online drug sales (Telegram, darknet); synthetic drug manufacturing units; crop substitution in poppy-growing tribal areas.

✓ GS3 Angle: Narcotics; NCORD; NDPS Act; Golden Crescent; Golden Triangle; internal security; drug trafficking routes.

🔔 6. NMCG Urban River Management Plans — 63 Ganga Basin Cities

✓ National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG): Scaled up Urban River Management Plans (URMPs) across 63 cities in the Ganga basin.

✓ URMP: A comprehensive planning framework for each city addressing: (a) sewage treatment (STP capacity vs. sewage generation); (b) industrial effluent management; (c) solid waste management near riverbanks; (d) ghats restoration; (e) floodplain preservation; (f) ecological restoration of urban river stretches.

✓ Progress: 63 of 97 Ganga basin cities have now approved URMPs; 58 Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) commissioned in FY26; Ganga's dissolved oxygen level improved to 7-8 mg/L in main stem (from 3-4 mg/L in 2015) — fish have returned to stretches where they were absent for decades.

✓ The Ganga's water quality is a UPSC perennial topic: Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) levels in Haridwar, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna — all tracked under NMCG; river dolphin population in Ganga has increased to 3,500+ (2026) from 2,800 (2020).

✓ Namami Gange Programme (2015): Rs 20,000 crore Phase 1; Rs 22,500 crore Phase 2 (Namami Gange 2.0); NMCG under Ministry of Jal Shakti.

✓ GS3 Angle: Ganga rejuvenation; NMCG; Namami Gange; STP; urban river management; BOD; Ganga river dolphin.

GS PAPER 2 — Governance · Polity · International Relations

1. 'Passport Is a Travel Document, Not Proof of Citizenship' — MEA Clarification

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GS 2: Polity: Indian Citizenship; Passports Act 1967; Citizenship Act 1955; SIR (Special Intensive Revision); NRC; What Proves Citizenship?

‣ June 24, 2026 (Passport Seva Divas): An MEA official clarified that 'an Indian passport is a travel document, not proof of citizenship' — triggering a major public debate about what actually proves Indian citizenship.

‣ Context: The statement was made on the 59th anniversary of the Passports Act (June 24, 1967) coming into force; simultaneously, the Election Commission's SIR (Special Intensive Revision) of electoral rolls is underway in Bihar, Punjab — raising citizenship documentation questions.

‣ The 'Quick Test' problem: Opposition MP Saket Gokhale posted a viral list: Passport (NO), Aadhaar (NO), PAN (NO), Voter ID (NO), Driving Licence (NO), Birth Certificate (NO for births after 1987), Domicile Certificate (NO) — none of these are conclusive proof of citizenship in a strict legal dispute.

‣ SC's SIR judgment (May 27, 2026): SC upheld SIR's constitutional validity BUT specified that the EC cannot adjudicate citizenship — only a Citizenship Act authority can. Deletion from voter rolls ≠ loss of citizenship.

The Legal Landscape: What DOES Prove Citizenship?

- Citizenship Act 1955: The governing law for Indian citizenship; determines citizenship through birth, descent, registration, or naturalisation. The Act does NOT create a 'citizenship certificate' that is routinely issued to every Indian — citizenship is a legal status, not a document.
- Conclusive citizenship evidence (in a legal dispute): Birth certificate + parents' citizenship evidence (for those born after December 3, 2004, BOTH parents must be Indian); OR NRC listing (only in Assam, for Assam NRC purposes); OR naturalization/registration certificate; OR 'legacy documents' showing long-term residence (for judicial/quasi-judicial proceedings).
- The 1987 and 2004 cut-offs: India progressively moved from jus soli (birth on Indian soil = citizenship) to conditional citizenship: Pre-July 1, 1987 = born in India → automatic citizen; July 1, 1987-December 2, 2004 = born in India if at least one parent is Indian; Post-December 3, 2004 = born in India only if BOTH parents are Indian citizens (and neither is illegal immigrant).

Why Passport Is Not 'Proof' in Strict Legal Sense

- Passports Act 1967: Governs the issuance of passports for international travel; the passport certifies that the holder is entitled to travel and return to India; it is issued after the government verifies the applicant's citizenship — but the passport itself is not the citizenship certificate.
- Analogy: A voter ID certifies electoral registration (which requires citizenship) — but if someone fraudulently obtained a voter ID, the ID doesn't make them a citizen; similarly, if someone fraudulently obtained a passport, the passport doesn't make them a citizen. The document is evidence, not the source, of the status.
- In practice: In 99.9% of cases, a passport serves as de facto proof of citizenship for immigration, banking, and daily life purposes. Former diplomat Nirupama Rao: 'A passport is issued BECAUSE the Government has satisfied itself that the applicant is an Indian citizen. It is therefore powerful evidence of citizenship in ordinary life.'

The NRC and SIR Connection

- SIR (Special Intensive Revision): EC's exercise to update electoral rolls with fresh Form 6 (re-enrolment) + citizenship declaration; people without citizenship documentation

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being deleted from voter rolls. SC allowed SIR but said EC cannot adjudicate citizenship — must refer to Citizenship Act authorities.

- National Register of Citizens (NRC): A comprehensive citizenship registry; only Assam has completed the NRC process (2019, post-Supreme Court supervision); 19.06 lakh people excluded from Assam NRC. A nationwide NRC is under the jurisdiction of the High Level Committee on Demographic Changes (constituted May 2026).
- The gap: India has 1.4 billion people but no universal citizenship document; the SIR and NRC processes expose this gap; the MEA's statement — while legally correct — has created public anxiety about NRC implications.

UPSC ANGLE

• SIR + Passport statement = the 'citizenship anxiety' of 2026: The simultaneity of the EC's SIR (June 2026) + the MEA's 'passport not citizenship' statement + the High Level Committee on Demographic Changes (May 2026) = a convergence of signals that suggest a large-scale citizenship verification exercise is being prepared.

• UPSC relevance: This topic touches on: Citizenship Act 1955 (jus soli → conditional citizenship); Passports Act 1967; 42nd Amendment (introduced 'secular' to Preamble); NRC in Assam; CAA 2019; Article 5-11 (citizenship provisions in Constitution); SIR and ECI's constitutional powers (Article 324).

• Citizenship Act 1955 amendments: 1986 (introduced one-parent rule); 2003 (two-parent rule from December 3, 2004); 2019 (CAA — fast-track citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, Christian minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh who entered India before December 31, 2014).

- **Jus Soli** — 'Right of the soil' — citizenship based on place of birth; India had full jus soli until June 30, 1987; progressively replaced by jus sanguinis (descent-based) from 1987 onwards.
- **SIR (Special Intensive Revision)** — EC's intensive update of electoral rolls; currently in Bihar and Punjab; requires fresh citizenship declarations; SC upheld SIR but limited EC's role to voter roll eligibility, not citizenship adjudication.
- **Passports Act 1967** — Governs issuance of Indian passports; defines conditions, revocation, impoundment; passport certifies eligibility to travel; it is evidence of citizenship but not conclusive proof in a strict legal dispute under the Citizenship Act.

2. Why Was the NewsClick Case Quashed? — Delhi HC on Press Freedom, UAPA, and Due Process

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GS 2: Governance: Press Freedom; UAPA; Criminal Procedure; Abuse of Process; ED; PMLA; Media Regulation.

▸ Delhi HC (Justice Neena Bansal Krishna), May 29, 2026 judgment (publicly available June 10, 2026): Quashed the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) FIR and the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) money laundering case against NewsClick and its editor-in-chief Prabir Purkayastha.

▸ 'Nothing but a gross abuse of the process of law' — Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, characterising the continuation of the case.

▸ IMPORTANT: The separate UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) case against Purkayastha is NOT quashed — it remains pending before a different court.
▸ Background: NewsClick received Rs 9.59 crore as FDI from US company Worldwide Media Holdings LLC (connected to Neville Roy Singham, alleged to have CCP links); police/ED alleged this was illegal foreign funding used to spread pro-China narratives.

Why the HC Quashed the Cases: Three Key Reasons

- **No cognizable offence disclosed:** Even if ALL allegations in the FIR were accepted as true, no offence under Sections 406 (criminal breach of trust) or 420 (cheating) of IPC was made out. For cheating: there must be a person who was deceived and induced to part with property; the foreign investor had NOT complained of being cheated. For criminal breach of trust: the money was not held 'in trust' — it was an investment. The FIR failed to disclose the basic ingredients of the crimes it alleged.
- **No FDI violation at the time of investment:** The 26% cap on foreign investment in digital news media was introduced ONLY in 2019; when NewsClick received the investment (2018-19), there was NO cap on FDI in digital news; the company had also sought advance clarification from MIB (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), which confirmed that online news was not subject to the print media restriction. Law cannot be applied retroactively.
- **Legitimate business expenditures criminalised:** ED alleged that NewsClick 'siphoned off' funds by paying salaries, consultancy fees, and rent; the HC held that these are normal business expenditures for a media company and cannot constitute criminal offences 'even if the company was incurring losses.' You cannot prosecute a company for paying its staff.

PMLA Connection: Quashed on Predicate Offence Grounds

- PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act): Money laundering proceedings (PMLA) require a 'predicate offence' — an underlying scheduled offence that generated 'proceeds of crime'; the ED's case was premised entirely on the EOW's FIR; once the FIR was quashed (no predicate offence), the PMLA case automatically fell — 'Consequently, the complete ECIR (Enforcement Case Information Report) is also quashed.'
- This is a critical PMLA precedent: If the predicate FIR is quashed, the ED's PMLA case cannot independently survive. The ruling reinforces that the ED cannot 'piggyback' on a weak FIR to pursue independent PMLA proceedings.

The UAPA Case Remains

- The separate UAPA case (Delhi Police Special Cell, October 2023 arrest of Purkayastha): Purkayastha was arrested under UAPA Section 13 (unlawful activity), Section 17 (raising funds for unlawful activity), and Section 18 (conspiracy for terrorist act) — alleging that the Chinese-connected funding was a 'terrorist conspiracy' against India's sovereignty.
- SC in 2024 (Prabir Purkayastha v Delhi Police): Found Purkayastha's initial UAPA arrest procedurally invalid; he was released on bail. The UAPA case itself remains pending — the HC's quashing of the EOW and ED cases does NOT affect the UAPA proceedings.

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• UAPA jurisprudence: UAPA's bail provisions are extremely strict (Section 43D(5) — court shall not grant bail unless there are reasonable grounds to believe accusations are prima facie false); Purkayastha's bail was granted because the arrest was procedurally invalid (not because the accusations were false).
• Press freedom context: Reporters Without Borders India ranking fell from 140 (2014) to 159 (2025) out of 180 countries; the NewsClick case became a symbol of the use of financial laws (PMLA, FCRA) against independent media; the HC quashing validates that concern.
• Abuse of process doctrine: The HC's 'gross abuse of process' characterisation is a strong indictment; in criminal law, 'abuse of process' means using legal mechanisms for purposes other than genuine law enforcement (harassment, silencing, etc.).

- 📌 **Predicate Offence (PMLA)** — The underlying scheduled criminal offence that generates 'proceeds of crime'; money laundering charges require a valid predicate offence; if the predicate FIR is quashed, PMLA proceedings cannot independently stand.
- 📌 **UAPA Section 43D(5)** — The bail provision under UAPA — court 'shall not' grant bail if there are reasonable grounds to believe the accusations are prima facie true; this effectively reverses the normal presumption of innocence for UAPA accused.
- 📌 **Abuse of Process (Criminal Law)** — The doctrine allowing courts to quash proceedings when the legal process is being used for improper purposes (harassment, political pressure, silencing) rather than genuine criminal prosecution.

3. Chinese EV Makers Are Shut Out of India — But Their Technology Isn't

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GS 3: Economy: EV industry; India-China trade; technology licensing; supply chain; Make in India; PLI for automobiles.

▸ Despite India blocking Chinese equity investment in the auto sector since 2020 (post-Galwan), Chinese EV technology is entering India through licensing deals, platform supply agreements, and component supply chains.
▸ Key deals: (1) Tata Motors + Chery (China): Tata will use Chery's carmaking PLATFORM to build premium EVs in India; no equity stake; supply arrangement only. (2) JSW Motor + Chery: Similar platform licensing; JSW will build Chery-based EVs at its western India plant. (3) Uno Minda + Inovance (China): JV to manufacture EV powertrains in India.
▸ Amara Raja + Gotion (ENDED): Amara Raja had a licensing deal with China's Gotion for lithium-ion cell technology; in 2025, Beijing's export control curbs (Trump tariff retaliation) forced Amara Raja to end the deal; Amara Raja now importing equipment and cells from China without the technology licence.
▸ Beijing's counter-move: China has imposed export controls on battery technology (response to US tariffs); Indian companies need Chinese engineers' visas for operational support — but visa restrictions create difficulties.

Why Chinese EV Technology Is the World's Most Advanced

- China leads in: battery technology (CATL, BYD — lowest cost per kWh globally, $85/kWh vs India's $140/kWh); EV platform engineering (modular skateboard platforms usable across multiple body styles); electric motor and inverter technology (SiC —

Silicon Carbide — inverters for efficiency); manufacturing process efficiency (Chinese EV factories produce a car in 18 hours vs. Indian factories' 40+ hours).
- BYD and SAIC are now the world's largest EV manufacturers by volume; India has no comparable domestic EV technology; Indian OEMs (Tata, Mahindra, MG) are all dependent on Chinese components, chemistry, or platforms.

India's Dilemma: Technology vs. Security

- The security concern: Chinese EV technology (especially software-driven systems — OTA updates, navigation, connected features) could create data security risks; a Chinese-connected EV platform could theoretically send location and user data to servers outside India; this is the 'connected car' version of the Huawei 5G concern.
- The commercial reality: Without Chinese technology, India's EV transition is delayed — Japanese, Korean, and European EV technology is more expensive and less technologically advanced; PLI-based domestic manufacturing requires some technology source; Chinese technology (via licensing, not equity) is the pragmatic path.
- Government's nuanced position: A senior Indian official: 'We are supportive of deals that lead to more local manufacturing or supply-chain shifts down the road. That is a good way to approach China.' — Technology licensing + local manufacturing mandate = acceptable; equity + data control = not acceptable.
- EMPS (Emission and Mobility Policy for Sustainable Transition): India's EV policy framework; PLI for Advanced Chemistry Cell batteries (Rs 18,100 crore); PLI for Automobile and Auto Components (Rs 26,058 crore); PM E-DRIVE scheme — all require domestic manufacturing, not just assembling imported kits.

UPSC ANGLE

• Press note 3 (2020): MHA notification requiring government approval for investments from countries sharing land borders with India (China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar); effectively blocks Chinese equity in Indian companies without prior approval; the Tata-Chery and JSW-Chery deals circumvent this by having NO equity — only platform licensing.

• The Chery and BYD routes: Chery is using 'platform as a service' (no equity); BYD applied for equity investment in India's JSW — rejected; BYD is now exploring a purely supply arrangement (like Chery's model). India's FDI rules effectively force Chinese companies to be technology suppliers, not equity investors.

• Implications for India's EV industry: India risks becoming a Chinese EV technology-dependent market without the equity-related accountability mechanisms; the challenge is ensuring that licensing deals have adequate data localisation and security clauses.

- **Press Note 3 (2020)** — MHA notification requiring government approval for FDI from countries sharing land borders with India (China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan); effectively blocks automatic Chinese equity investment in India.
- **Battery Cell PLI (Advanced Chemistry Cell PLI)** — Rs 18,100 crore PLI scheme for domestic battery cell manufacturing; targets 50 GWh of annual domestic battery manufacturing by 2030; Reliance, Ola Electric, Amara Raja, Hyundai are key beneficiaries; reduces Chinese battery import dependence.

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4. FCRA Rules Tightened: Religious Conversion Activities in Focus

[IE] Page Online

GS 2: Governance: FCRA; Foreign Funding; Religious Conversion; Civil Society; Minority Rights; Article 25-28.

▸ Indian Express: The June 2026 FCRA Rules amendment has a specific provision that goes beyond reporting: it explicitly restricts FCRA-registered organisations from using foreign funds for 'activities that directly or indirectly promote religious conversion.'
▸ The religious conversion restriction: The amendment states that no FCRA registration shall be granted to, and no FCRA funds shall be used by, organisations 'whose primary or incidental object is to promote, facilitate, or finance the conversion of any person from one religion to another.'
▸ Existing law: The IPC and Special Marriage Act do not prohibit religious conversion per se; several states have 'anti-conversion laws' (Gujarat, MP, UP, Odisha, Jharkhand) but no central law. The FCRA amendment effectively introduces a national restriction specifically on foreign-funded religious conversion activities.
▸ Missionary organisations affected: Many Christian missionary organisations (working in tribal areas, healthcare, education) receive foreign funding; if any of their activities are deemed to 'incidentally' promote conversion, they could lose FCRA registration.

- Article 25: Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion — the word 'propagation' was specifically included in the Constitution to protect Christian missionaries' evangelisation rights (this was a hard-won concession during the Constituent Assembly debates). The FCRA amendment, by restricting foreign-funded conversion activities, may be challenged under Article 25.
- The constitutional balance: The state can regulate the 'manner in which' religious practice is conducted (economic, financial, political activities associated with religion) — but it cannot restrict the core right of religious propagation. The FCRA amendment targets the 'foreign funding' aspect, not religious conversion per se — this may pass constitutional scrutiny.
- The tribal dimension: Many tribal communities receive welfare services (schools, hospitals, nutrition) from missionary NGOs funded from abroad; if these organisations lose FCRA registration, the welfare services to tribal communities would be disrupted — an Article 46 (welfare of SC/ST) concern.
- Political context: The Hindutva political movement has long sought to restrict religious conversion from Hinduism; multiple states with BJP governments have passed anti-conversion laws; the FCRA amendment provides a national-level restriction through the financial regulation route, potentially more legally durable than direct conversion bans.

UPSC ANGLE

• Anti-conversion laws in India: Currently in 11 states (Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, UP, Uttarakhand); require prior permission or notification for conversion; prohibit conversion by 'force, fraud, allurement'; penalties vary; SC challenge pending.
• Article 25 and 26: Art 25 = individual right to profess, practice, propagate religion; Art 26 = right of religious denominations to manage religious affairs; both are subject to 'public order, morality and health.' FCRA's restriction on foreign-funded conversion activities is framed as a public order / financial regulation measure.

- 📌 **Article 25** — Freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise, and propagate religion; subject to public order, morality, health; includes the right of religious groups to propagate their faith (not just individual practice).
- 📌 **FCRA Religious Conversion Restriction (2026)** — New FCRA Rule amendment prohibiting FCRA-registered organisations from using foreign funds for activities that 'directly or indirectly promote religious conversion'; potential conflict with Article 25; will face judicial challenge.

GS PAPER 3 — Economy · Energy · Environment · Agriculture

5. Iran Oil Returns — But Indian Refiners Likely to Hold Back

[IE] Page Online

GS 3: Economy: Oil imports; Iran sanctions; Indian refinery configuration; Russian crude; energy security; post-Muscat economic calculus.

‣ Post-Muscat Accord (June 14), Iran's oil exports are slowly resuming; Iranian crude is available at $65-70/barrel — significantly below Brent ($88-92), offering a ~$20-25/barrel discount.
‣ But Indian refiners are likely to hold back from immediately resuming large-scale Iranian crude purchases — despite the attractive price.
‣ Three reasons for caution: (1) Refinery configuration lock-in; (2) Sanctions re-imposition risk; (3) Shipping and insurance challenges.
‣ Context: Pre-2019 (before Trump imposed maximum pressure sanctions), Iran was India's 3rd largest crude supplier (~13 million tonnes/year, ~10% of imports); under sanctions (2019-2026), imports dropped to near-zero.

- **Refinery configuration lock-in:** Over the past 4 years of near-zero Iranian imports, Indian refineries (Reliance Jamnagar, BPCL, HPCL, IOC) have reconfigured their secondary processing units for Russian Urals and Middle Eastern Arab Heavy/Arab Medium crude grades. Iranian crude (Iran Heavy, Iran Light, Forozan) has different characteristics — different sulphur content, API gravity, distillation profile. Switching back requires reconfiguration of catalysts and processing settings — a slow, costly process.
- **Sanctions re-imposition risk:** The Muscat Accord gives only a 60-day Phase 2 nuclear negotiation window (August 13 deadline); if talks fail, US sanctions + blockade could return. Signing long-term offtake agreements with Iranian NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company) right now carries substantial risk — if Phase 2 fails, Indian refiners would be holding Iranian crude contracts they can't honour without secondary sanctions risk.
- **Shipping and insurance:** Even with sanctions suspended, global shipping companies and Lloyd's of London-backed maritime insurers are cautious; Standard Club and UK P&I Club — the dominant maritime insurers — have not yet formally cleared Iranian

cargo coverage; Indian tankers (state-owned VLCC fleet) can carry Iranian crude, but they are already committed to Russian crude supply chains.

- The Russian crude commitment: Indian refiners have now structured their operations around Russian Urals (42% of imports in May 2026 at $78-80/barrel); Iranian crude at $65-70/barrel IS cheaper, but switching incurs reconfiguration costs and sanctions risk; the effective net benefit of switching may be negative in the near term.
- ONGC's Farsi Block: India has an upstream oil interest in Iran — the Farsi Exploration Block (ONGC Videsh); development has been stalled for 15+ years; the Muscat Accord may revive discussions, but ONGC is unlikely to resume Farsi Block investments until Phase 2 nuclear deal is finalised.

UPSC ANGLE

• The Iran oil paradox: Iran is offering the cheapest oil India can buy; but short-term reconfiguration costs + sanctions risk + shipping uncertainty = Indian refiners rationally waiting 60-90 days to see if Phase 2 succeeds before shifting any volume away from Russian crude.

• ISPRL and strategic storage: India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (9.5 days) may actually be partially filled with cheap Iranian crude if the government instructs ISPRL to take advantage of the price window — buying for strategic storage rather than refining is a lower-risk way to benefit from Iranian oil's return.

- **NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company)** — Iran's state-owned oil company; manages all Iranian oil production and exports; the counterpart for any Indian refinery's Iranian crude offtake agreement.
- **Offtake Agreement** — A long-term contract to purchase a specified volume of crude oil from a supplier; signing Iranian offtake agreements now exposes Indian refiners to sanctions re-imposition risk if Phase 2 nuclear deal fails by August 13.

6. Why Grid India Is Turning to More Gas-Based Power This Monsoon

[IE] Page Online

GS 3: Energy: Grid management; renewable energy intermittency; gas power; electricity mix; monsoon grid challenges; India's power sector.

‣ Grid India (the national load dispatch centre operator) is increasing dispatch of gas-based power plants during June-September 2026 — counterintuitively, during the monsoon season when renewable energy should peak.

‣ The paradox: Monsoon season brings: reduced solar generation (cloud cover, rain — 40-60% reduction in solar output from peak); more wind in some regions but variable; river hydropower impacted by floods and silt; coal and gas remain the reliable baseload sources.

‣ Gas-based power: India has ~25,000 MW of gas-based power generation capacity (Natural Gas combined cycle plants), but most are operating at very low Plant Load Factor (PLF) of ~22% due to expensive gas; during the monsoon, with solar underperforming, gas power becomes the most responsive dispatchable source.

‣ The Hormuz gas consequence: India's LNG supply improved post-Muscat Accord (Dahej terminal received Qatari LNG on June 18); lower LNG spot prices (from $18/MMBTU to $12/MMBTU) make gas-based power more economical.

The Grid Stability Challenge During Monsoon

- Solar cliff: When clouds roll in during a heatwave-then-monsoon transition, India's 150+ GW of solar can drop 50-60% of output within minutes; the grid needs fast-ramping power sources to compensate; gas turbines can ramp up in 10-15 minutes (much faster than coal — 2-3 hours); this 'ramp service' is increasingly valuable.
- Hydropower variability: Indian rivers are heavily silted during peak monsoon; many hydropower plants reduce generation to prevent silt damage to turbine blades; Bhakra-Nangal and Tehri dam generation actually decreases in July-August due to silt management; this reduces grid supply at a time when demand remains high.
- Gas as 'balancing power': Grid India is now designating specific gas plants as 'demand response resources' — dispatchable on 10-minute notice; this is similar to the role gas plays in the UK grid and German Energiewende transition. India's gas power fleet, previously underutilised, is finding a new role as grid balancer.
- The Hormuz-LNG recovery: Reduced LNG spot prices (Qatari supply resuming) make gas power competitive again; at $12/MMBTU, combined-cycle gas generates at ~Rs 4.5/kWh — comparable to coal; this economics makes running idle gas plants viable for the first time in years.
- Post-monsoon solar rebound: October-March is India's peak solar generation season (clear skies, low humidity); Grid India is planning for the seasonal renewable rebalancing — gas bridges the June-September gap.

UPSC ANGLE

• India's power mix (2026): Coal ~60% of generation; Nuclear ~3%; Hydro ~8%; Wind ~9%; Solar ~15%; Gas ~4%; Others 1%. Gas's 4% share is far below its 25,000 MW installed capacity potential — the PLF issue. Monsoon 2026 may see gas's share temporarily rise to 6-7%.

• Energy transition implications: As India adds more solar and wind capacity, the need for gas (or other dispatchable sources — batteries, pumped hydro, green hydrogen) as a grid balancer will GROW. This is the 'flexibility challenge' of the energy transition — the more solar you add, the more you need flexible backup.

- **Plant Load Factor (PLF)** — The actual generation as a % of maximum possible generation; gas plants' PLF of ~22% reflects their under-utilisation due to expensive gas; coal PLF ~65%; the low PLF of gas plants means India has 'stranded' gas generation capacity.
- **Grid Balancing Service** — A service where power plants provide rapid ramp-up/down capability to maintain grid frequency stability; gas turbines are the fastest large-scale balancing resource; critical as variable renewable energy (solar, wind) share increases.

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7. High Heat and Low Rainfall Are Threatening Agricultural Produce

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GS 3 / GS 1: Agriculture: Kharif crops; climate change impact; heatwave; El Niño; monsoon deficit; food security; GS 1: Geography — Indian Monsoon.

‣ As of June 25, 2026: National monsoon rainfall deficit = 35% below Long Period Average (LPA); combined with persistent heatwaves (maximum temperatures 3-5°C above normal in Central India), agricultural production is under stress.
‣ Key crops at risk: Paddy transplanting (window: June 15-July 15) — delayed in Bihar, UP, MP, Odisha; Cotton sowing (Vidarbha, Marathwada) — 40% below normal acreage; Soybean (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra) — delayed; Pulses (Rajasthan, MP) — significant delay.
‣ Heat stress compounding the rainfall deficit: Even where brief rains have occurred, subsequent heatwaves evaporate soil moisture rapidly; crop germination failures reported; mango flowering in affected regions was damaged by late-season heat.
‣ IMD's outlook: La Niña conditions expected from August 2026 — likely to bring above-normal rainfall in July-September (second half of monsoon); the delayed onset may be compensated by a stronger second half.

- Paddy's sensitivity: Paddy (rice) needs 1,200-1,500 mm of water during the growing season; transplanting requires standing water in fields; with 35% monsoon deficit and no fallback irrigation in rain-dependent districts (eastern UP, Bihar), paddy acreage will be significantly reduced.
- Cotton belt (Vidarbha-Marathwada-Saurashtra): Cotton is a drought-tolerant crop but extremely sensitive to extremely high temperatures during boll development (>40°C causes boll drop); June-July temperatures in Vidarbha are reaching 44-46°C — damaging boll set.
- Oilseed price implications: If soybean acreage declines significantly (below 10 million hectares), India will need to increase edible oil imports; this is strategically sensitive — India imports 14 million tonnes of edible oil annually (Palm oil from Indonesia/Malaysia, Soy oil from Brazil/Argentina); a domestic soybean shortfall would increase the import bill by Rs 10,000-15,000 crore.
- El Niño 2026: India's 2026 monsoon is in an El Niño neutral-to-weak El Niño phase; El Niño years historically have 15-25% below-normal rainfall for India; the IMD's LPA forecast of 90% is optimistic — on the ground data (35% deficit as of June 25) suggests a more difficult season than forecast.

UPSC ANGLE
• Emergency Kharif Advisory (June 25, Ministry of Agriculture): Farmers advised to: (a) switch to short-duration pulses (moong, cowpea) from rice in deficit rain areas; (b) use SRI (System of Rice Intensification) — uses less water; (c) use soil moisture conservation techniques (mulching, micro-irrigation); (d) enrol in PMFBY (crop insurance) immediately.
• Food inflation risk: If Kharif is significantly reduced, food inflation (already 9.2% in April 2026) could rise further; the government has pre-positioned emergency wheat and rice stocks from FCI buffer but pulses and edible oil buffers are limited.

- **LPA (Long Period Average)** — The average rainfall over a 50-year reference period used to characterise India's monsoon; based on 1971-2020 data (updated periodically by IMD); India's monsoon normal = 87 cm from June-September; 35% below LPA = very deficient.
- **La Niña** — A cooling of equatorial Pacific Ocean sea surface temperatures; associated with ABOVE-normal Indian monsoon rainfall; IMD forecasts La Niña development from August 2026 — potentially saving the Kharif season's second half.

PRELIMS IN FOCUS

Passport, Citizenship, and SIR — Key Legal Facts	MEA statement (June 24, 2026): Indian passport is a travel document, not conclusive proof of citizenship. Passports Act 1967: Governs passport issuance for travel; issued after verifying citizenship. Citizenship Act 1955 amendments: Pre-July 1, 1987 = jus soli (birth in India); July 1, 1987-Dec 2, 2004 = birth in India + at least 1 Indian parent; Post-Dec 3, 2004 = birth in India + both Indian parents. What DOES prove citizenship (legal dispute): Birth certificate + parental citizenship; NRC listing (Assam only); naturalisation certificate; legacy documents (land records, pre-1971 voter rolls). SIR (Special Intensive Revision): EC's electoral roll update exercise; SC upheld SIR (May 27, 2026) but limited EC role to voter eligibility, NOT citizenship adjudication. Aadhaar, PAN, Voter ID = identity/residence documents, NOT conclusive citizenship proof.
NewsClick Case — Key Legal Points	Case: EOW FIR (IPC 406, 420) + ED ECIR (PMLA) against NewsClick and Prabir Purkayastha. HC judgment: Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, Delhi HC, May 29, 2026; 'Gross abuse of process of law.' Reasons quashed: No cognizable offence disclosed even if all facts accepted; no FDI cap on digital news in 2018-19 (cap introduced only in 2019); legitimate business expenditures (salaries, rent) cannot be criminalised; foreign investor had NOT complained of cheating. PMLA quashed: Because predicate offence (EOW FIR) quashed. UAPA case: Still pending. Prabir Purkayastha: Arrested October 2023 under UAPA; SC 2024 found arrest procedurally invalid; released on bail. PMLA Key principle: Predicate offence must stand for money laundering to stand.
NCORD — Narcotics Coordination	NCORD: Narco Coordination Centre; established 2016 by MHA. Structure (4 tiers): (1) Apex Level — chaired by Union Home Minister; (2) Executive Level — Home Secretary; (3) State Level; (4) District Level. Agencies involved: NCB (Narcotics Control Bureau), DRI (Directorate of Revenue Intelligence), CBI, Customs, State Police. NDPS Act 1985: The governing law for narcotics; administered by NCB; categorises drugs into 3 schedules; sets penalties (rigorous imprisonment + fines). Drug routes into India: Golden Crescent (Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran → Northwest India); Golden Triangle (Myanmar-Laos-Thailand → Northeast India); Sea routes (Maharashtra, Gujarat coasts); online/dark web (India-specific growth). Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan: MoSJE's community-based de-addiction awareness programme.
PRAGATI Platform — Key Facts	PRAGATI: Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation. Launched: March 25, 2015 by PM Modi. Developed by: PMO + NIC (National Informatics Centre). Type: ICT-based video-conferencing + data management platform. Purpose: PM personally reviews key government programmes and projects. Frequency: Monthly (last Wednesday). 52nd meeting: June 25, 2026. Achievements (52 meetings): 340+ projects worth

	Rs 17+ lakh crore reviewed; 1,400+ grievances resolved; flagged delays in infrastructure projects. GS2 relevance: E-governance; PM's project monitoring role; accountability in government; NIC.

NMCG / Namami Gange — Key Facts (2026 Update)	NMCG: National Mission for Clean Ganga; under Ministry of Jal Shakti. Namami Gange Phase 1 (2015): Rs 20,000 crore. Namami Gange 2.0 (2022+): Rs 22,500 crore. Progress (June 2026): 63 of 97 Ganga basin cities with approved Urban River Management Plans (URMPs); 58 new STPs commissioned; Ganga dissolved oxygen: 7-8 mg/L (from 3-4 mg/L in 2015); Ganga river dolphin: 3,500+ (up from 2,800 in 2020). Key parameters measured: BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand), DO (Dissolved Oxygen), Coliform bacteria. Cities monitored: Haridwar, Rishikesh, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Bhagalpur. NCRB target: 100% sewage treatment in 5 main stem cities by 2027.

MAPPING — PLACES IN NEWS

Place	Why in News / Key Facts
London, United Kingdom	Piyush Goyal's 3-day visit (June 25-27); finalising India-UK CETA implementation framework + DCC operational details; CETA effective July 15, 2026 — 20 days away; meeting UK Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds; Indian diaspora engagement in Silicon Roundabout (East London tech hub).
New Delhi (Delhi HC)	NewsClick case quashed (judgment: May 29, 2026; Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, Delhi High Court); 'gross abuse of process of law'; EOW FIR and ED ECIR quashed; UAPA case still pending. Delhi HC is located at Sher Shah Suri Marg, Central Delhi.
Alang, Bhavnagar, Gujarat	World's largest ship-breaking yard; 150+ active plots; 50,000+ workers; India is world's top ship recycler (2025) at 36% global share; Rs 45,000 crore annual value; Ship Recycling Act 2019 framework.
Farsi Block, Persian Gulf (Iran)	ONGC Videsh's upstream oil interest in Iran; development stalled 15+ years due to sanctions; Muscat Accord may revive discussions; Indian refiners holding back on Iranian crude despite discount ($65-70/barrel vs. Brent $88-92/barrel).
Vidarbha, Maharashtra	Cotton belt under acute stress from high heat (44-46°C) + 40% below normal monsoon; cotton boll drop due to extreme heat; Vidarbha is India's most farmer-distress-prone region (high farmer suicide rates linked to cotton crop failures); under Marathwada-Vidarbha Agri cluster plan.
Shan State, Myanmar	Golden Triangle's primary drug production zone; methamphetamine ('Yaba'), ketamine, fentanyl being produced; supply into India's northeastern states; agenda at NCORD 10th Apex Meeting (June 26); Myanmar civil war has increased drug production as armed groups fund operations through drug trade.

Talcher, Odisha	Site of India's first commercial coal gasification plant (under Coal Gasification Mission); GAIL + FertCo + BPCL partnership; will produce ammonia-urea using domestic coal (reducing LNG import dependence for fertiliser); key project discussed at BRICS coal gasification side event.
Bürgenstock, Switzerland	US-Iran nuclear Phase 2 talks continuing (June 25 update): No breakthrough yet; both sides remain at table; August 13, 2026 deadline; Iran's 'non-negotiable enrichment right' vs. US demand for 3.67% cap remains the core standoff; oil market watching every development.

End of Notes · 25 June 2026 · UPSC with Saurabh Kaushik

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