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DEEP ANALYSIS

for

**IAS MAINS
EXAMINATION**

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INDEX

1. GENERAL STUDIES 2	01
1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE	01
1.1.1. Online Speech Regulation in India	01
1.1.2. Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006	04
1.2. SOCIAL JUSTICE	06
1.2.1. Rising Inequality in India: Trends, Dimensions and Policy Concerns	06
2. GENERAL STUDIES 3	10
2.1. ECONOMY	10
2.1.1. India's Energy Security in a Fragmented Global Order	10
2.2. DISASTER MANAGEMENT	13
2.2.1. Urban Fire Safety in India: Challenges and Mitigation	13
2.3. DEFENCE	16
2.3.1. India's New Security Doctrine	16

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1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. ONLINE SPEECH REGULATION IN INDIA

Context:

In recent years, the Union government's approach towards regulating online content has become increasingly assertive. Through amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and expansive use of provisions under the Information Technology Act, 2000, the State has acquired significant control over digital discourse.



While the stated objective is to curb misinformation, unlawful content, and emerging threats such as AI-generated manipulation, the manner of enforcement has raised serious concerns regarding freedom of speech, institutional accountability, and democratic norms.

Legal Architecture and Its Evolution

The legal basis of online content regulation lies primarily in two provisions:

- Section CUA: Empowers the government to block public access to information on grounds such as sovereignty, integrity, and public order.
- Section 7U(3)(b): Removes "safe harbour" protection from intermediaries if they fail to act upon knowledge of unlawful content.

Originally, these provisions were meant to function within a narrow and procedurally safeguarded framework. This was clarified by the Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India*, which held that intermediaries are required to act only upon receiving:

- A court order, or
- A legally valid government notification.

This judgment was crucial in preventing arbitrary censorship and protecting Article 1U(1)(a).

However, current practices suggest a shift from rule-of-law-based regulation to executive-driven enforcement, often without the procedural safeguards envisaged by the Court.

Nature of the Emerging Problem

1. Compression of Response Time and Coercive Compliance

Digital platforms such as Meta and X are reportedly required to remove flagged content within extremely short timeframes (as little as three hours).

In such a scenario:

- Platforms are left with no realistic opportunity to assess legality.
 - The fear of losing safe harbour protection or facing criminal liability leads to over-compliance.

This transforms intermediaries into agents of state censorship rather than neutral platforms.

2. Expansion of Executive Power Without Legislative Backing

Mechanisms like the Sahyog portal—which allow law enforcement agencies across the country to send takedown requests—have effectively expanded censorship infrastructure.

The critical issue here is:

- These powers are being exercised without explicit parliamentary sanction.
- This undermines the principle of separation of powers, where lawmaking should remain within the domain of the legislature.

3. Opacity and Absence of Transparency

- Number of takedown orders
- Nature of content removed
- Grounds invoked

One of the most serious democratic deficits is the lack of publicly available data on:

This secrecy creates:

- Information asymmetry
- Lack of accountability
- Difficulty in judicial or public scrutiny

4. Chilling Effect on Free Speech

The cumulative impact of these measures is a “chilling effect”, where individuals refrain from expressing critical opinions due to fear of:

- Account suspension
- Legal consequences
- Loss of livelihood (especially for digital creators)

Importantly, this does not only affect unlawful speech but also legitimate political dissent, satire, and investigative journalism.

5. Institutional Concerns and Judicial Response

There are growing concerns that:

- Lower courts have, at times, failed to strictly enforce the precedent laid down in *Shreya Singhal*.
- The executive has avoided formal legislation, possibly to circumvent deeper scrutiny and debate.

This creates a situation where constitutional protections exist in theory but weaken in practice.

6. Risk of Political Misuse Across Regimes

A particularly important dimension is that such tools are politically neutral in structure but politically exploitable in practice.

- Today’s ruling party may benefit from narrative control.
- Tomorrow’s opposition, once in power, may use the same mechanisms.

Thus, the issue is not partisan but systemic, raising long-term concerns for democratic resilience.

Government's Justification: A Necessary Counterpoint

It is important to acknowledge that the State's concerns are not entirely unfounded. The digital ecosystem today faces:

- Rapid spread of misinformation and deepfakes
- Threats to national security
- Online radicalisation and communal tensions

In such a context, the government argues that:

- Speed is essential in content moderation
- Traditional legal processes may be too slow for digital harms

However, the key issue is not the existence of regulation, but the manner and extent of its exercise.

Way Forward

A more balanced and constitutionally sound approach would require:

- Legislative Backing

Any expansion of state power in digital regulation must be debated and enacted through Parliament, ensuring democratic legitimacy.

- Strengthening Judicial Oversight

Takedown mechanisms should involve:

- Independent review
- Time-bound appellate processes
- Transparency and Disclosure Regular publication of:
 - Takedown statistics
 - Legal grounds
 - Compliance reports
- Platform Accountability with Due Process Intermediaries should:
 - Avoid blind compliance
 - Develop robust internal review systems
- Digital Rights Framework

India needs a comprehensive framework that balances:

- Security concerns
 - Fundamental rights
 - Technological realities

Conclusion

The regulation of online speech sits at the intersection of technology, law, and democracy. While the State has a legitimate role in addressing digital harms, the concentration of unchecked power risks eroding the very democratic values it seeks to protect.

If left unaddressed, such trends could gradually transform India's digital public sphere into a controlled and homogenised space, undermining pluralism and dissent. The challenge, therefore, lies in crafting a framework that is effective yet restrained, powerful yet accountable, and firm yet constitutionally grounded

Q. *Regulation of online speech in India increasingly reflects a tension between security and liberty." Discuss. (10 Marks)*

1.1.2. FOREST RIGHTS ACT (FRA), 2006

Context:

The Allahabad High Court ruled that the Forest Rights Act, 2006 overrides conflicting earlier court orders, while quashing rejection of Tharu tribal claims and highlighting ongoing administrative and judicial violations undermining forest dwellers' rights.



About the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** aims to "undo the historical injustice" meted out to forest-dwelling communities.

Objectives of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

- **Correct historical injustice** faced by forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest communities
- **Recognise and vest forest rights** (individual and community) over land and resources
- Ensure **livelihood security** through access to forest produce and land
- Promote **sustainable forest conservation** through community participation
- Strengthen **decentralised governance** via Gram Sabha-led decision-making
- Protect forest dwellers from **arbitrary eviction and displacement**
- Balance **ecological conservation with social justice**

Key Provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

1. Eligibility Criteria

- **Scheduled Tribes (FDST):** Must primarily reside in forest land and depend on it for livelihood.
- **Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD):** Must have resided in and depended on the forest for **three generations (75 years)** prior to December 13, 2005.

2. Types of Rights Recognized

- **Title Rights:** Ownership of land being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers (max **4 hectares**). No new lands are granted; only land already under occupation is recognized.
- **Use Rights:** Rights to **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)** (e.g., honey, wax, tendu leaves), grazing areas, and water bodies.

- **Forest Management Rights:** Right to protect, regenerate, or conserve any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting.

3. Authorities Involved (The Process)

1. **Gram Sabha:** The **initiating authority**. It passes a resolution recommending whose rights should be recognized.
2. **Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC):** Examines the resolution passed by the Gram Sabha.
3. **District Level Committee (DLC):** The **final authority** to approve or reject the claims.

Key Challenges of Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006

- **High Rejection Rates:** Claims are frequently dismissed by District Level Committee (DLC) on technicalities or "insufficient evidence" without granting claimants an opportunity to appeal.
- **Administrative Resistance:** Forest departments often prioritize colonial-era laws over the FRA, viewing the recognition of tribal rights as a loss of territorial control.
- **Consent Violations:** Developmental and mining projects often bypass the mandatory "free, prior, and informed consent" of the Gram Sabha during forest land diversion.
- **Onerous Proof for Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD):** The "three-generation" (75-year) residency requirement for non-tribals is nearly impossible to document, leading to widespread exclusion.
- **Institutional Weakness:** Gram Sabhas often lack the technical tools (like GPS) and legal expertise necessary to effectively initiate and defend rights claims.
- **Mapping & Boundary Conflicts:** Poor digital records and unclear demarcation create persistent legal friction between community lands and "Protected Areas."

Way Forward

- **Digitization & Tech-Integration:** Use high-resolution satellite imagery and GPS mapping to assist Gram Sabhas in boundary demarcation, reducing dependence on forest department records.
- **Strengthening Gram Sabhas:** Provide legal and technical training to local bodies to ensure they can effectively initiate claims and exercise their "Informed Consent" powers.
- **Streamlining Appeals:** Establish a transparent, time-bound grievance redressal mechanism that allows claimants to contest DLC rejections before an independent tribunal.
- **Sensitization of Bureaucracy:** Conduct mandatory training for Forest and Revenue officials to shift their role from "controllers" to "facilitators" of tribal rights.
- **Convergent Governance:** Integrate forest rights with welfare schemes (like MGNREGA and Mission Antyodaya) to ensure that land ownership translates into sustainable livelihoods and forest conservation.

Conclusion

The FRA is a landmark tool for social justice. Success requires aligning judicial precedents with legislative intent, empowering Gram Sabhas, and ensuring administrative transparency to bridge the gap between statutory rights and ground-level implementation.

Q. "Despite the progressive intent of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, its implementation remains fraught with legal and administrative challenges." Critically examine in the light of recent judicial developments. (15 Marks)

1.2. SOCIAL JUSTICE

1.2.1. RISING INEQUALITY IN INDIA: TRENDS, DIMENSIONS AND POLICY CONCERNS

Context

Recent policy developments such as the implementation of the new Labour Codes and the replacement of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 have reignited debates on inequality, labour welfare and rural distress in India.



What is Inequality?

Inequality is the structural disparity in the distribution of economic assets (income, wealth) and life chances (education, healthcare, political voice). It is not merely about "having less," but about the **gap** between different segments of a population.

Major Types of Inequality

- 1. Income Inequality:** Unequal distribution of salaries, wages and earnings among individuals, where high-income groups earn disproportionately more than low-income workers.

Example: A corporate CEO earning lakhs per month while a daily wage labourer earns only a few hundred rupees a day.
- 2. Wealth Inequality:** Unequal ownership of assets such as land, property, gold, shares and businesses, leading to concentration of wealth in a few hands.

Example: A small percentage of Indians owning large urban properties and financial assets while many rural families remain landless.
- 3. Consumption Inequality:** Differences in the ability of households to spend on goods and services such as education, healthcare and lifestyle needs.

Example: Urban affluent families spending heavily on private education and luxury goods while poor households struggle to afford basic nutrition.
- 4. Social Inequality:** Unequal access to opportunities and resources based on caste, gender, religion, class or region.

Example: Women and Scheduled Castes often facing barriers in employment, education and social mobility compared to dominant social groups.

Measuring Inequality

1. Gini Coefficient

A statistical measure used to assess the degree of inequality in income, wealth or consumption distribution within a society.

- Gini Coefficient = 0 → Perfect Equality (Everyone has equal income or resources)
- Gini Coefficient = 1 → Perfect Inequality (One person possesses all income or resources)

Example:

If two households earn almost the same income, inequality is low; but if one household earns significantly more than others, inequality is high.

2. Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE)

MPCE measures the average monthly consumption expenditure per person in a household and is widely used to study consumption inequality in India.

Formula:

$$\text{MPCE} = \text{Total Monthly Household Expenditure} \div \text{Total Number of Family Members}$$

Example:

If a family spends Rs. 20,000 per month and has 5 members, then MPCE = Rs. 4,000.

Key Findings on Inequality in India

Based on the **World Inequality Lab (2024)** and the **NSSO Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES 2023-24)**, here are 5 crisp points for your notes:

- **Rise of the "Billionaire Raj":** Inequality in India has skyrocketed since the early 2000s. As of 2022-23, the **top 1%** of the population holds **22.6% of the national income** and **40.1% of the total wealth**, marks that are historically higher than even the British Colonial Raj.
- **Declining Consumption Inequality:** Contrary to wealth trends, the **Gini Coefficient for consumption** has shown a decline. In 2023-24, it dropped to **0.237 (Rural)** and **0.284 (Urban)**, suggesting that while wealth is concentrating at the top, basic consumption is becoming slightly more distributed across the broader population.
- **Narrowing Rural-Urban Gap:** The consumption gap between rural and urban India is shrinking. The difference in Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) fell from **84% in 2011-12 to 70% in 2023-24**, driven largely by faster growth in rural non-food spending.
- **Shifting Spending Patterns (Non-Food Dominance):** For the first time, food accounts for **less than half** of the average rural household's expenditure (47%). Spending has shifted toward conveyance, consumer durables, and processed foods, reflecting a transition in the rural economy.
- **Welfare Net Impact:** Social welfare programs (like free food grains under PMGKY) have a measurable impact on the bottom deciles. When "imputed values" of free items are included, the MPCE for the poorest 5-10% shows the highest growth rate, indicating that the safety net is propping up bottom-tier consumption.

Causes of Rising Inequality in India

1. **Skill-Biased Technological Change (SBTC):** Rapid digitalization and AI adoption disproportionately reward high-skilled workers in the tech and service sectors. Conversely, low-skilled workers face stagnant wages or job displacement due to automation.
2. **Regressive Taxation and Loopholes:** High reliance on indirect taxes (like GST) burdens the poor more than the rich as a percentage of income. Simultaneously, the ultra-wealthy often leverage tax exemptions and loopholes to pay lower effective rates.
3. **Capital Concentration vs. Labor Stagnation:** Returns on capital (stocks, real estate) have historically outpaced growth in real wages. This "Piketty Effect" ensures that those who already own assets accumulate wealth much faster than those relying solely on labor.

- 4. Informality and Job Polarisation:** Over 90% of India's workforce remains in the informal sector without social security or collective bargaining power. This creates a "dual economy" where a tiny formal elite prospers while the rest remain in subsistence.
- 5. Low Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP):** Persistent gendered barriers keep India's FLFP at a low (approx. 15.7%), leading to "missing" household income. This gender gap suppresses the economic mobility of nearly half the population.
- 6. Structural Gaps in Human Capital:** Unequal access to high-quality healthcare and "elite" education creates a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Children from affluent backgrounds access high-value networks, while others remain trapped in low-productivity cycles.

Key Government Initiatives to Reduce Inequality

1. Viksit Bharat—G RAM G Act, 2025

Replacing MGNREGA, this Act increases the statutory employment guarantee from 100 to **125 days** per rural household. It prioritizes the creation of climate-resilient assets and "saturation-based" delivery to ensure no eligible rural family is left without a livelihood.

2. PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) Extension

The government has extended this massive food security net until **December 2028**, providing 5kg of free food grains monthly to over 80 crore people. This serves as a critical buffer against food inflation, protecting the bottom 60% of the population from consumption shocks.

3. Social Security for Informal & Gig Workers (e-Shram)

With the **Code on Social Security (2020)** coming into force in late 2025, gig and platform workers are being integrated into the e-Shram portal. This provides them with Universal Account Numbers (UAN) and access to health insurance under **Ayushman Bharat (AB-PMJAY)**.

4. PMAY 2.0 (Urban & Gramin)

Launched in late 2024, PMAY 2.0 targets the construction of **3 crore additional houses** to bridge the housing gap. By focusing on "Housing for All," the initiative aims to reduce wealth inequality by providing permanent physical assets to the landless and urban poor.

5. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) Saturation

The 2026-27 policy shift aims for **100% saturation** in social pensions for the elderly, widows, and disabled persons. Through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), the mission eliminates middlemen to ensure that the most vulnerable receive monthly financial aid directly in their bank accounts.

6. Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

This scheme targets "Horizontal Inequality" by developing socio-economic infrastructure in historically marginalized and minority-concentrated areas. It focuses on schools, health centers, and skill labs to ensure that regional disparities do not hinder individual economic mobility

Way Forward: Mitigating Inequality

- 1. Universal Social Security:** Accelerate the transition of informal workers into the formal sector via the **e-Shram** portal to provide portable health, pension, and insurance benefits.
- 2. Progressive Fiscal Policy:** Balance the tax structure by exploring **wealth/inheritance taxes** for the ultra-rich while lowering GST on essential commodities to reduce the burden on the poor.

- 3. Investing in the Care Economy:** Expand public childcare and elderly care to improve **Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)** and address gender-based economic gaps.
- 4. Outcome-Oriented Human Capital:** Shift focus from "access" to "quality" in education and health to ensure **intergenerational mobility** regardless of a household's paying capacity.
- 5. Labor-Intensive Growth:** Incentivize high-employment sectors (textiles, food processing) via **PLI 2.0** to create mass jobs for the semi-skilled workforce and counter skill-biased disparity.
- 6. Rurban Industrialization:** Decentralize industries through the **Viksit Bharat Mission (Gramin)** to create agro-processing clusters, keeping value addition and income within the rural economy.

Conclusion

To achieve **Viksit Bharat by 2047**, India must bridge structural gaps through inclusive growth. Prioritizing social security, progressive taxation, and rural industrialization will ensure that prosperity is shared equitably, leaving no citizen behind.

Q. Inequality in the ownership pattern of resources is one of the major causes of poverty. Discuss in the context of 'paradox of poverty'. (15 Marks)

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Prelims Test Series

2.1. ECONOMY

2.1.1. INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY IN A FRAGMENTED GLOBAL ORDER

Context:

The recent conflicts in West Asia and the Russia-Ukraine war have highlighted how geopolitical crises directly affect India's economy, especially through energy prices and supply chains. India's energy security is no longer only about cheap imports; it now depends on resilience, diversification, and strategic preparedness.



The Evolving Paradigm of Energy Security

- **From "Cheap Fuel" to "Strong Buffers"** Energy security has shifted from simply finding the lowest price to building a system that can survive sudden global shocks. Nations are now choosing to pay more for "insurance" such as extra storage and spare supply capacity prioritizing economic safety over simple market efficiency.
- **Diversification and "Power of Choice"** True security now depends on having a diverse "basket" of suppliers, allowing a country to quickly pivot if one region becomes unstable. India's strategy of balancing Russian imports with traditional Gulf ties is a prime example of using "optionality" to maintain steady supplies.
- **The Fragility of Sea Lanes** Even with many suppliers, the physical journey of oil remains a major risk because it often passes through narrow "chokepoints" like the Strait of Hormuz. Because 25% of global oil travels through these vulnerable areas, protecting sea routes with naval strength has become as important as the fuel itself.
- **Energy as a Shield for the Economy** Steady energy supplies are now seen as the foundation of a healthy domestic economy, directly affecting inflation and growth. By securing supply chains, a nation protects its citizens from "imported" economic crises, ensuring that global volatility doesn't derail domestic prosperity.

Global Energy Market: Breakdown of the Old Order

- **From Pipelines to Sea Routes:** The Russia-Ukraine war destroyed the myth of pipeline reliability, pushing the world toward sea-borne LNG. This shift has elevated the strategic risk of maritime **chokepoints**, such as the **Strait of Hormuz**, where local conflict now dictates global prices.
- **Security Over Savings:** The "just-in-time," low-cost procurement model has been replaced by a "**security-first**" approach. Nations now treat energy as an insurance policy, investing heavily in massive strategic reserves and spare capacity to buffer against supply shocks.
- **The Power of "Optionality":** Fixed, long-term dependencies on single suppliers are over. Large importers like India now utilize "**optionality**" the ability to switch between diverse sources like Russia, the US, and the Gulf—to maintain leverage and stability.

- **Europe's Strategic Pivot:** Europe has permanently severed its reliance on cheap Russian gas, which once met 45% of its demand. This collapse forced a rapid grid redesign, a 20% drop in consumption, and a total commitment to the global LNG market.
- **New "Green" Vulnerabilities:** The energy transition is trading oil dependency for a reliance on **critical minerals**. The global risk is shifting from "extracting fuel" to "controlling processing," creating new geopolitical dependencies on nations that dominate the battery supply chain.

Government Initiatives on India's Energy Security

1. Strategic & Maritime Security

- **Operation Sankalp:** Launched by the Indian Navy to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through the **Strait of Hormuz** and the Gulf region.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) Programme:** To create a "national insurance" against supply chain breaks, India is building massive underground storage facilities. Current capacities in **Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur** are being expanded to increase the number of days India can survive without imports.

2. Diversification of Energy Mix

- **National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM):** With an outlay of **₹19,744 crore**, it aims to make India a global hub for Green Hydrogen. The goal is to produce 5 MMT per year by 2030, potentially saving over ₹1 lakh crore in fossil fuel imports.
- **PM JI-VAN Yojana:** Focuses on creating an ecosystem for **Second Generation (2G) Bioethanol**. By converting agricultural waste (like stubble) into fuel, it supports the **Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)** and reduces reliance on imported crude.
- **PM-KUSUM & PM Surya Ghar:** These schemes focus on "solarizing" the demand side agriculture and households to reduce the burden on the national grid and decrease the fiscal cost of energy subsidies.

3. Securing Future Technologies

- **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM):** Launched in **2025**, this mission is vital for the transition to EVs and renewables. It focuses on:
 - **Domestic Exploration:** Targeting over 1,200 sites for minerals like Lithium and Cobalt.
 - **Overseas Acquisition:** Through **KABIL** (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd), India is securing mineral assets in the "Lithium Triangle" (South America) and Australia.
 - **Recycling Incentives:** A ₹1,500 crore scheme to recover critical minerals from e-waste and old batteries.

4. Geopolitics and Diplomacy

- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** A global platform led by India to promote solar energy deployment, particularly in "sun-shine" countries, reducing global dependence on fossil-fuel-rich regions.
- **Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA):** Launched during India's G20 presidency to accelerate the global uptake of biofuels, creating a more stable and diversified alternative fuel market.

Challenges to India's Energy Security

- **Extreme Import Dependence:** India remains structurally vulnerable, importing nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements while domestic production remains stagnant at around 28.7 MMT. This creates a direct link between global geopolitical volatility and domestic inflation/GDP growth.
- **Geographic and Maritime Bottlenecks:** Diversifying suppliers does not solve the "chokepoint" problem, as nearly 45% of imports still transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Regional tensions in these sea lanes necessitate costly military interventions, like Operation Sankalp, to ensure supply continuity.
- **The "Processing" Monopoly:** The shift toward green energy introduces a new reliance on critical minerals (Lithium, Cobalt, Rare Earths) where China controls over 90% of production. India currently processes less than 5% of its future battery-grade needs, risking a shift from oil-dependency to mineral-dependency.
- **Strategic Reserve Inadequacy:** Compared to peers like Japan (254 days of reserves), India's strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) are still in an early stage of expansion. Current capacity lacks the depth required to cushion the economy against a prolonged total disruption of global supply chains.
- **Energy Transition Paradox:** While the transition to EVs and solar reduces long-term oil demand, the short-term cost of technology adoption and infrastructure overhaul is immense. Transitioning too fast without a secure mineral supply chain could destabilize the energy market before the benefits are realized.

Way Forward for India's Energy Security

- **Scaling Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** India must rapidly expand its underground storage capacity beyond the current phases to match the resilience of nations like Japan. Increasing the "days of cover" ensures a larger buffer against sudden supply shocks or total blockages of maritime chokepoints.
- **Securing Critical Mineral Supply Chains:** To avoid a new dependency on China, India needs to aggressively pursue "mineral diplomacy" through the KABIL consortium. This involves acquiring overseas assets and building domestic high-end processing facilities for lithium, cobalt, and rare earths.
- **Enhancing Maritime Defense and Diplomacy:** Strengthening the Indian Navy's "Blue Water" capabilities is essential for securing vital sea lanes like the Strait of Hormuz. Sustained initiatives like Operation Sankalp should be integrated into a broader maritime security framework with regional partners.
- **Decarbonization and Demand Side Management:** The "oil intensity" of the Indian economy must be reduced by accelerating the FAME-II scheme for EVs and shifting freight from road to rail. Incentivizing green hydrogen and biofuels will decouple industrial growth from global crude price fluctuations.
- **Leveraging "Market Power" for Better Terms:** As a rare engine of incremental oil demand, India should negotiate more favorable "destination-free" contracts and eliminate the "Asian Premium." Using this leverage allows India to secure supply priority and pricing discounts during periods of global surplus.

Conclusion

India must transition from **tactical agility** to **structural resilience**. By securing **critical mineral chains** and expanding **strategic reserves**, India can decouple its **macroeconomic stability** from **geopolitical shocks**, ensuring a **sustainable, self-reliant** energy future.

Q. "Energy security in the 21st century is no longer limited to access to oil, but includes resilience, diversification and supply-chain security." Discuss in the context of India's changing geopolitical environment. (15 Marks)

2.2. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

2.2.1. URBAN FIRE SAFETY IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION

Context:

Recent fire incidents in Delhi (Shahdara, Palam, Dwarka) have highlighted critical gaps in urban planning, building safety protocols, and electrical infrastructure during peak summer months.



Introduction

Urban fire safety refers to the preventive and protective measures designed to minimize fire risks in densely populated areas. In India, rapid urbanization often bypasses **National Building Code (NBC)** compliance, leading to avoidable tragedies.

Constitutional Provisions for Urban Fire Safety in India

- **Article 243W & 12th Schedule:** Introduced by the **74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992)**.
 - "Fire Services" is listed as **Entry 7** in the 12th Schedule.
 - It empowers Municipalities to perform functions related to fire prevention and life safety.
- **State List (Entry 6):** Public health and sanitation, including fire services, fall under the legislative jurisdiction of individual States.

Reasons for Frequent Urban Fire Accidents in India

1. **Violation of National Building Code (NBC):** Many buildings lack mandatory fire exits, open terraces, and refuge areas. Unauthorized constructions and illegal extensions often block ventilation, turning structures into "smoke chambers" during a fire.
2. **Electrical Overloading and Poor Wiring:** The use of high-wattage appliances (like ACs) during summer exceeds the designed capacity of old wires. Frequent bypassing of **Miniature Circuit Breakers (MCBs)** prevents the system from tripping safely during a short circuit.
3. **Compromised Security Features:** Installation of permanent metallic grills on balconies and windows intended for theft prevention traps occupants inside. Similarly, modern electronic locks often fail to release during power cuts or fire-related malfunctions.

4. **Inefficient Urban Planning and Congestion:** Narrow lanes and haphazardly placed overhead hanging wires prevent fire tenders from reaching the spot. Illegal parking and low-entry gates often block access for heavy hydraulic fire-fighting equipment.
5. **Negligence in Mixed-Use Occupancy:** Residential buildings are frequently used as small-scale factories or warehouses for flammable materials. These spaces rarely follow the stringent industrial fire safety protocols required for hazardous storage.
6. **Lack of Fire Safety Audits and Enforcement:** Local municipal bodies often suffer from a shortage of inspectors, leading to "paper-only" Fire NOCs. Without periodic audits, active systems like smoke detectors and sprinklers often remain non-functional or unmaintained.

Government Initiatives for Urban Fire Safety in India

1. Legislative and Policy Frameworks

- **National Building Code (NBC) 2016:** Published by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**, Part 4 of this code is the definitive guide for fire safety. It mandates structural requirements like fire-resistant doors, specific exit widths, and mandatory fire lifts in high-rises.
- **Model Building Bye-Laws (2016):** Issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), these guide local municipal bodies to integrate NBC fire safety standards into their building approval processes.

2. Institutional and Strategic Guidelines

- **NDMA Guidelines (2012):** The **National Disaster Management Authority** has issued specific protocols for the "Revitalization of Fire and Emergency Services." These provide a roadmap for state governments to scale up training, manpower, and equipment.
- **SFAC (Standing Fire Advisory Council):** Functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs, this body acts as the apex technical advisory committee to the government on all matters related to fire services.

3. Financial Modernization (XV Finance Commission)

The 15th Finance Commission has made significant budgetary provisions to bridge the infrastructure gap:

- **State-Level Allocation:** Approximately **₹5,000 crore** was earmarked specifically for the "Modernization of Fire Services" across states.
- **Urban Grants:** A portion of the **₹38,000 crore** technical grant for urban local bodies is tied to improving disaster management capabilities, including fire preparedness.

Technical, Technological, and Community Initiatives

- **Fire Safety Audits:** Mandatory periodic inspections of "Special Buildings" (hospitals, malls) by certified auditors are required to renew the **Fire No-Objection Certificate (NOC)**.
- **National Fire Service College (NFSC):** Based in Nagpur under the MHA, it provides specialized training and professional degree courses to develop a skilled cadre of fire officers.
- **Aapda Mitra Scheme:** A community-centric initiative where local volunteers are trained as first responders for disaster evacuation, including basic fire safety and first aid.

Challenges in Urban Fire Management

- **Weak Municipal Enforcement:** Building bye-laws and National Building Code (NBC) standards are often bypassed during construction due to corruption or lack of technical staff.
- **Legacy Infrastructure:** Older, congested urban pockets feature narrow lanes and overhead hanging wires that physically prevent the entry of modern fire tenders.
- **Shortage of Manpower and Equipment:** Most state fire services operate with significant vacancies and lack advanced high-rise firefighting tools like long-reach hydraulic ladders.
- **Poor Maintenance of Active Systems:** In many buildings, installed safety features like smoke detectors and sprinklers become non-functional over time due to a lack of regular servicing.
- **Unregulated Mixed-Use Occupancy:** The proliferation of small-scale industries and warehouses within residential zones creates high-risk zones that lack proper industrial safety protocols.
- **Low Public Awareness:** A general lack of "safety culture" leads residents to block escape routes or install permanent window grills that turn homes into death traps during emergencies.

Global Best Practices in Urban Fire Safety

Country	Practice Name	Explanation
USA	NFPA Standards & NEC Compliance	The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) sets 300+ rigorous codes, including the National Electrical Code (NEC) , which is updated every 3 years to mandate advanced circuit breakers that prevent electrical fires.
Japan	Fire-Resilient Urbanism (Bousai)	Tokyo uses " Fire Containment Zones " and earthquake-resistant building codes that mandate automatic gas shut-off valves and "seismic breakers" to prevent post-disaster fire outbreaks.
Singapore	Mandatory Fire Safety Managers (FSM)	The Civil Defence Force (SCDF) mandates a certified Fire Safety Manager for all public and industrial buildings to conduct bi-annual drills and daily safety audits, ensuring zero-gap enforcement.

Way Forward for Urban Fire Safety

1. **Strict Enforcement of the NBC:** Municipalities must link **Property Tax and Insurance premiums** to National Building Code (NBC) compliance, ensuring safety is a financial incentive rather than a choice.
2. **Mandatory Electrical Safety Audits:** Implement periodic third-party electrical inspections for buildings older than 15 years to identify **overloaded circuits** and mandate the installation of high-quality circuit breakers.
3. **Modernizing Fire Infrastructure:** Utilize the **XV Finance Commission grants** to induct narrow-lane fire tenders, drones for high-rise surveillance, and IoT-based hydrants that signal local stations when water levels are low.
4. **Retrofitting and Design Innovation:** Promote the use of "**Swing-away**" or "**Removable**" **metallic grills** and fire-resistant materials in existing high-density residential areas to balance security with emergency evacuation.

5. **Community-Led Preparedness:** Scale up the **Aapda Mitra scheme** to create a cadre of "Fire Mitras" in every Resident Welfare Association (RWA) to lead mock drills and maintain clear escape routes.
6. **Institutional Accountability:** Adopt the Singapore model of appointing **Certified Fire Safety Managers** for large residential complexes, making them legally responsible for the functionality of active firefighting systems.

Conclusion

Urban fire safety must evolve from a reactive service to a proactive governance pillar. By integrating **NBC compliance, technological modernization, and community-led preparedness**, India can build resilient cities that prioritize human life over structural shortcuts.

Q. Recent urban fire accidents in India expose deeper failures in urban planning, electrical safety, and disaster preparedness. Examine the major challenges in ensuring fire safety in Indian cities and suggest measures to improve urban resilience. (15 Marks)

2.3. DEFENCE

2.3.1. INDIA'S NEW SECURITY DOCTRINE

Context:

Operation Sindoor was launched by India on May 7, 2025, as a high-intensity retaliatory strike against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack of April 22, 2025. It marked a major shift in India's national security doctrine.



Significance of Operation Sindoor

- **Doctrinal Shift:** It marks the formal end of "Strategic Restraint," replacing the traditional "dossier approach" with a **zero-tolerance policy** where cross-border terrorism is treated as an official **act of war**.
- **Nuclear De-hyphenation:** By striking deep-state targets (e.g., Bahawalpur and Muridke), India successfully called the adversary's **nuclear bluff**, demonstrating the ability to conduct high-intensity operations below the nuclear threshold.
- **Operational Integration:** The mission served as a successful litmus test for **Jointmanship**, showcasing seamless synergy between the Army, Navy, and Air Force under a unified political directive.
- **Technological Sovereignty:** The stellar performance of indigenous platforms and air-defence systems (like the S-400) validated the push for **Atmanirbharta**, proving that domestic innovation is critical for national security.

Features of the New Indian Doctrine

- **Proactive Retribution:** India has moved from diplomatic "reactive restraint" to a policy of immediate military costs. It no longer relies on international dossiers, instead choosing to defend its interests through decisive, independent action.
- **Calling the Nuclear Bluff:** The doctrine identifies a "conventional space" for military strikes below the nuclear threshold. By targeting assets deep within adversary territory, India has demonstrated that nuclear status is not a shield for proxy warfare.
- **Integrated Combat Synergy:** Defense is now a "whole-of-nation" effort. It emphasizes "Jointness," synchronizing the Army, Navy, and Air Force with advanced technology (like the S-400) to create an overwhelming, unified response.
- **Zero-Tolerance Mandate:** Cross-border terrorism is now classified as an "Act of War." This provides the military with a political "free hand" to dictate the timing and intensity of strikes, shifting the psychological burden of uncertainty to the aggressor.

Strategic Implications for India

1. **Shift from Defensive to Proactive Deterrence:** India has moved away from a purely reactive posture to one of "credible deterrence" that includes preemptive options. This implies a willingness to strike at the sources of terror or aggression across borders to maintain national integrity.
2. **Integrated Theatre Commands (ITC):** The transition toward jointness among the Army, Navy, and Air Force aims to optimize resource allocation and operational synchronization. This structural shift ensures a unified military response to hybrid threats and two-front challenges.
3. **Atmanirbharta in Defense Technology:** There is a decisive push for indigenous manufacturing to reduce dependency on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). This strengthens strategic autonomy, ensuring that critical supply chains remain resilient during periods of global geopolitical friction.
4. **Multi-Domain Operations and Cyber-Space Security:** The doctrine recognizes that modern warfare extends beyond land, sea, and air into the digital and extra-atmospheric realms. Significant emphasis is now placed on protecting critical information infrastructure and enhancing space-based surveillance.
5. **Strategic Autonomy through Multi-Alignment:** India seeks to maintain independent decision-making by engaging with multiple global power centers simultaneously. This allows the nation to balance its interests in forums like the Quad and BRICS while acting as a "Vishwa Bandhu" (Global Friend).

Challenges of India's New Strategic Doctrine

1. **Risk of Nuclear Escalation:** Frequent military retaliation against a nuclear-armed Pakistan increases the danger of unintended escalation and strategic instability in South Asia.
2. **Sustaining High Military Readiness:** A proactive doctrine requires continuous deployment, surveillance, and operational preparedness, placing immense pressure on armed forces and resources.

- 3. Diplomatic and Global Pressure:** Major powers and international organizations may push India toward restraint during crises, limiting strategic flexibility.
- 4. Economic and Fiscal Burden:** Maintaining advanced defence capabilities, modernization, and indigenous production demands massive long-term financial investment.
- 5. Cyber and Hybrid Warfare Threats:** Adversaries may increasingly use cyberattacks, drones, misinformation, and proxy actors instead of conventional warfare.
- 6. Dependence on Indigenous Defence Capacity:** The success of the doctrine depends on rapid growth of domestic defence manufacturing, where technological gaps and import dependence still remain significant.

Way Forward

- 1. Strengthen Integrated Theatre Commands:** India must accelerate military integration among the **Army, Navy, and Air Force** to ensure faster decision-making and seamless joint operations during future conflicts.
- 2. Boost Defence Indigenisation and Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Greater investment in **indigenous defence manufacturing**, drones, missiles, AI, and cyber systems is essential to reduce foreign dependency and enhance strategic autonomy.
- 3. Enhance Intelligence and Surveillance Capabilities:** India should strengthen **real-time intelligence gathering**, satellite surveillance, cyber monitoring, and border reconnaissance to prevent terror infiltration and hybrid threats.
- 4. Develop Advanced Cyber and Hybrid Warfare Preparedness:** A modern security doctrine must include strong capabilities against **cyberattacks, drone warfare, misinformation campaigns, and electronic warfare** emerging from hostile actors.
- 5. Expand Strategic Diplomacy and Global Partnerships:** India should deepen cooperation with partners like the **QUAD, France, and the United States** to build international support against cross-border terrorism and regional instability.
- 6. Maintain Credible Deterrence with Escalation Control:** While adopting a proactive military posture, India must continue focusing on **measured response, escalation management, and strategic stability** in a nuclearized region.

Conclusion

Operation Sindoor marks a decisive shift in India's security doctrine from reactive restraint to proactive deterrence. Its long-term success depends on **military preparedness, defence indigenisation, strategic diplomacy**, and effective escalation management in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Q. "Operation Sindoor reflects a paradigm shift in India's national security doctrine from strategic restraint to proactive deterrence." Discuss the strategic significance of this shift. Also examine the challenges associated with India's emerging security doctrine. (15 Marks)

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