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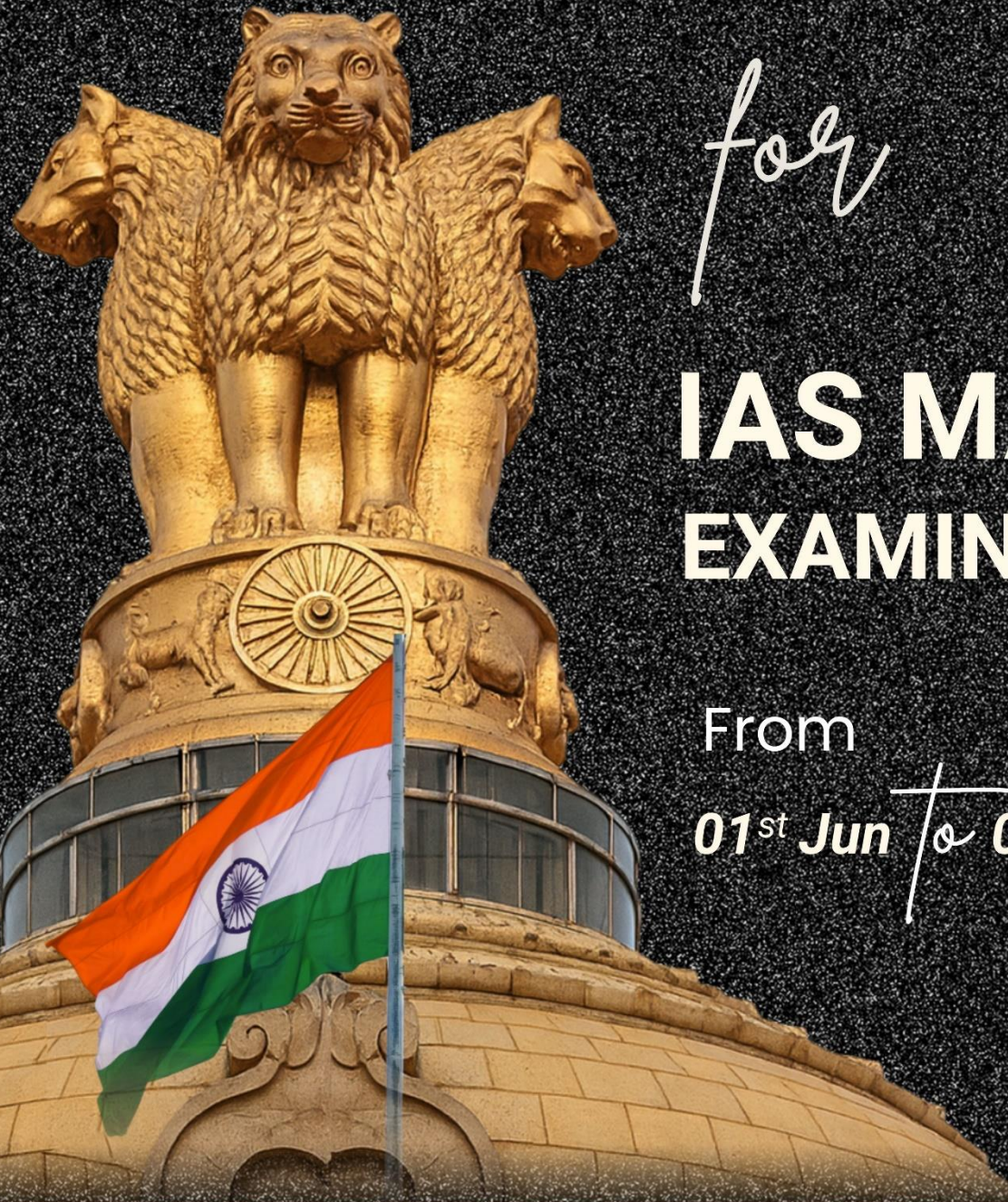
DEEP ANALYSIS

for

**IAS MAINS
EXAMINATION**

From

01st Jun to 06th Jun 2026



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1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. THE DEBATE OVER JUDICIAL HOLIDAYS & THE UNSEEN BURDEN OF THE JUDICIARY

Context

The debate over judicial holidays resurfaces frequently amid concerns regarding judicial delays and mounting pendency. Critics view court vacations as contributing to backlog, whereas supporters argue that judicial breaks are essential working periods that enable judges to discharge their responsibilities effectively beyond courtroom proceedings.



Significance of Judicial Holidays

1. Ensuring Quality and Accuracy of Judgments

- Judicial decisions affect personal liberty, property rights, governance and commercial interests, making careful deliberation indispensable.
- Dedicated non-sitting periods allow judges to ensure legal precision, consistency with precedent and constitutional compliance.

2. Addressing Rising Complexity of Cases

- Contemporary disputes increasingly involve artificial intelligence, cybercrime, environmental regulation, constitutional governance and international commerce.
- Such cases require extensive research and multidisciplinary understanding that cannot always be accommodated during regular court sittings.

3. Preserving Judicial Independence and Objectivity

- Judges operate under constant public scrutiny, political pressures and media attention while remaining impartial.
- Judicial recesses provide the intellectual space necessary for independent reflection and reasoned decision-making.

4. Maintaining Judicial Efficiency and Preventing Burnout

- Judicial work demands continuous concentration, legal interpretation and balancing of competing rights and interests.
- Periodic breaks help sustain mental acuity, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of judicial outcomes.

5. Strengthening Institutional Effectiveness

- Judicial holidays function as periods for reducing pending judgments, studying complex matters and preparing for future hearings.
- They contribute to better case management and overall judicial productivity.

Arguments in Favour of Judicial Holidays

1. Judicial Work Extends Beyond Courtroom Proceedings

- Court hearings represent only the visible component of judicial functioning, while much of the work occurs outside court hours.
- Judges spend significant time examining records, researching precedents and drafting judgments requiring detailed legal reasoning.

2. Judicial Holidays are Working Windows, Not Vacations

- Court recesses provide uninterrupted time for completing reserved judgments and preparing constitutional or legally complex matters.
- Heavy daily cause lists during regular sessions leave limited scope for focused writing and legal research.

3. High Intellectual and Cognitive Demands

- Judicial responsibilities require constant engagement with statutes, precedents and constitutional principles.
- The intellectual rigor involved necessitates dedicated periods for reflection and analysis beyond court proceedings.

4. Financial Opportunity Cost of Judicial Service

- Many judges relinquish highly lucrative legal practices to join the Bench.
- Judicial office therefore represents public service and constitutional duty rather than financial gain.

5. Family and Personal Sacrifices

- Judicial responsibilities often continue into evenings, weekends and official holidays.
- Family members frequently share the burden as judges remain occupied with case files, research and judgment writing.

Arguments Against Judicial Holidays

1. Massive Judicial Pendency

- India has over 5 crore pending cases across various courts, leading many to question whether long court vacations remain justified.
- Delays undermine citizens' access to timely justice and weaken confidence in judicial institutions.

2. Reduced Court Working Days

- Compared to many public institutions, higher courts often function for fewer sitting days annually.
- Critics argue that increasing court sitting days could improve disposal rates and reduce pendency.

3. Access to Justice Concerns

- Litigants often face prolonged delays in matters involving personal liberty, property disputes and commercial conflicts.
- Extended court closures can further delay urgent hearings and justice delivery.

4. Economic Costs of Delayed Justice

- Judicial delays increase litigation costs, discourage investment and create uncertainty for businesses.
- Faster dispute resolution is essential for improving the ease of doing business and economic growth.

5. Public Perception and Institutional Legitimacy

- Long vacations may create a perception that courts are disconnected from the urgency of citizens' grievances.
- In a democracy, public confidence in institutions is critical for maintaining legitimacy.

Case Studies

1. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud: Scale of Judicial Work

- D. Y. Chandrachud authored over 600 judgments and sat on more than 1,200 Benches during his Supreme Court tenure.
- Demonstrates the extraordinary volume of work undertaken by judges beyond courtroom appearances.

2. Justice H.R. Khanna: Moral Courage of the Judiciary

- H. R. Khanna delivered the lone dissent in the ADM Jabalpur case during the Emergency despite knowing it would cost him the Chief Justiceship.
- Illustrates the ethical burden and personal sacrifices associated with judicial independence.

3. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg: Global Example of Judicial Commitment

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg was renowned for working late into the night and maintaining one of the fastest judgment-writing records on the Bench.
- Demonstrates that judicial labor extends well beyond courtroom proceedings globally.

4. Lord Denning and Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer

- Lord Denning and V. R. Krishna Iyer continued contributing to jurisprudence through books, lectures and legal scholarship long after retirement.
- Highlights the lifelong intellectual commitment associated with judicial service.

Global Best Practices

1. Staggered Vacation System (United Kingdom)

- Courts remain functional throughout the year while individual judges take leave in rotation.
- Ensures continuity of judicial services without compromising judges' need for rest and research time.

2. Strong Judicial Clerkship Support (United States)

- Judges are assisted by dedicated law clerks and legal researchers who undertake preliminary research and case analysis.
- Reduces administrative burden and enhances judicial productivity.

3. Advanced Digital Case Management (Singapore)

- Extensive use of e-filing, digital case tracking and automated scheduling systems.
- Improves efficiency and reduces time spent on procedural tasks. .

4. Differentiated Case Management (Australia)

- Cases are categorized according to complexity and urgency.
- Routine matters receive expedited treatment while complex cases receive specialized judicial attention.

5. Continuous Court Functioning Through Vacation Benches

- Several jurisdictions maintain special benches for urgent matters during recess periods.
- Ensures uninterrupted access to justice while preserving judicial working breaks.

Way Forward

1. Deployment of More Legal Researchers

- Strengthen institutional support through law clerks, judicial assistants and research officers.
- Enables judges to focus on adjudication rather than administrative and preliminary research tasks.

2. Rationalized and Staggered Vacations

- Replace uniform court-wide vacations with staggered leave systems.
- Maintain continuous court functioning while preserving judges' writing and research periods.

3. Filling Judicial Vacancies

- A significant contributor to pendency is the shortage of judges rather than judicial holidays alone.
- Timely appointments can substantially improve disposal rates.

4. Leveraging Technology and AI

- Adopt AI-assisted case management, document review and scheduling systems.
- Reduce procedural delays and enhance judicial efficiency.

5. Improving Court Infrastructure

- Expand courtrooms, digital facilities and support staff.
- Strengthen institutional capacity across all levels of the judiciary.

Conclusion

The debate on judicial holidays should move beyond the simplistic narrative of "vacations versus productivity." Judicial breaks perform a crucial institutional function by providing judges the uninterrupted time necessary for research, deliberation and judgment writing. At the same time, concerns regarding pendency and access to justice are legitimate and require systemic reforms.

Q. *The discourse on judicial holidays often overlooks the invisible intellectual labour involved in adjudication. Critically analyse the necessity of judicial holidays in India while examining the reforms required to improve judicial efficiency and access to justice." 15 Marks*

1.2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1.2.1. THE INDO-CANADIAN STRATEGIC PIVOT

Context:

The 2026 bilateral engagements between India and Canada mark a strategic transition from recent diplomatic frictions to pragmatic cooperation. For Canada, India is a critical anchor in its **Indo-Pacific Strategy** to diversify away from over-reliance on the US market. For India, Canada provides access to critical minerals, advanced technology, high-grade uranium, and substantial institutional capital required for its transition to a green economy and the *Viksit Bharat 2047* vision.



Pillars of India Canada Relations

1. Economic Cooperation and Bilateral Trade

- **CEPA Framework:** Both nations signed the Terms of Reference (ToR) to officially resume negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), targeting a **USD 50 billion bilateral trade goal by 2030**.
- **Investment Flows:** Canadian Pension Funds serve as a major pillar of foreign direct investment, cumulatively investing over **USD 75 billion** in India's infrastructure, logistics, and digital ventures.

2. Energy Security and Uranium Diplomacy

- **The Cameco Pact:** The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) secured a **USD 2.6 billion contract** with Canada's Cameco for Uranium Ore Concentrates to fuel India's target of 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** A new MoU aligns both nations with the **G7 Critical Minerals Action Plan** to construct secure supply chains and bypass monopolistic market dominance.

3. Multilateral Integration and Minilateralism

- **Climate Alliances:** Canada expanding its environmental diplomacy by officially joining the India-led **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and the **Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA)**.
- **Geopolitical Alignments:** India endorsed Canada's bid to join the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** as a Dialogue Partner, while both established the trilateral **Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation (ACITI) Partnership**.

4. Innovation, Defence, and Institutional Frameworks

- **Strategic Security:** The establishment of the first-ever **India-Canada Defence Dialogue** formalizes institutional **military-to-military engagement**.

- **Food Security R&D: A Joint Pulse Protein Centre of Excellence** was announced at NIFTEM-Kundli (Haryana) to co-develop fortified foods addressing micronutrient deficiencies.

5. Cultural Relations and the Diaspora Bridge

- **Demographic Clout:** The **1.8 million-strong Indian diaspora** (roughly 4% of Canada's population) serves as a strategic asset driving soft power, capital flows, and bilateral trade.
- **Educational Linkages:** India remains Canada's largest source of international students, with nearly **400,000 Indian students** contributing significantly to Canada's services export revenue.

Significance of the Bilateral Partnership

- **Strategic Complementarity:** The relationship presents a economic synergy, pairing Canada's capital abundance, landmass, and resource wealth with India's demographic dividend, labor pool, and massive consumer market.
- **Middle-Power Diplomacy:** As two prominent democratic "middle powers," their alignment strengthens the rules-based international order, providing a necessary counterweight to authoritarian expansionism in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Agricultural and Food Security:** Beyond high-tech and energy sectors, Canada is a critical global supplier of **potash fertilizers** and leguminous vegetables, which are fundamental to sustaining India's agricultural productivity and domestic nutritional security.
- **Frontier Domain Collaboration:** The partnership holds immense untapped potential in frontier areas, including space exploration (via the Indian Space Research Organisation and Canadian Space Agency) and **Arctic research**, where Canada is a core Council member and India holds an active observer status.

Challenges to India-Canada Relations

- **Khalistani Extremism:** The phenomenon of "long-distance nationalism," where certain diaspora elements use Canada's liberal rights to mobilize support for radical separatist activities against India, remains the most severe friction point. This led to unprecedented diplomatic downgrades in 2023–2024.
- **Trade Barriers:** Persistent differences over India's agricultural tariffs, Canada's stringent sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, and disputes regarding intellectual property rights continue to complicate trade negotiations.
- **Visa and Consular Delays:** Past diplomatic expulsions drastically reduced consular staff, resulting in severe visa processing backlogs that negatively impact student mobility, tourism, and business travel.
- **Systemic Discrimination:** Despite economic success, the South Asian diaspora continues to face underlying challenges related to systemic racism and hate crimes in certain regions of Canada.

Way Forward: Navigating Diplomatic Frictions

To insulate the economic partnership from political volatility, both nations must adopt a multi-pronged approach:

1. **Security and Intelligence Coordination:** Strictly enforce the frameworks agreed upon during the 2026 NSA-level dialogues to counter violent extremism, organized crime, and terror-financing networks operating from Canadian soil.
2. **Early Harvest Agreement:** Prioritize an interim, limited trade deal to immediately reduce tariffs in non-contentious sectors while complex CEPA negotiations continue.
3. **Institutional Buffers:** Empower non-political mechanisms like the recently launched **Canada-India Trade and Investment Forum** and academic exchange programs to ensure people-to-people and B2B ties remain unaffected by diplomatic cycles.
4. **Subnational Diplomacy:** Deepen direct trade and technology ties between Indian states and Canadian provinces to insulate functional cooperation from federal political friction.
5. **Legal Framework Modernization:** Streamline the mechanics of existing **Mutual Legal Assistance (MLAT)** and Extradition Treaties via fast-tracked judicial channels for evidence-sharing, preventing legal disputes from escalating into public diplomatic standoffs.

Conclusion

The 2026 India-Canada summit signifies a mature recalibration of bilateral ties, prioritizing shared economic and strategic imperatives over political differences. By deepening collaboration in clean energy, resilient supply chains, and Indo-Pacific maritime security, the partnership holds the potential to become one of the most defining democratic alliances of this decade.

Q. Discuss the core pillars of cooperation that define the strategic partnership between India and Canada. What are the major challenges currently affecting their bilateral ties? 10 marks

1.3. SOCIAL JUSTICE

1.3.1. NFHS-6: JOY AND PAIN IN INDIA'S PUBLIC HEALTH TRANSITION

Context:

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-6 (2023–24) reflects a mixed picture of India's healthcare system, showing major gains in maternal-child health while exposing rising challenges of lifestyle diseases and ageing. It highlights India's transition from undernutrition and infectious diseases to a dual burden of malnutrition and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).



The "Joy": Key Health Gains (Structural Triumphs)

1. Surge in Institutional Deliveries

- **Institutional deliveries increased from 88.6% to 90.6%.** This reflects deeper healthcare penetration and safer childbirth practices, helping reduce maternal mortality, neonatal deaths and pregnancy-related complications.

2. Expansion of Antenatal Care (ANC)

- **ANC registration reached 95.9%; first-trimester registration rose from 70% to 76.2%; 4+ ANC visits increased to 65.2%.** Improved antenatal care strengthens maternal and child outcomes through early risk detection, nutritional support and better pregnancy monitoring.

3. Stability in Replacement Fertility

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) remained stable at 2.0, below replacement level (2.1).** It signals demographic maturity driven by women's empowerment, education and reproductive awareness while indicating future ageing-related challenges.

4. Reduction in Child Malnutrition

- **Stunting reduced from 35.5% to 29.3%; severe wasting declined from 7.7% to 5.2%.** This reflects improvements in nutrition delivery, maternal care and public welfare interventions, improving cognitive and physical development of children.

5. Strengthening Childhood Immunisation

- **Fully vaccinated children (12–23 months) increased from 83.8% to 87.1%.** Stronger immunisation coverage enhances preventive healthcare capacity and reduces infant vulnerability to vaccine-preventable diseases.

6. Exponential Rise in Rotavirus Vaccine Coverage

- **Rotavirus immunisation increased dramatically from 36.4% to 85.4%.** This indicates successful public health expansion in combating diarrhoeal diseases, a major contributor to child mortality and malnutrition.

7. Public Healthcare Dominance in Immunisation

- **95.6% of child immunisations occurred through public health facilities.** This highlights the critical role of state-led healthcare delivery and growing trust in public institutions for preventive healthcare.

8. Expansion of Financial Health Protection

- **Health insurance coverage increased from 41% to 60.2%.** Welfare schemes such as Ayushman Bharat strengthened financial protection and reduced catastrophic out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure.

9. Closing the Female Digital Divide

- **Women using the internet increased from 33.3% to 64.3%.** Digital inclusion strengthens women's agency, access to healthcare information, financial independence and participation in governance.

The "Pain": Unaddressed Needs and Emerging Lacunae

Despite gains, NFHS-6 reveals structural vulnerabilities requiring urgent policy attention.

1. India's Dual Burden of Malnutrition

- **Undernutrition coexists with obesity and metabolic disorders.** India simultaneously faces persistent nutritional deprivation among vulnerable groups and increasing lifestyle-linked illnesses caused by urbanisation and dietary changes.

2. Obesity Surge and Lifestyle Diseases

- **Women: 24% → 30.7%; Men: 22.9% → 27.3%.** Rising obesity signals growing prevalence of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, increasing long-term healthcare burdens.

3. Decline in Exclusive Breastfeeding

- **Exclusive breastfeeding declined from 63.7% to 55.8%.** Reduced breastfeeding weakens infant immunity and nutritional security, heightening risks of infections, malnutrition and developmental delays.

4. Sharp Rise in Caesarean Deliveries

- **C-section births increased from 21.5% to 27.2%.** The sharp rise raises concerns regarding medicalisation of childbirth, unnecessary surgical interventions and widening inequities in maternal care.

5. Inadequate Attention to NCD Financing

- **SRS and National Health Accounts indicate weak preparedness for metabolic disorders.** India's healthcare expenditure remains disproportionately curative rather than preventive, undermining long-term disease preparedness.

Implications of NFHS-6: India's "Greyer Nation" Dilemma

1. Demographic Transition and Population Ageing

- **India is steadily moving toward an ageing population structure due to declining fertility and rising life expectancy.** While this reflects developmental progress, it will significantly increase the demand for geriatric care, long-term healthcare financing and social security systems.

2. Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

- **The obesity surge and lifestyle shifts indicate a future explosion of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.** If ignored, NCDs may become the leading cause of disability and mortality, overwhelming India's already stretched healthcare infrastructure.

3. Threat to Demographic Dividend and Economic Productivity

- **A disease-burdened workforce can weaken India's demographic dividend advantage.** Rising healthcare costs, absenteeism and lower labour productivity may reduce economic growth and increase dependency burdens.

4. Increased Household Financial Vulnerability

- **Lifestyle diseases require prolonged treatment and repeated medical expenditure.** This can push vulnerable households into poverty through catastrophic out-of-pocket spending despite rising insurance coverage.

5. Need for Public Health System Reorientation

- **India's health architecture remains largely maternal-child and infectious disease centric.** NFHS-6 signals the urgent need to redesign healthcare systems toward preventive, life-cycle and chronic disease management models.

Way Forward: Policy Interventions

- **Institutionalise nationwide screening for diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.** Early diagnosis lowers treatment costs and shifts India toward preventive and community-based healthcare governance.
- **Promote healthy diets, physical exercise and exclusive breastfeeding.** Mass awareness campaigns can reduce obesity prevalence, improve nutrition behaviour and prevent lifestyle-related diseases.
- **Increase taxation on sugary beverages and ultra-processed foods.** Fiscal disincentives can curb unhealthy consumption while generating revenue for preventive healthcare investments.
- **Strengthening the 3-Tier Healthcare System: Strengthen NCD management from Ayushman Arogya Mandirs to tertiary hospitals.** Building local diagnosis and referral systems improves accessibility, affordability and continuity of chronic care.
- **Sustain Maternal and Child Health Gains: Prevent slippages in immunisation, nutrition and reproductive healthcare delivery.** Existing achievements must be preserved through uninterrupted funding, quality healthcare and last-mile accessibility.
- **Evidence-Based Governance: Use NFHS data for targeted interventions and resource prioritisation.** Data-driven policymaking improves accountability, regional targeting and efficiency of welfare delivery.

Conclusion

NFHS-6 acts both as a scorecard of India's developmental success and an early warning system for future public health vulnerabilities. While gains in maternal-child healthcare, fertility stabilisation and immunisation deserve celebration, India must simultaneously pivot toward preventive, NCD-centric and life-cycle healthcare to sustain a healthy demographic transition.

Q. NFHS-6 reflects both the achievements and emerging vulnerabilities of India's public health transition." Examine the key health gains, emerging challenges and policy measures required to ensure a sustainable demographic transition in India. 15 Marks

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GENERAL STUDIES 3

2.1. ECONOMY

2.1.1. BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND RBI, GETTING BACK THE INVESTOR

Context:

The RBI's latest monetary policy review was conducted amid rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia, increasing crude oil prices and growing concerns over inflation. While the policy is being discussed primarily in terms of inflation management, the larger objective is to protect investor confidence and safeguard India's external sector stability.



Introduction

India's macroeconomic management is becoming increasingly complex as rising inflation risks coincide with external sector vulnerabilities. In this context, the RBI's focus extends beyond inflation and growth to preserving investor confidence and economic stability.

Why Has the RBI's Policy Dilemma Intensified?

The RBI faces a difficult policy environment due to the simultaneous emergence of inflationary and growth-related concerns.

1. Rising Inflation Risks

- **Escalation of conflict in West Asia has increased crude oil prices:** Higher crude oil prices raise transportation and production costs, leading to imported inflation across the economy.
- **El Niño-related concerns have raised fears of weak monsoon conditions:** A deficient monsoon can reduce agricultural output and trigger food inflation, which constitutes a major component of India's CPI basket.
- **Food and fuel inflation may create broader price pressures:** Rising food and fuel costs can spill over into other sectors, making inflation more persistent and widespread.
- **RBI has consequently revised its inflation outlook upwards:** Anticipating these risks, the RBI has increased its inflation projections, indicating a less comfortable price environment.
- **Increase the Current Account Deficit (CAD):** A larger trade deficit directly contributes to a widening current account deficit.

2. Slowing Growth Concerns

- **Elevated energy costs can dampen consumption and investment:** Higher fuel and electricity prices reduce household purchasing power and increase business operating costs.
- **Weak monsoon may adversely affect rural demand:** Lower farm incomes due to poor agricultural output can suppress rural consumption, which remains a key driver of economic growth.

- **Global economic uncertainty continues to affect external demand:** Slower growth in major economies may reduce demand for Indian exports, affecting industrial and services sector performance.
- **Excessive monetary tightening could weaken the ongoing recovery:** Higher interest rates may discourage borrowing, investment and consumption, thereby slowing economic growth.

RBI's Strategy to Safeguard External Sector Stability and Restore Investor Confidence

1. Why Investor Confidence Becomes Crucial

- **Finance the Current Account Deficit:** Foreign capital inflows help bridge the gap between external earnings and payments.
- **Maintain adequate foreign exchange reserves:** Continuous investment inflows strengthen the country's reserve position.
- **Stabilise the rupee:** Capital inflows increase foreign currency availability and reduce exchange-rate volatility.
- **Reduce the risk of external financing shocks:** Stable investments provide protection against sudden stops or reversals of capital flows.
- **Preserve overall macroeconomic stability:** Investor confidence supports financial market stability and economic resilience.

2. Measures to Encourage Foreign Investment in Debt Markets

- **Expansion of the Fully Accessible Route (FAR):** Allows foreign investors greater access to Indian government securities without investment limits.
- **Easier access to government securities for foreign investors:** Makes India's debt market more attractive to global investors.
- **Greater participation of Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs):** Enhances the flow of overseas capital into domestic bond markets.

Challenges Ahead

Despite the RBI's efforts to attract capital inflows and strengthen external stability, several risks could undermine macroeconomic resilience.

- **Persistent inflationary pressures:** A weak monsoon coupled with rising food and energy prices could keep inflation elevated and limit the RBI's policy flexibility.
- **Fragile domestic demand:** Sluggish rural consumption and higher input costs may weaken investment and overall economic growth.
- **Oil price and geopolitical risks:** Sustained increases in crude oil prices and escalating geopolitical tensions can worsen inflation and external sector vulnerabilities.
- **Global financial uncertainty:** Volatile financial markets and tighter monetary policies in advanced economies may trigger capital outflows from emerging markets like India.
- **Structural external sector vulnerabilities:** Continued dependence on imported energy and foreign capital makes India's Current Account Deficit and exchange rate highly sensitive to global shocks.

Way Forward

1. Short-Term Measures

- **Maintain a calibrated monetary policy stance:** The RBI should balance inflation control and growth support by avoiding both premature tightening and excessive easing.
- **Closely monitor inflation and oil price trends:** Continuous assessment of food and energy prices is essential for timely policy interventions.
- **Ensure adequate forex reserve buffers:** Strong foreign exchange reserves can help absorb external shocks and stabilise the rupee.

2. Medium-Term Measures

- **Diversify energy sources and accelerate renewable energy adoption:** Reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels can improve energy security and lower external vulnerabilities.
- **Strengthen export competitiveness:** Enhancing productivity, infrastructure and market access can boost exports and improve the trade balance.
- **Deepen domestic bond markets:** A stronger bond market can provide alternative sources of financing and reduce reliance on external capital.
- **Encourage stable long-term capital inflows:** Promoting FDI and other long-term investments can ensure more reliable financing than volatile portfolio flows.

3. Long-Term Measures

- **Reduce structural dependence on imported energy:** Expanding domestic energy production and clean energy capacity can lower exposure to global oil price shocks.
- **Build stronger external sector resilience:** A diversified export base and robust external buffers can help withstand global economic disruptions.
- **Improve domestic investment and productivity growth:** Higher productivity and investment-led growth can strengthen economic fundamentals and reduce vulnerability to external shocks

Conclusion

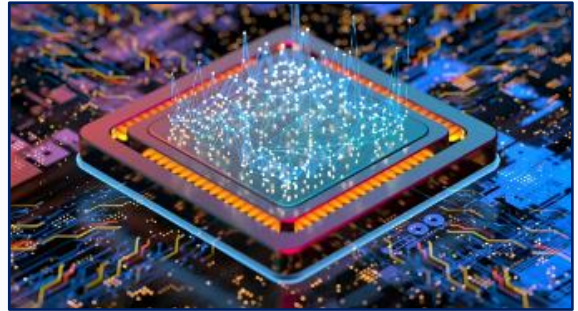
The RBI's policy reflects the evolving nature of macroeconomic management, where external sector stability is becoming as important as inflation control. Going forward, sustaining investor confidence and stable capital inflows will be crucial for navigating global uncertainties. A resilient external sector will remain vital for ensuring durable growth and economic stability.

Q. The challenge before the RBI is no longer confined to balancing inflation and growth alone. Examine in the context of rising external sector vulnerabilities and global economic uncertainty. 15 Marks

2.1.2. THE FUTURE OF INDIA'S CHIP INDUSTRY

Context:

India has identified semiconductors as a strategic sector due to their critical role in consumer electronics, telecommunications, automobiles, artificial intelligence, defence systems, and emerging technologies. A recent report by NITI Aayog titled *Future of India's Semiconductor Industry* highlights both the opportunities and challenges facing India's semiconductor ambitions.



Why Semiconductors Matter for India

1. Economic Growth and Digital Transformation

Semiconductors are the backbone of the digital economy and are essential for manufacturing electronics, telecommunications equipment, electric vehicles, and consumer devices. They also support flagship initiatives such as Digital India, Make in India, Industry 4.0, and the growth of AI-driven technologies.

2. Strategic and National Security Imperatives

Semiconductor chips are critical components in defence systems, aerospace technologies, communication networks, and cybersecurity infrastructure. Heavy dependence on imported chips creates strategic vulnerabilities and may compromise India's technological and security interests during crises.

3. Supply Chain Resilience and Technological Sovereignty

Global semiconductor manufacturing is concentrated in a few regions, particularly Taiwan, South Korea, and China, making supply chains vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, trade restrictions, and natural disasters. Developing domestic capabilities is essential to ensure uninterrupted access to critical technologies and enhance India's technological self-reliance.

Current Government Initiatives for Semiconductor Development

1. India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)

The India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) is a flagship programme backed by a ₹76,000 crore corpus to develop a comprehensive semiconductor ecosystem in India. It aims to attract investments and establish domestic capabilities in chip manufacturing and related sectors.

2. Financial Incentives and Manufacturing Support

The government provides substantial capital subsidies, covering up to 50% of project costs for semiconductor fabrication units and other strategic projects. Additional support is offered through production-linked incentives (PLI) and incentives for component manufacturing.

3. Strengthening Design and Research Ecosystem

India is promoting semiconductor innovation by providing access to industry-grade chip design software and tools for students, researchers, and academic institutions. This initiative seeks to build a skilled workforce and strengthen indigenous research and design capabilities.

Major Challenges Before India's Semiconductor Ambition

1. Underdeveloped Domestic Ecosystem

India lacks a complete semiconductor supply chain and continues to depend heavily on imported chips to meet domestic demand.

2. Long Gestation Period of Fabs

Semiconductor fabrication plants require 4–5 years for construction and additional time for testing, yield optimisation, and commercial production.

3. Massive Capital Requirements

Chip manufacturing is highly capital-intensive, requiring an estimated \$45–60 billion in government support over the next decade.

4. Technology and Skilled Workforce Deficit

India has strengths in chip design but lacks advanced manufacturing expertise, semiconductor R&D capabilities, and a specialised workforce.

5. Intense Global Competition

Established players such as the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan enjoy technological leadership and mature semiconductor ecosystems.

Implications on India's Semiconductor Ambition

1. Strategic Dependence on Imports

Heavy reliance on foreign suppliers exposes India to external shocks and supply disruptions.

2. Delayed Economic Returns

Long project timelines increase investment risks and postpone profitability for investors.

3. Fiscal Burden on the Government

Sustaining large-scale financial incentives over many years may strain public resources.

4. Technological Vulnerability

Limited domestic expertise constrains innovation and reduces India's ability to achieve technological self-reliance.

5. Difficulty in Achieving Global Competitiveness

Competing against countries with decades of experience and economies of scale remains a major challenge for India.

Way Forward for India's Semiconductor Ecosystem

1. Build Strategic Self-Reliance through R&D and IP Creation

Strengthen indigenous semiconductor research, sovereign chip design capabilities, and domestic intellectual property to transform India from a design-services hub into a technology innovator.

2. Adopt a Pragmatic Manufacturing Strategy

Prioritise mature and compound semiconductor nodes aligned with industrial, automotive, and defence needs instead of immediately competing in high-risk frontier chip manufacturing.

3. Scale Up Packaging, Testing, and Import Substitution

Develop ATMP/OSAT facilities as a core pillar of the ecosystem to generate employment, integrate into global value chains, and reduce dependence on imported electronics components.

4. Ensure Sustained Investments and Leverage Emerging Technologies

Provide long-term financial support through ISM 2.0 while harnessing AI-driven semiconductor engineering, advanced materials research, and next-generation chip architectures.

5. Forge Trusted Global Partnerships for Technology Access

Deepen collaboration with the United States, Japan, the European Union, and South Korea to secure technology transfer, equipment access, resilient supply chains, and skilled workforce development.

Conclusion

India's semiconductor mission represents a strategic investment in the nation's technological future. With sustained policy support, innovation-driven R&D, global partnerships, and ecosystem development, India can evolve from a major consumer to a trusted global semiconductor hub, strengthening economic resilience, technological sovereignty, and leadership in the emerging digital and AI-driven world.

Q. Semiconductors have emerged as the new strategic resource of the digital age." Examine the significance of developing a domestic semiconductor ecosystem for India. Discuss the challenges in achieving semiconductor self-reliance and suggest measures to strengthen India's semiconductor industry. 15 Marks

2.2. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

2.2.1. URBAN FIRE DISASTERS IN INDIA: GOVERNANCE, SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Context:

- The recent Delhi B&B fire and Muzaffarpur hospital fire have once again exposed serious deficiencies in urban fire safety and regulatory oversight.
- Similar incidents, from the Uphaar Cinema Fire to the Arpora Nightclub Fire, show that lessons from past tragedies have not been fully translated into institutional reforms.



Introduction

- Fire accidents in Indian cities are increasingly becoming governance issues rather than mere accidental events. They reflect the intersection of rapid urbanisation, weak regulatory enforcement, and inadequate disaster preparedness.
- The recurrence of such incidents raises important concerns regarding citizen safety, accountability of public institutions, and the effectiveness of urban governance systems.

Key Issues Involved

- 1. Regulatory Non-Compliance:** Many commercial establishments continue to operate without proper fire clearances or violate approved occupancy limits. Such violations often remain unnoticed until a disaster exposes the risks.
- 2. Unauthorized Structural Modifications:** Illegal additions, blocked exits, and altered building layouts compromise emergency evacuation during fires. These modifications significantly increase casualties by trapping occupants.
- 3. Weak Enforcement Mechanism:** Fire safety inspections are often irregular and enforcement tends to be reactive rather than preventive. Regulatory agencies frequently intervene only after accidents occur.
- 4. Accountability Deficit:** While owners are usually prosecuted after accidents, the role of regulatory authorities often escapes scrutiny. This weakens institutional accountability and allows unsafe practices to continue.
- 5. Urban Planning Loopholes:** Congested urban spaces, narrow roads, and misuse of land-use provisions reduce accessibility for emergency services. Poor planning transforms manageable incidents into major disasters.
- 6. Safety of Vulnerable Groups:** Hospital patients, elderly persons, children, and persons with disabilities face greater challenges during emergency evacuation. Their vulnerability makes safety compliance even more critical.
- 7. Inadequate Deterrence:** Delayed judicial processes and inconsistent convictions reduce the deterrent value of existing laws. As a result, safety violations are often viewed as manageable risks rather than serious offences.

Major Challenges

- 1. Rapid and Unplanned Urbanisation:** Cities are expanding faster than the capacity of regulatory and safety infrastructure. This creates gaps between urban growth and the ability to enforce safety standards.
- 2. Informalisation of Economic Activities:** Many businesses operate beyond approved norms or under loosely regulated arrangements. Such informality makes monitoring and enforcement difficult.
- 3. Lack of Safety Culture:** Fire safety is often treated as a procedural requirement rather than a core operational responsibility. Compliance therefore becomes symbolic instead of substantive.
- 4. Institutional Fragmentation:** Multiple agencies share responsibility for building approvals, inspections, and emergency response. This fragmented framework often results in coordination failures and blame shifting.
- 5. Infrastructure Constraints:** Inadequate fire stations, poor access roads, and insufficient emergency equipment limit the effectiveness of rescue operations. These shortcomings are particularly visible in densely populated urban areas.
- 6. Governance and Capacity Deficits:** Local bodies frequently suffer from staff shortages, limited technical expertise, and weak monitoring systems. These institutional limitations reduce the effectiveness of enforcement.

- 7. Economic Incentives Against Compliance:** Businesses may avoid investing in safety measures to reduce costs and increase profitability. The benefits of prevention are often undervalued until a disaster occurs.

Government Initiatives and Existing Framework

- 1. National Building Code (NBC), 2016:** The code provides detailed guidelines on fire prevention, emergency exits, evacuation planning, and building safety standards. It serves as the primary technical framework for fire-safe construction.
- 2. Model Building Bye-Laws:** These bye-laws require adherence to fire safety norms during building approval and operation. They seek to integrate safety considerations into urban development processes.
- 3. Disaster Management Act, 2005:** The Act promotes a comprehensive approach to disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and response. Fire safety forms an important component of this broader framework.
- 4. Smart Cities Mission:** The mission encourages the use of technology and data-driven governance to improve urban resilience. Several cities are integrating emergency response systems into smart infrastructure.
- 5. AMRUT:** By strengthening urban infrastructure and service delivery, AMRUT indirectly contributes to safer and more resilient urban environments. Improved planning reduces disaster vulnerabilities.

Way Forward

- 1. Shift Towards Preventive Governance:** Safety regulation must focus on identifying and addressing risks before disasters occur. Regular inspections and compliance monitoring should replace reactive enforcement.
- 2. Strengthen Enforcement and Accountability:** Accountability should extend beyond private violators to include negligent public officials. Fixing responsibility across the chain of governance will improve compliance.
- 3. Technology-Driven Compliance:** Digital monitoring systems, GIS mapping, and online clearance mechanisms can improve transparency and reduce regulatory loopholes. Technology can also facilitate real-time risk assessment.
- 4. Mandatory Third-Party Audits:** Independent safety audits can help identify violations that routine inspections may overlook. This would improve the credibility and effectiveness of compliance systems.
- 5. Improve Urban Planning:** Urban development must incorporate fire safety considerations such as road accessibility, building spacing, and emergency infrastructure. Safety should become a core planning objective.
- 6. Build a Safety Culture:** Regular fire drills, public awareness campaigns, and staff training can foster behavioural change. A culture of preparedness is essential for reducing disaster risks.
- 7. Enhance Institutional Coordination:** Better coordination among municipal bodies, fire departments, police, and disaster management authorities can improve both prevention and emergency response. Integrated governance is crucial for effective risk management.

8. **Protect Vulnerable Populations:** Hospitals, schools, old-age homes, and hospitality establishments require specialised safety protocols. Evacuation plans should account for the needs of vulnerable groups.
9. **Strengthen Legal Deterrence:** Faster prosecution and stricter penalties for safety violations can increase compliance. Effective punishment reinforces the seriousness of fire safety obligations.
10. **Promote Urban Resilience:** Fire safety should be integrated into broader urban resilience and disaster risk reduction strategies. Resilient cities are those that systematically reduce vulnerabilities before crises emerge.

Conclusion

- Recurring urban fire disasters reveal that the problem lies not only in accidental ignition but also in persistent governance failures that allow risks to accumulate over time.
- Ensuring fire-safe cities requires a combination of effective regulation, accountable institutions, resilient urban planning, and an enduring culture of safety.

Q. *Recurring fire tragedies in Indian cities are less a consequence of accidental ignition and more a reflection of governance and regulatory failures. Examine. Discuss the challenges in ensuring urban fire safety and suggest measures for building fire-resilient cities. 15 Marks*

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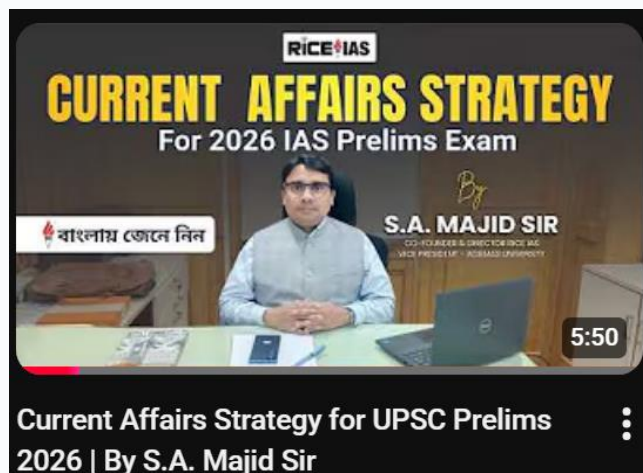
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