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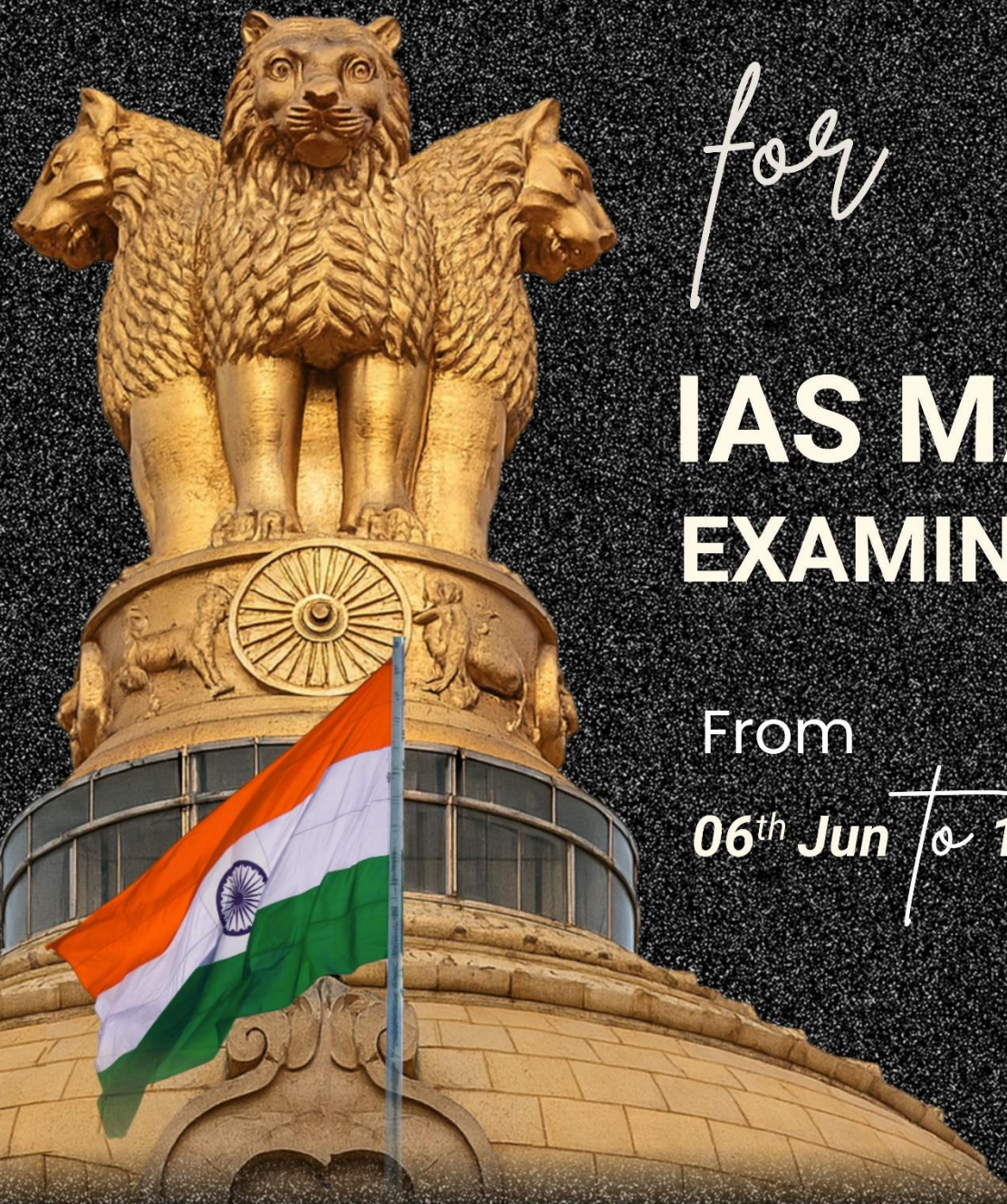
DEEP ANALYSIS

for

**IAS MAINS
EXAMINATION**

From

06th Jun *to* 11th July 2026



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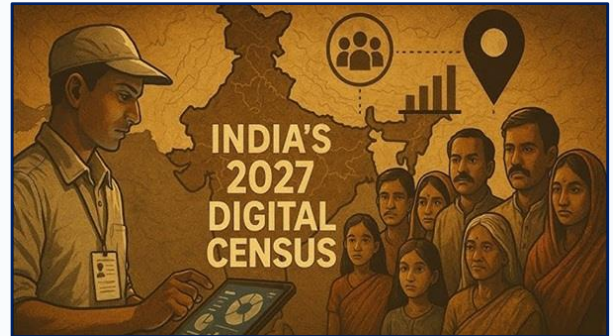
Prelims Test Series

1.1. SOCIETY

1.1.1. NAVIGATING INDIA'S FIRST DIGITAL CENSUS

Context

The upcoming Census 2027 introduces a statutory caste enumeration alongside a fully digital methodology. However, the pre-test phase has highlighted methodological concerns regarding the "open column" self-declaration, necessitating a shift towards a pre-loaded, curated digital taxonomy to ensure the generation of reliable socio-economic data.



Introduction

Census 2027 marks a watershed moment in India's administrative history as the 16th national census and the 8th since independence. Moving beyond traditional paper-based methods, it is the world's first fully digital population census. The inclusion of a statutory caste enumeration aims to generate empirical data for targeted social justice, requiring an infallible digital methodology to prevent the demographic fragmentation seen in past exercises.

What Makes Census 2027 Unique?

- **Fully Digital Execution:** Replaces traditional paperwork with mobile applications, a Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS) portal, and digital Houselisting Block (HLB) mapping.
- **Self-Enumeration Facility:** Introduces a citizen-centric online portal allowing individuals to submit household information digitally before field operations begin.
- **Statutory Caste Enumeration:** Marks the first comprehensive and legally backed counting of castes in independent India since the 1931 Census.

Phases of the Census

- **Phase 1: Houselisting and Housing Census (HLO):** Conducted from April to September 2026. This phase involves geo-tagging buildings and capturing data on housing conditions, amenities, and assets. An optional 15-day self-enumeration period precedes the house-to-house survey in each state.
- **Phase 2: Population Enumeration (PE):** Scheduled for February 2027 (with adjusted timelines beginning September 2026 for snow-bound regions like Ladakh, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand). This phase collects granular individual-level data, including demographics, migration, and caste details.

Scale of 2027 Census

- **Massive Coverage:** The exercise covers over 1.4 billion people across 36 States and Union Territories, including over 6.3 lakh villages and 9,700 towns.
- **Extensive Workforce:** It involves the deployment of approximately 3.2 million enumerators, supervisors, and master trainers, making it the largest administrative exercise globally.

About Caste Census: The Methodological Shift

- **The Pitfalls of Open Declaration:** The 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) utilized an unguided "open column," resulting in over 46 lakh fragmented, unusable caste entries due to phonetic variations, sub-castes, and overlapping clan names.
- **Curated Digital Taxonomy:** To rectify past errors, experts advocate pivoting towards pre-loading enumerators' hand-held devices with a standardized, state-specific directory of recognized castes, ensuring the data collected is coherent and administratively actionable.

Significance of Caste Enumeration

1. **Precision in Affirmative Action:** Replaces outdated 1931 demographic baselines with contemporary empirical data to structurally rationalize reservation quotas.
2. **Equitable Sub-Categorization:** Generates granular data necessary to implement the sub-categorization of backward classes, preventing dominant groups from monopolizing welfare benefits.
3. **Identification of the Creamy Layer:** Supplies multi-dimensional socio-economic indicators required to objectively identify and exclude affluent segments within reserved categories.
4. **Targeted Policy Formulation:** Correlates specific caste identities directly with health, education, and economic deprivations, shifting governance towards evidence-based resource allocation.
5. **Democratic Delimitation:** Provides accurate demographic compositions essential for the rational delimitation of electoral constituencies, ensuring equitable political representation.

Challenges Associated with Caste Enumeration

1. **Risk of Identity Ossification:** Formal enumeration of primordial identities risks solidifying societal fault lines and reinforcing the very hierarchies the Constitution seeks to abolish.
2. **Taxonomical Complexity:** Harmonizing fluid, self-perceived social status and overlapping regional dialects into a rigid national master list presents an immense bureaucratic hurdle.
3. **Politicization of Data:** The revelation of precise demographic proportions may trigger aggressive political mobilization and competitive demands for quota expansions beyond legal caps.
4. **Administrative Burden:** Reconciling localized data entries with conflicting Central and State lists for SCs, STs, and OBCs requires highly complex backend deduplication.
5. **Data Security Risks:** The centralized digital collection of sensitive socio-economic and caste-based identities raises significant privacy and cybersecurity concerns.

Global Best Practices

1. **United States – Census Bureau Framework:** Utilizes a highly structured, self-identified racial and ethnic categorization system coupled with robust digital privacy safeguards, ensuring data is used strictly for civil rights compliance and resource distribution rather than societal stratification.
2. **United Kingdom – ONS Ethnic Group Classifications:** Employs carefully curated, standard drop-down taxonomies that evolve through extensive public consultation, minimizing data fragmentation while accurately capturing diverse demographic shifts.

Way Forward

1. **Mandate Pre-Loaded Digital Registries:** Abandon the "open column" format entirely in Phase 2, deploying standardized, pre-curated drop-down options on enumerators' digital devices.
2. **Implement Robust Deduplication Algorithms:** Utilize advanced backend analytics within the CMMS to automatically resolve phonetic variations and merge identical clan entries in real-time.

3. **Harmonize Central and State Schedules:** Form an expert inter-disciplinary commission to reconcile discrepancies between state-level registries and the central list prior to nationwide enumeration.
4. **Focus on Socio-Economic Correlation:** Strictly link demographic identity mapping with economic and developmental indices to maintain focus on welfare delivery over political categorization.
5. **Ensure Stringent Data Privacy:** Enforce end-to-end encryption, strict access controls, and compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act to prevent the systemic misuse of sensitive population data.
6. **De-Link from Political Mobilization:** Communicate the census objectives explicitly as an economic and developmental mapping project, shifting the public narrative away from competitive backwardness.

Conclusion

The integration of a statutory caste enumeration within India's first digital census is an administrative necessity for actualizing targeted social justice. By abandoning flawed, open-ended methodologies in favor of a scientifically curated digital taxonomy, the state can transform abstract demographic identities into precise, actionable tools for equitable national development.

Q. The transition to a fully digital framework in Census 2027, coupled with a statutory caste enumeration, presents both historic opportunities and complex administrative challenges. Discuss. 15 Marks

1.1.2. REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION TO BRIDGE THE ENROLMENT-EMPLOYMENT GAP

Context

The AISHE 2023-24 report reveals a record 4.5 crore higher education enrolment, highlighted by a 42% rise in female participation over the last decade. However, this quantitative success is overshadowed by a broken pipeline between campus enrolment and formal employment opportunities.

Introduction

India's higher education sector has achieved unprecedented social inclusion and gender parity. Yet, horizontal segregation in STEM, acute faculty shortages, and a widening skill-to-market mismatch prevent these educational gains from translating into equitable workforce participation.

Key Trends in Higher Education

- **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) Surge:** The national GER expanded to 30 in 2023-24, with the female GER (31.2) significantly outpacing the male GER.
- **Social Group Representation:** Hard-won equity gains are visible, with female enrolment rising by 51.4% among Scheduled Castes (SC) and 75.7% among Scheduled Tribes (ST) since 2014-15.
- **The STEM Illusion:** While women represent 44% of STEM students, they are clustered in general sciences (54.6%) and remain severely underrepresented in engineering and technology (31.1%).



- **Patriarchal Faculty Architecture:** Although the student body reflects a near 50-50 gender split, institutional leadership is skewed, with only 82 female teachers for every 100 male teachers.

Significance of the Current Trends

1. **Democratic Transition of Education:** The influx of 2.24 crore women establishes higher education as a deeply democratized space, challenging historical access barriers.
2. **Empowerment of Marginalized Cohorts:** Exponential growth in SC/ST female enrolment triggers a structural shift for rural and semi-urban generational mobility.
3. **Global Edge in STEM Human Resources:** A 44% female share in overall STEM positions India strongly in building a scientifically trained global workforce.
4. **Delayed Demographic Shifts:** Prolonged university stays naturally delay the age of marriage for young women, positively influencing maternal health parameters.
5. **Labor Force Formalization Potential:** A highly educated female student body provides an unparalleled opportunity to rapidly formalize India's knowledge and service sectors.

Persistent Challenges in the Higher Education Sector

1. **Horizontal Segregation and Digital Exclusion:** Clustering in traditional sciences isolates women from future-proof, high-paying sectors like artificial intelligence and software engineering.
2. **Scale vs. Quality Compromise:** The explosive growth of low-tier private colleges, marred by a 28% teaching vacancy rate in central universities, dilutes academic standards.
3. **The Education Debt Trap:** Over 75% of HEIs are privately managed, burdening families with debt for degrees that yield low employability in the formal market.
4. **Stagnant R&D Investment:** India's Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) remains stagnant at 0.6%–0.7% of GDP, stunting deep-tech innovation on campuses.
5. **Societal and Structural Mobility Barriers:** Severe deficits in safe public transit, rigid domestic expectations, and gender wage gaps restrict women from translating degrees into active careers.

Global Best Practices

1. **Germany – Dual VET System:** Seamlessly integrates classroom higher education with mandatory industry apprenticeships to ensure high employability and skill matching.
2. **United States – Venture-Backed R&D:** Fosters deep integration between university research laboratories and private equity to drive the commercialization of deep-tech innovations.

Way Forward

1. **Operationalize a Targeted "Women-in-Tech" Pipeline:** Introduce corporate-linked scholarships and dedicated incubation quotas explicitly for women in engineering and AI to shatter gender imbalances.
2. **Replace Rigid Oversight with Performance-Linked Autonomy:** Dismantle the "one-size-fits-all" regulatory oversight of UGC/AICTE, allowing top-performing colleges the freedom to design market-responsive curricula.
3. **Transition to Venture-Based R&D Funding:** Shift the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) to a strategic equity partner model to back university-led startups and democratize tier-2 funding.
4. **Mandate Industry-Academia Co-Governance:** Enforce the inclusion of active industry practitioners on university governing boards to introduce stackable, modular micro-credentials.

5. **Deploy "AI-First" Localized Knowledge Translation:** Utilize advanced Large Language Models (LLMs) via platforms like SWAYAM to translate cutting-edge global research into 22 Indian languages.
6. **Enact a National Faculty Mobility Architecture:** Address acute teacher shortages by launching a National Faculty Exchange (NFE) program, allowing corporate tech experts to take academic sabbaticals.

Conclusion

India must transition its higher education system from rote compliance to an agile, innovation-driven ecosystem. Bridging the gap between campus enrolment and formal employment is the ultimate prerequisite for realizing the nation's demographic dividend and ensuring inclusive economic growth.

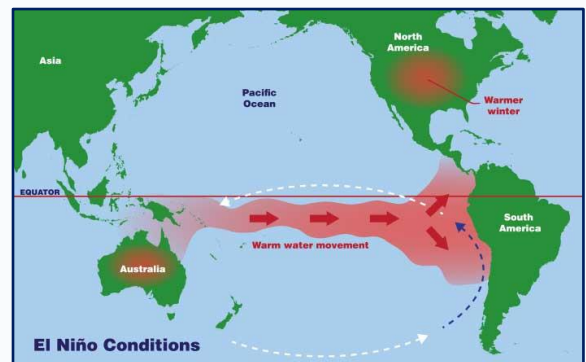
Q. National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement. 15 Marks

1.2. GEOGRAPHY

1.2.1. NAVIGATING EL NIÑO'S SHOCKS TO INDIA'S AGRARIAN ECONOMY

Context

- Following a 40% June monsoon deficit, the IMD has forecast below-normal July rainfall. This raises concerns over crop losses, food inflation, and macroeconomic risks due to El Niño.
- Severe **El Niño** events have historically caused major droughts, including the **Great Famine (1876–78)**; since 2000, **6 of 11 below-normal monsoon years** occurred during El Niño.
- Traditionally, **community water bodies** helped mitigate drought impacts through decentralized water harvesting.



Introduction

The **Southwest Monsoon** anchors India's agrarian framework. With El Niño increasing the frequency of severe rainfall deficits, shifting from **reactive disaster relief to proactive, structural drought-proofing** is now critical to sustain **rural demand, manage inflation**, and ensure **macroeconomic stability**.

What is El Niño?

- El Niño is a climate pattern characterized by the **unusual warming of sea surface temperatures** in the eastern and central equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- During an El Niño event, **trade winds weaken or reverse**, preventing the upwelling of cold water and shifting warm surface water eastward.
- This alteration in global atmospheric circulation typically **weakens the easterly trade winds over the Indian Ocean**, fundamentally **suppressing the Indian Southwest Monsoon**.

Economic Implications of El Niño for India

1. Agricultural Shock

- A deficient monsoon severely impacts the **sowing and yield of crucial rain-fed Kharif crops** like rice, cotton, and pulses.
- Scarcity of surface water forces farmers to rely on **groundwater extraction**, sharply **increasing input costs** for diesel and electricity.

2. Inflationary Spiral

- Dropping agricultural output creates an **immediate supply-side shock**, rapidly driving up **prices of essential dietary staples** and vegetables.
- **High food inflation aggressively erodes household budgets**, leaving less disposable income for non-agricultural goods.

3. Rural Demand Contraction

- A fall in farm incomes directly damages the **rural non-farm sector**, severely hitting industries dependent on **rural purchasing power**.
- This stress cascades into the wider economy, signaling early squeezes in sectors like **automobiles, two-wheelers, and real estate**.

4. Productivity Tax from Heat

- **Severe heat stress reduces the physical efficiency** of India's vast informal outdoor workforce.
- This leads to a **massive loss of workable hours**, disproportionately affecting vulnerable urban and rural demographics.

5. Macroeconomic Dilemma

- The RBI faces the **stagflation threat** of slowing growth combined with rising food inflation.
- **Tighter monetary policies** to control inflation make borrowing expensive, which **stifles corporate capital expenditure** and business expansion.

Challenges in Adapting to Monsoon Deficits

1. Severe Irrigation Deficit

- Out of **315 districts vulnerable** to a poor monsoon, **111 face primary concerns** due to a severe **lack of protective irrigation facilities**.
- This leaves a massive portion of the national crop output **entirely dependent on unpredictable rainfall patterns**.

2. Rapid Reservoir Strain

- Central Water Commission data indicates **critical reservoir storage levels are falling significantly below the historical normal**.
- While the system can meet immediate requirements, consecutive poor monsoons **severely strain long-term water and hydropower security**.

3. Input Supply Constraints

- **Geopolitical tensions** compound the pressure on fertilizer supplies and increase operational costs for farmers.

- **Pest attacks and global supply chain disruptions** further threaten overall agricultural productivity.

4. Current Account Pressures

- Sustained crop failures force the government to **import essential commodities and release buffer stocks**.
- This **widens the Current Account Deficit** and puts downward pressure on the value of the rupee.

5. Agricultural Export Threats

- A poor monsoon jeopardizes **India's agricultural export trajectory**, which traditionally contributes significantly to core export revenues.
- Reduced output forces **export bans to ensure domestic food security**, causing a loss of global market share.

Way Forward

1. Ex-Ante Risk Reduction

- Public investment must shift from **reactive crop insurance payouts** to **proactive, localized infrastructure resilience**.
- Focusing on risk reduction ensures that agricultural systems are **fundamentally prepared for climate shocks** before they occur.

2. Contingency Crop Planning

- State agricultural departments must operationalize **District Agriculture Contingency Plans (DACPs)** effectively.
- This involves substituting water-guzzling crops with **short-duration, drought-tolerant millets, pulses, and oilseeds**.

3. Micro-Irrigation Expansion

- Accelerate the penetration of **drip and sprinkler irrigation** to optimize the water footprint in agriculture.
- Expanding the **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana** ensures better crop yields even under severe water stress.

4. Decentralized Water Governance

- Restore **traditional community tanks and decentralized water bodies** to ensure local drinking water security.
- These historical systems act as **vital buffers for groundwater recharge** during prolonged dry spells.

5. Statutory Heat Action Plans

- Localize and legally enforce **Heat Action Plans** to protect the informal outdoor workforce.
- This includes mandating **altered working hours, shaded worksites, and climate insurance** for wage-loss compensation.

6. Ecosystem-Based Urban Adaptation

- Implement **cool roof policies and restore urban wetlands** to aggressively counter the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect.

- Integrating **green-blue infrastructure into urban planning** is critical for sustainable microclimate management.

Conclusion

El Niño climate shocks severely threaten India's **macroeconomic stability**. To safeguard **rural livelihoods and growth**, India must aggressively pivot from reactive disaster management to **proactive climate adaptation** through **resilient agriculture, robust heat action plans, and decentralized water governance**.

*Q. Most of the unusual climatic happenings are explained as an outcome of the El Niño effect. Do you agree? **15 Marks***

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Prelims Test Series

2.1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1.1. REJUVENATING THE INDIA-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Context

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent visit to India reinforced bilateral coordination amid global uncertainties. Both nations signed 16 agreements, reaffirming their commitment to an updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and securing maritime energy transport.

Introduction

The India-Japan partnership has evolved across defence, technology, and infrastructure to ensure regional stability. However, structural divergences in trade, alliance commitments, and threat perceptions require immediate policy rejuvenation to navigate current geopolitical turbulence.



What are the Core Pillars of the India-Japan Strategic Partnership?

1. Investment & Infrastructure Engine

- The bedrock of the economic relationship is massive capital infusion, highlighted by a target of 10 trillion JPY (approx. USD 68 billion) in private investment over the next decade.
- Cumulative Official Development Assistance (ODA) has surpassed \$52.7 billion, solidifying Japan as a critical infrastructure partner.

2. Strategic Synchronisation in the Indo-Pacific

- There is a deep intellectual overlap between India's Act East Policy (and the IPOI) and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision.
- As core Quad members, both nations collaborate extensively in maritime security, with Japan formally leading the Connectivity Pillar of India's IPOI framework.

3. Next-Gen Defence Cooperation

- The defense relationship features complex, multi-domain military drills including JIMEX, Dharma Guardian, and the multilateral Malabar exercises.
- The UNICORN naval radar mast project marks a milestone, representing a critical relaxation of Japan's historic defense export self-restrictions.

4. Economic Security & High-Tech Innovation

- The trilateral Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) and a ₹7,600 crore semiconductor OSAT facility in Gujarat aim to de-risk critical global supply chains.
- The India-Japan Digital Partnership focuses on AI, 5G/6G, and joint space exploration, notably the Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) mission.

Significance of the Partnership

1. Preservation of Regional Stability

- It acts as a geostrategic anchor to counter unilateral revisionist actions and maintain a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.
- This alignment protects strategic interests and minimizes vulnerabilities arising from shifting global power dynamics.

2. Securing the Maritime Energy Value Chain

- Joint naval platforms and enhanced maritime domain awareness ensure the safety of energy-carrying ships navigating from the Gulf to the Pacific.
- This cooperation is vital to insulate both economies from disruptions caused by conflicts in West Asia.

3. Driving Frontier Infrastructure Connectivity

- The Act East Forum and JICA funding aggressively develop India's land-locked North Eastern Region, including major bridges over the Brahmaputra.
- This physical connectivity integrates South Asia with Southeast Asia, boosting regional prosperity and security.

4. Building Supply Chain Resilience

- By establishing 11 Japan Industrial Townships (JITs) in India, the partnership reduces over-reliance on a single geography for manufacturing.
- It synergizes Japan's advanced hardware mastery with India's demographic dividend and software ecosystem.

5. Accelerating Clean Energy Transitions

- The Clean Energy Partnership drives deep decarbonisation through joint green hydrogen ecosystems and bioethanol projects.
- This aligns the energy security goals of both nations with their respective net-zero climate commitments.

Challenges Associated with the Partnership

1. Asymmetric Trade Flows and NTMs

- Despite the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), India faces a steep bilateral trade deficit of USD 15.39 billion.
- Strict Japanese non-tariff measures (NTMs), technical regulations, and phyto sanitary standards severely restrict the entry of Indian agricultural and pharmaceutical products.

2. Divergent Alliance Commitments

- Japan is bound by the US-Japan Security Treaty, operating as a formal treaty ally deeply integrated with Western security architecture.
- India strictly maintains strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, participating in non-Western mini-laterals like BRICS and the SCO.

3. Conflicting Multilateral Trade Strategies

- Japan champions the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to secure regional market access and counterbalance China from within.

- India exited the RCEP negotiations to protect its domestic dairy, MSME, and manufacturing sectors from dumping.

4. Asymmetry in Threat Perceptions

- India's immediate security challenges are inherently continental, focused on its unresolved mountainous borders (LAC) with China and Pakistan.
- Japan's threat perception is primarily maritime, centered on the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and North Korean missile tests.

5. Defense Industrial Bottlenecks

- India's "Make in India" initiative demands technology transfer and local co-production, which clashes with Japan's lack of experience in global defense exports.
- This friction previously paralyzed a decade of negotiations over India's intended purchase of Japan's ShinMaywa US-2 amphibious aircraft.

Way Forward

1. Structural Overhaul of the CEPA

- The bilateral Joint Committee must actively dismantle non-tariff barriers and introduce fast-track regulatory pathways for Indian generic pharmaceuticals.
- India should offer plug-and-play manufacturing infrastructure to attract Japan's specialized Tier-2 and Tier-3 electronic suppliers.

2. Build a Co-Authored Sovereign AI Network

- Establish a joint sovereign AI infrastructure fund under the JAI Initiative to build localized Large Language Models (LLMs) tailored for Asian industrial structures.
- This merges Japan's AI governance frameworks with India's computing stacks to build a trusted, non-Western AI ecosystem.

3. Formulate a Digital Talent Corridor

- Create cross-border frameworks to deploy Indian health-tech startups to manage remote, AI-driven diagnostics for Japan's strained, aging medical infrastructure.
- Establish fast-tracked immigration pathways placing Indian engineers directly into Japanese semiconductor firms.

4. Co-Invest in Critical Mineral Refining

- Utilize the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to fund midstream mineral processing plants inside Indian Special Economic Zones.
- This provides India with local refining capabilities while guaranteeing Japan a tax-free supply of processed materials.

5. Establish Prefecture-to-State Corridors

- Create direct investment pathways between Japan's 47 regional prefectures and Indian state governments to bypass top-down federal bureaucratic delays.
- Localized micro-sovereign wealth funds can clear land and labor permits much faster for specific tech and aerospace projects.

6. Pivot to Modular Trilateral Layouts

- Shift third-country cooperation away from slow mega-projects toward deploying joint initiatives combining Japanese maritime infrastructure financing with India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
- Target these trilateral frameworks in immediate maritime neighborhoods like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to deliver high-visibility geoeconomic alternatives.

Conclusion

The **India–Japan** partnership is a key pillar of **Indo-Pacific** stability, combining economic resilience with maritime security. Despite challenges in trade, threat perceptions, and strategic priorities, deeper cooperation in technology, resilient supply chains, and trilateral partnerships will strengthen it as a major global strategic partnership.

Q. Discuss the significance and challenges of the India-Japan Global and Strategic Partnership in ensuring Indo-Pacific stability. 15 Marks

2.1.2. RECALIBRATING THE INDO-PACIFIC ORBIT OF INDIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS

Context

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to Australia highlights the shift in bilateral ties into a high-velocity, multi-domain "T-20 mode". Moving beyond legacy social connections, the relationship has expanded into deep structural collaborations across defense, technology, and clean energy.



Introduction

The India-Australia relationship has transformed from historical divergence into a comprehensive strategic partnership driven by shared maritime interests. Bound by the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, both democracies are leveraging their economic complementarities to build resilient supply chains.

What is the Structural Architecture of the Engagement?

The Foundational Pillars

- **Legacy Matrix:** The relationship was historically anchored by the **3 Cs — of Commonwealth, Cricket and Curry** — and subsequently matured through the **three Ds — Democracy, Diaspora and Dosti**.
- **Strategic Shift:** Transcending these socio-cultural foundations, the contemporary partnership has rapidly shifted focus towards two crucial new dimensions: **Development and Defence**.

Economic and Investment Highways

- **ECTA Dividends:** Under the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), 100% of Indian exports enjoy duty-free access, while India provides preferential access to 90% of Australia's trade value.
- **Bilateral Targets:** Trade volume is projected to scale from \$33 billion toward a shared target of \$100 billion by 2030, supported by ongoing CECA negotiations.

- **Capital Flows:** Two-way cumulative investment is approaching \$50 billion, anchored by major infrastructure and clean energy projects.

Defense and Maritime Security Framework

- **Strategic Dialogue:** Defense cooperation represents the fastest-growing sector, systematically elevated through the **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**.
- **Operational Interoperability:** Comprehensive trilateral and multilateral military drills—including **AUSINDEX, Malabar, and Talisman Sabre**—foster deep tri-service coordination.
- **Logistics Integration:** Supported by the **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)**, both navies have institutionalized maritime domain awareness and base access.

Energy, Technology, and Knowledge Corridors

- **Renewable Energy Taskforces:** Joint initiatives in solar and green hydrogen align Australia's critical mineral reserves with India's manufacturing targets.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** Advanced arrangements for future Australian uranium exports are being finalized to augment India's civil nuclear program.
- **Educational Corridors:** Over one lakh Indian students are enrolled in Australia, backed by the **Maitri Scholarship Program** and new Australian university campuses in India.

Significance of the Partnership

1. Anchors Indo-Pacific Stability

- Functions as a geostrategic pillar within the **Quad framework** to counter unilateral revisionism and secure critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

2. Secures Critical Mineral Supply Chains

- Aligns Australia's resource wealth with India's manufacturing ambitions, guaranteeing stable access to lithium, cobalt, and nickel.

3. Drives Plurilateral Minilateralism

- Counters market dominance through overlapping minilaterals like the **India-Japan-Australia Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)**.

4. Bridges the Global South and West

- Synergizes India's leadership in the Global South with Australia's traditional alliances to coordinate capacity building in Pacific Island Countries.

5. Optimizes Human Capital Synergy

- Mitigates Australia's structural workforce shortfalls by integrating highly skilled Indian youth through targeted mobility visa frameworks.

Challenges Associated with the Relationship

1. Asymmetric Trade Dependencies on China

- Australia maintains extensive primary commodity trade with Beijing, whereas India pursues active economic and industrial decoupling.

2. Regulatory and Immigration Barriers

- Persistent procedural friction surrounding work permits, professional credential recognition, and student visa backlogs restricts optimal talent mobility.

3. Defense Industrial Bottlenecks

- Transitioning from strategic military exercises to concrete defense co-production and technology transfers faces severe bureaucratic delays.

4. Divergent Climate and Energy Politics

- Balancing Australia's position as a major fossil fuel/coal exporter with India's dual demand for energy security and decarbonization requires alignment.

5. Implementation Lag in Trilateral Layouts

- Broad convergences on values do not automatically translate to rapid execution in trilateral formats like India-Indonesia-Australia.

Way Forward

1. Finalize the Full CECA Framework

- Conclude the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to eliminate remaining tariff lines and ease persistent non-tariff barriers.

2. Standardize Vocational and Skill Recognition

- Harmonize training qualifications between both nations to deploy certified Indian workers in Australia's solar and mining sectors.

3. Operationalize the Uranium Export Supply Line

- Fast-track practical arrangements for uranium exports to inject long-term fuel security into India's civil nuclear energy architecture.

4. Deepen Defense Co-Production in Maritime Assets

- Move past standard joint exercises toward deep technology co-development in sub-surface drones, cyber-defense suites, and space systems.

5. Expand Joint Research in Priority Sectors

- Direct public and private funding into joint cross-border innovation hubs for advanced computing, health care, and aerospace.

6. Deploy Modular Trilateral Initiatives

- Prioritize swift, high-visibility joint projects combining Australian financing with India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in the neighborhood.

7. Build Broad-Based Sports Cooperations

- Deepen cooperation in sports medicine, training, and infrastructure ahead of major events like the Brisbane Olympics 2032.

8. Institutionalize a Critical Minerals Sovereign Fund

- Create a dedicated bilateral financial vehicle to directly secure joint ventures in midstream mineral processing and refining.

Conclusion

The introduction of a high-velocity "T-20 mode" marks a profound shift towards permanent defence co-production and resilient mineral supply chains. Overcoming regulatory hurdles will allow both nations to safeguard mutual prosperity and ensure a secure Indo-Pacific order.

3.1. ECONOMY

3.1.1 NFSA AMENDMENT AND ANTYODAYA ANNA YOJANA (AAY)

Introduction

The proposed **2026 amendment to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** seeks to reform **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** entitlements by shifting from a purely household-based allocation to a **per-capita entitlement model**, aiming to improve equity while raising concerns over federalism and food security.



What is the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013?

The **NFSA, 2013** is a rights-based legislation that provides **legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrains** through the Public Distribution System (PDS), aiming to ensure food and nutritional security for vulnerable sections.

Objectives

- **Ensure Food Security as a Legal Right:** Guarantees eligible households a **statutory entitlement to subsidised foodgrains**, making access to food a legal right rather than a welfare scheme.
- **Reduce Hunger and Malnutrition:** Aims to improve nutritional outcomes by ensuring regular access to affordable food for vulnerable populations.
- **Strengthen Targeted Public Distribution:** Enhances the efficiency of the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)** by delivering subsidised foodgrains to identified beneficiaries.
- **Protect Vulnerable Households through Subsidised Foodgrains:** Provides affordable food support to economically weaker sections, reducing food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability.

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY): Existing Framework and Proposed NFSA Amendment (2026)

- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):** Launched in 2000, AAY provides highly subsidised foodgrains to the *poorest of the poor* households, offering higher food security than the Priority Household category under the NFSA.
- **Existing Provision:** Every AAY household receives **35 kg of foodgrains per month**, irrespective of family size.
- **Proposed NFSA Amendment (2026):** Replace the household-based entitlement with **7 kg per person per month**, subject to a maximum of **35 kg per household**.
- **Objective of the Amendment:** Eliminate intra-category inequities, align foodgrain allocation with household size and nutritional needs, ensure equitable distribution among beneficiaries, and improve the efficiency of food subsidy expenditure.

Challenges Associated with the Proposed NFSA Amendment

1. **Reduced Food Security for Small Households:** **The shift to a per-capita entitlement may reduce foodgrain allocation for families with fewer than five members, affecting their food security.**

2. **Regional Imbalance in Foodgrain Allocation:** States with smaller average family sizes, particularly Tamil Nadu and Kerala, may receive lower allocations, potentially widening regional disparities.
3. **Inadequate Protection for the Poorest:** The amendment may weaken the special protection historically provided to Antyodaya households by replacing a fixed household entitlement with a variable one.
4. **Increased Financial Burden on Poor Families:** Reduced subsidised foodgrain may compel vulnerable households to purchase food from the open market, increasing out-of-pocket expenditure.
5. **Inadequate Stakeholder Consultation:** The proposal has drawn criticism for insufficient consultation with States and other stakeholders before introducing significant changes.
6. **Failure to Address Targeting Errors:** The amendment focuses on changing entitlement norms without adequately addressing inclusion and exclusion errors in beneficiary identification.

Broader Policy Challenges

1. **Balancing Equity with Food Security:** A more equitable per-capita allocation must not compromise the minimum food security guaranteed to the poorest households.
2. **Accommodating Regional Diversity:** A uniform national framework should account for variations in demographic patterns, family structures, and consumption behaviour across States.
3. **Strengthening Cooperative Federalism:** Major reforms in food security require meaningful Centre–State consultation to ensure consensus and effective implementation.
4. **Addressing Diverse Nutritional Needs:** Food entitlements should reflect age, gender, occupation, and nutritional requirements rather than relying solely on household size.
5. **Managing Political Economy Concerns:** Food security reforms must balance fiscal efficiency with their social and political implications, particularly in welfare-oriented States.
6. **Enhancing Administrative Capacity:** Effective implementation requires accurate beneficiary databases, periodic verification, and robust digital governance systems.

Global Perspective: Food Security Models Across Countries

Country	Food Security Model	Key Learning for India
Brazil	Fome Zero (Zero Hunger Programme) integrates food subsidies, cash transfers, school meals, and support for small farmers to combat hunger and malnutrition.	Food security should combine food assistance with livelihood and nutrition support rather than relying only on subsidised foodgrains.
United States	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides electronic food benefits based on household income and family size , ensuring targeted assistance.	A need-based and dynamic entitlement system can improve equity while reducing exclusion and inclusion errors.
Indonesia	Rastra/BPNT (Non-Cash Food Assistance Programme) shifted from physical foodgrain distribution to digital food	Leveraging digital technology and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) can enhance efficiency, reduce leakages,

	vouchers , allowing beneficiaries greater choice and improving transparency.	and strengthen beneficiary empowerment.
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Way Forward

1. Build Consensus through Cooperative Federalism: **Institutionalise extensive consultation with States to ensure that food security reforms are participatory, region-sensitive, and enjoy broad political acceptance.**
2. Adopt an Equitable and Flexible Entitlement Framework: **Design a hybrid entitlement model that guarantees a minimum household allocation while incorporating per-capita benefits to balance equity with food security.**
3. Protect the Most Vulnerable: **Ensure that no Antyodaya household experiences a decline in food support below minimum nutritional requirements through appropriate safeguards.**
4. Strengthen Targeting and Digital Governance: **Regularly update beneficiary databases using digital platforms and Aadhaar-enabled verification to minimise inclusion and exclusion errors.**
5. Promote Evidence-Based and Nutrition-Sensitive Policy: **Base foodgrain allocation on demographic patterns, household composition, and nutritional needs rather than relying solely on family size.**
6. Enhance Efficiency while Ensuring Food Security: **Improve transparency, monitoring, and PDS efficiency while maintaining the NFSA's core objective of universal food security for the most vulnerable sections.**

Conclusion

The NFSA must evolve to ensure that reforms promote **equity without compromising food security**. A balanced, evidence-based, and cooperative federal approach can strengthen India's food security architecture while safeguarding the interests of its most vulnerable citizens.

***Q.** The proposed amendment to the National Food Security Act (NFSA) seeks to improve the efficiency and equity of India's food subsidy system. Examine its economic rationale, associated challenges, and suggest measures to ensure inclusive food security. 15 Marks*

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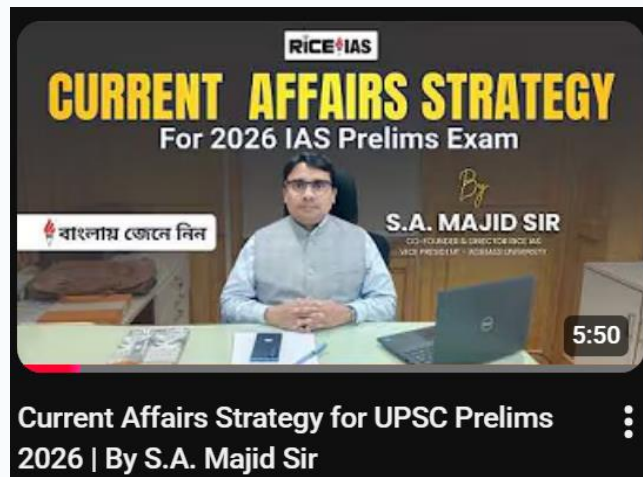
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