

#RiseWithRICE

A large, golden-brown statue of a lion with four heads, standing on a pedestal, is the background for the top half of the image. The lion's heads are facing in four directions. The pedestal has a circular design in the center.

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Prelims Test Series

1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. ROAD SAFETY IN INDIA: BEYOND JUDICIAL FIAT

Context

Despite having only around **1% of the world's vehicles**, India accounts for **nearly 11% of global road traffic fatalities**. Recent judicial attention to seat belts, helmets and child restraints highlights an important concern, but road safety requires a **systemic approach** rather than dependence on individual compliance or judicial intervention alone.



Introduction

Road safety is not merely a matter of **responsible driving**, it is a question of **governance, infrastructure, enforcement, vehicle design and public health**. India therefore needs to shift from a **fault-based approach** to a **“Safe System” approach**, where roads and transport systems are designed to minimise both the probability and severity of crashes.

Understanding India's Road Safety Crisis

- **High mortality:** India has a disproportionately high share of global road fatalities despite a relatively small share of the global vehicle fleet.
- **Two-wheelers dominate deaths:** In 2024, **two-wheeler riders accounted for 46.2%** of road deaths, making them the most vulnerable road-user group.
- **Pedestrian vulnerability:** **Pedestrians constituted 20.6%** of fatalities, highlighting weaknesses in urban planning and pedestrian infrastructure.
- **Speeding as a major cause:** Speeding remains the dominant recorded traffic violation associated with fatalities.
- **Children at risk:** Poor compliance with child restraints and rear-seat belts exposes children to preventable injuries.

Major Challenges to Road Safety in India

1. Excessive Speeding

- **Risk multiplier:** Higher speeds reduce reaction time and increase the probability of collisions, while also making injuries more severe when crashes occur.
- **Systemic cause:** Weak speed enforcement and road designs that allow high-speed acceleration, especially in urban and mixed-traffic areas, amplify the risk.

2. Weak Enforcement Capacity

- **Institutional gap:** Shortages of traffic personnel and uneven enforcement reduce the deterrence effect of traffic laws across States and cities.
- **Compliance deficit:** Persistent violations of speed limits, helmet and seat-belt rules indicate that legal provisions have not translated into consistent behavioural compliance.

3. Unsafe Road Infrastructure

- **Design failure:** Poor intersections, inadequate lighting, unsafe crossings and unaddressed accident-prone locations increase the likelihood of crashes.
- **Human-error blindness:** Roads often assume perfect behaviour; a **Safe System** instead designs infrastructure to minimise the consequences of inevitable human mistakes.

4. Vulnerability of Two-Wheeler Users

- **Limited protection:** Unlike enclosed vehicles, two-wheelers offer little physical protection, making riders particularly vulnerable to serious injury during collisions.
- **Risk accumulation:** Helmet non-compliance, speeding and interaction with larger vehicles further increase the fatality risk for two-wheeler users.

5. Inadequate Pedestrian Infrastructure

- **Unsafe mobility:** Broken/absent footpaths, unsafe crossings and poor pedestrian facilities force pedestrians into direct interaction with vehicular traffic.
- **Planning gap:** Car-centric urban planning often prioritises traffic flow over **safe and accessible mobility** for pedestrians and other vulnerable users.

6. Vehicle-Safety Gaps

- **Occupant vulnerability:** Poor use of seat belts and child restraints increases the risk of ejection and severe injuries during crashes.
- **Regulatory challenge:** Unsafe vehicle modifications and inadequate safeguards against tampering can undermine safety features even after vehicles leave the manufacturer.

7. Weak Post-Crash Response

- **Golden-hour problem:** Delays in crash detection, ambulance services and emergency treatment can convert potentially survivable injuries into fatalities.
- **Healthcare gap:** Inadequate trauma-care facilities, particularly along highways and in remote areas, weaken the final link in the road-safety chain.

8. Poor Road-Safety Culture

- **Behavioural normalisation:** Speeding, unsafe overtaking, distracted driving and other violations are often socially tolerated, weakening voluntary compliance.
- **Beyond enforcement:** Sustainable safety requires road-safety education, social accountability and institutional responsibility so that **safe behaviour becomes a social norm, not merely a legal obligation**.

Why the Existing Approach is Insufficient?

1. Excessive Focus on Individual Responsibility

- **Narrow focus:** Helmets, seat belts and responsible driving are essential, but they place disproportionate responsibility on individuals while overlooking unsafe roads, vehicle design and enforcement failures.
- **Limited coverage:** Since **two-wheeler users and pedestrians constitute a major share of fatalities**, an occupant-safety approach cannot address the full spectrum of road deaths.

2. Law Without Effective Implementation

- **Implementation deficit:** The **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019** strengthened penalties and institutional mechanisms, but legal provisions have limited impact without adequate policing, monitoring and compliance.
- **Governance chain:** **Law → Enforcement → Compliance → Behavioural change → Safety outcomes**, weaknesses in enforcement and implementation disrupt this entire chain.

3. Limited Adoption of the Safe System Approach

- **Paradigm gap:** India still largely treats road crashes as consequences of individual errors rather than designing roads and transport systems to anticipate inevitable human mistakes.
- **Systemic objective:** The focus must shift from merely **preventing violations** to **preventing crashes and minimising fatalities when crashes occur** through safer speeds, roads, vehicles and post-crash care.

4. Judicial Intervention Has Structural Limits

- **Institutional limitation:** Courts can enforce rights and direct compliance, but cannot permanently substitute for the executive functions of **traffic policing, road engineering, urban planning and healthcare delivery**.
- **Appropriate role:** Judicial intervention should act as a **catalyst for administrative accountability and implementation**, while long-term road safety must remain anchored in institutional capacity and evidence-based policymaking.

Global Best Practices

1. Sweden – Vision Zero

- **Safety-first approach:** Sweden's *Vision Zero* treats deaths and serious injuries as unacceptable and recognises that **human error is inevitable**, shifting responsibility towards road designers and system managers.
- **Engineering over blame:** Roads are designed to control crash energy through **speed management, safer infrastructure and protection of vulnerable users**, rather than relying solely on driver compliance.

2. Netherlands – Sustainable Safety

- **Self-explaining roads:** The Dutch approach uses road design and traffic management to make the **intended behaviour obvious**, reducing conflicts between different road users.

- **Conflict minimisation:** It separates incompatible traffic where necessary and promotes safer walking and cycling infrastructure, demonstrating how **urban planning can become a road-safety intervention**.

Way Forward: Building a Safer and More Resilient Road Transport System

1. Adopt a Safe System Approach

- **Paradigm shift:** Treat human error as inevitable and distribute responsibility across **government, road designers, manufacturers, enforcement agencies and users**, rather than placing the entire burden on drivers.
- **Core objective:** Move from merely preventing violations to **preventing crashes and minimising fatalities when crashes occur** through safer roads, speeds, vehicles and post-crash care.

2. Prioritise Speed Management

- **Control the risk multiplier:** Scientifically determine speed limits and strengthen automated enforcement through **speed cameras, CCTV and e-challans**, particularly on high-risk corridors.
- **Engineer for compliance:** Redesign roads using **traffic calming, rumble strips and appropriate road geometry**, so that the physical environment discourages dangerous speeds rather than relying only on signage.

3. Build Forgiving and Inclusive Roads

- **Crash prevention:** Identify and rectify **black spots, unsafe intersections and hazardous road sections** through better lighting, signage, median barriers and road engineering.
- **Protect vulnerable users:** Ensure **continuous footpaths, safe crossings, cycling infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly junctions**, making road design resilient to human error.

4. Strengthen Vehicle and Occupant Safety

- **Safer vehicles:** Strengthen vehicle-safety standards and ensure effective **seat-belt reminders, child-restraint systems and other safety technologies**.
- **Prevent safety dilution:** Regulate unsafe post-purchase modifications and make critical safety features **difficult to disable or tamper with**, particularly for children and rear-seat occupants.

5. Strengthen Enforcement and Institutional Capacity

- **Capacity building:** Address shortages in traffic-police cadres and use technology-enabled enforcement to improve the **certainty and consistency of penalties**.
- **Coordinated governance:** Establish stronger coordination among **Union, State and local authorities**, so that road-safety laws translate into uniform implementation rather than fragmented enforcement.

6. Strengthen Post-Crash Care

- **Golden-hour response:** Develop an integrated chain of **Crash Detection** → **Emergency Call** → **Ambulance** → **Trauma Centre** → **Definitive Treatment** to reduce preventable deaths after crashes.
- **Health-system preparedness:** Expand trauma-care facilities along highways, improve ambulance networks and train first responders in **basic life-saving and emergency-care skills**.

7. Create a Data-Driven Road-Safety Culture

- **Evidence-based governance:** Develop reliable crash databases, map high-risk corridors and use accident data to continuously redesign roads and target enforcement.
- **Behavioural transformation:** Combine school-based education, public campaigns and community participation to make safe behaviour a **social norm**, while evaluating success through **reduction in deaths and serious injuries rather than merely the number of challans issued**.

Conclusion

India cannot reduce road fatalities merely by asking citizens to “**drive carefully**” or by relying on judicial directions. The solution lies in creating a **forgiving and resilient transport system** where human mistakes do not automatically become fatal.

Q. “Effective road safety requires a shift from an individual-centric approach to a systems-based approach.” Discuss in the context of India. 15 Marks

1.1.2. THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Context

The role of the **public intellectual** is increasingly vital in contemporary society to ensure democratic accountability, uphold constitutional values, and address pressing socio-economic challenges through objective and reasoned discourse.



Introduction

A **public intellectual** is an individual who actively engages with complex socio-political issues, utilizing critical thinking and reasoned arguments to advocate for **social justice, human dignity, and democratic fraternity**.

Concept and Origin

- **Historical Roots:** The term gained prominence during the **Dreyfus affair** in France, where artists and writers united to defend an innocent army captain against unjust state charges.

- **Ethical Responsibility:** Thinkers like **Antonio Gramsci** emphasized that intellectuals must shun indifference and actively articulate positions on the burning issues of their time.
- **Indian Tradition:** India has a rich legacy of intellectual engagement, ranging from the **Buddha** in ancient times to **B.R. Ambedkar** in modern history, who actively questioned dominant hegemonic paradigms.

The Role of Youth as Emerging Intellectuals

- **Political Empathy:** Recent agitations, such as the peaceful protests over systemic lapses in **national-level examinations (like NEET)**, highlight the remarkable **political consciousness** and empathy of the younger generation.
- **Demanding Accountability:** Youth movements are increasingly taking up the mantle of public intellectuals by pursuing the core democratic principle of **accountability** against systemic failures.

Significance of Public Intellectuals

- **Safeguarding Democratic Institutions:** They act as a vital check against the systematic weakening of public institutions and the erosion of **democratic practices**.
- **Promoting Civic Nationalism:** They defend an inclusive, **civic nationalism** based on constitutional principles (equality, liberty) over exclusive or jingoistic models.
- **Countering Misinformation:** They help interrogate the blurring of myth and history, thereby combating **fake narratives** and unscientific historical claims.
- **Refocusing Public Discourse:** They steer societal attention toward substantive issues like **unemployment, the agrarian crisis, and public education**, countering communal rhetoric.
- **Fostering Critical Consciousness:** They enhance long-term **critical thinking** among citizens, encouraging them to question dominant hegemonic paradigms.

Challenges in Contemporary Times

- **Academic Apathy:** A generalized, normalized silence pervades **university academia**, where experts hesitate to speak on issues threatening the constitutional framework.
- **Scientific Isolation:** Eminent scientists often confine themselves to narrow, specialized silos, remaining **disembodied and decontextualized** from broader social concerns.
- **Media Commodification:** Electronic media has heavily **commodified public debates**, prioritizing sensationalist noise over meaningful and substantive scholarly content.
- **Stigmatization of Dissent:** A questioning mind is heavily discouraged, with legitimate critiques often delegitimized as **anti-national or seditious**.
- **Criminalization of Expression:** There is a growing tendency toward the **criminalization of dissent**, resulting in threats that shrink safe spaces for objective questioning.

Way Forward

- **Reviving Moral Responsibility:** University teachers must utilize their critical imagination and conceptual equipment to advocate for the **marginalized and weak**.
- **Encouraging Institutional Autonomy:** Universities and scientific research bodies must be empowered to function as independent centers of **critical thought and discourse**.

- **Integrating Science and Society:** Scientists should actively step out of their specialized domains to contribute objective perspectives to **contemporary social debates**.
- **Demanding Administrative Accountability:** Intellectuals must consistently raise questions of accountability regarding lapses in democratic governance, such as systemic failures in **national-level examinations**.
- **Recognizing Youth Leadership:** Society must acknowledge the **political consciousness** and empathy of the youth, recognizing their peaceful protests as valid intellectual interventions.
- **Protecting Safe Spaces for Dissent:** State mechanisms must ensure a conducive environment where objective questioning is protected and **constructive resistance** is viewed as a democratic virtue.

Conclusion

Public intellectuals are indispensable to the moral and intellectual health of a nation. Fostering an environment that encourages reasoned debate and **critical consciousness** is crucial to sustaining India's inclusive, democratic, and egalitarian ethos.

Q. Evaluate the significance of public intellectuals in preserving democratic resilience and fostering critical consciousness in India. What are the key challenges they face in contemporary times? 15 Marks

1.1.3. RECONCILING INDIA'S GLOBAL SPORTING AMBITIONS WITH INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

Context

India faced renewed global scrutiny after at least **13 athletes tested positive** for banned substances ahead of the Commonwealth and Asian Games, resulting in squad exclusions. With the **Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)** categorizing India as a **high-risk doping nation**, structural reforms in enforcement and compliance have become an urgent priority.



Introduction

Doping violates the core tenets of **fair play**, threatens **athlete health**, and erodes national sporting credibility. While India introduced the **National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025** to empower domestic oversight, eliminating performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) requires addressing **fiscal constraints, supply chain trafficking, and institutional autonomy**.

What is Doping?

- **Doping** is the use of prohibited substances (e.g., **anabolic steroids, hormones, stimulants**) or prohibited methods (e.g., **blood doping, gene doping**) to artificially enhance athletic performance.
- It encompasses diverse **Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs)**, including test evasions, sample tampering, possession, and illicit substance trafficking.

- Beyond competitive distortion, doping induces severe **cardiovascular disorders, hormonal imbalances**, and permanent organ toxicity.

Legislative and Institutional Basis

- The **National Anti-Doping Act, 2022** provided India's first statutory framework, recently reinforced by the **National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025**.
- The legislation aligns domestic enforcement with the **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Code** and the **UNESCO International Convention against Doping in Sport**.
- It establishes a two-tiered statutory hierarchy: the **National Board for Anti-Doping in Sports** as the policy and supervisory body, and the **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** as the primary enforcement authority.
- Provides legislative sanction for **out-of-competition testing**, intelligence gathering, investigation, and disciplinary appeals.

Significance of a Robust Anti-Doping Architecture

1. Upholding Sporting Ethics and Fair Play

- It protects natural athletic merit by ensuring a **level playing field** free from pharmacologically manipulated outcomes.
- This preserves the foundational spirit of sports and restores public trust in domestic competitive tournaments.

2. Athlete Welfare and Health Security

- Strict deterrence prevents athletes from suffering long-term, irreversible **cardiovascular and physiological damage**.
- It shifts the ecosystem's focus toward **scientific training**, proper nutrition, and medical safety.

3. Boosting National Soft Power and Hosting Credentials

- Clean sporting credentials enhance India's international standing as an aspiring host for mega-events like the **Commonwealth Games** and **Olympics**.
- Eliminating systemic doping prevents embarrassing international disqualifications and downgrades.

4. Compliance with International Obligations

- A credible framework fulfills mandatory commitments under the **UNESCO Convention** and **WADA standards**.
- It prevents Indian sports bodies from facing global sanctions, bans, or neutral-flag restrictions.

5. Safeguarding Grassroots Talent

- It prevents honest, clean athletes—particularly from economically vulnerable backgrounds—from being sidelined by peers using illicit substances.
- Promotes equitable socio-economic mobility through fair, transparent sports recruitment quotas.

Challenges Associated with Anti-Doping Regulation in India

1. Deficit of Functional Autonomy

- Continued administrative and executive reliance on government departments limits **NADA's operational independence**.
- True deterrence requires an arm's-length regulatory separation similar to statutory financial and market watchdogs.

2. Institutional and Fiscal Under-Resourcing

- NADA remains **chronically understaffed**, curtailing sample collection across India's vast geography.
- Rising testing costs coupled with recent **budgetary cuts** restrict widespread testing at district and state levels.

3. Distorted Cash-Incentive Frameworks

- Massive, front-loaded **state cash awards** and secure government jobs for medalists incentivize athletes and coaches to take shortcuts.
- High financial stakes create a high-reward environment that outweighs the perceived risk of getting caught.

4. Unregulated Illicit Supply Chains

- India has emerged as a major consumption and transit hub for **black-market PED syndicates**.
- Inadequate inter-agency coordination between drug control departments and border customs facilitates cheap availability.

5. Apathy of National Sports Federations (NSFs)

- Federations frequently lack internal monitoring mechanisms and show administrative reluctance to expose violations.
- Support staff, personal coaches, and medical practitioners often escape accountability while individual athletes bear the entire burden of penalties.

Global Best Practices

1. United States – The Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act

- Extends **extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction** over international doping conspiracies that affect major competitions involving U.S. athletes or sponsors.
- Criminalizes the **illicit support ecosystem** (doctors, trainers, and officials) rather than punishing only the athletes.

2. Kenya – Inter-Agency Enforcement and Border Interdiction

- Deploys specialized police intelligence units working alongside anti-doping authorities to crack down on the **unauthorized importation of PEDs**.
- Imposes strict custodial sentences and criminal liabilities on pharmaceutical distributors supplying banned substances to competitors.

Way Forward

1. Operationalize the 2025 Statutory Mandates

- Strictly enforce the investigative powers under the **National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025** to conduct intelligence-led search and seizure operations.
- Ensure that the National Board for Anti-Doping functions as an effective appellate and supervisory mechanism.

2. Insulate Institutional Independence

- Grant statutory, financial, and operational autonomy to **NADA**, insulating it from sports ministry and federation influence.
- Institute dedicated, non-lapsable funding lines to meet escalating **accredited laboratory testing expenditures**.

3. Criminalize PED Trafficking and Networks

- Enact targeted legal provisions to impose **criminal liability on suppliers, handlers, and coaches** facilitating doping networks.
- Integrate state law enforcement and the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)** into anti-doping supply audits.

4. Restructure Athletic Incentive Frameworks

- Shift medal incentives toward **phased endowments, pensions, and long-term training grants** rather than one-time cash windfalls.
- Condition incentive disbursements on consecutive, post-competition negative dope tests over multi-year windows.

5. Enforce NSF Accountability Audits

- Link public funding, tax exemptions, and government recognition of **National Sports Federations** directly to their anti-doping compliance records.
- Mandate independent integrity officers inside every recognized national sports body.

6. Institutionalize Grassroots Education

- Scale values-based educational campaigns like **#PlayTrue** across youth sports academies, rural school meets, and district championships.
- Educate young competitors on the dangers of tainted supplements, inadvertent ingestion, and contaminated medication.

Conclusion

India's emergence as a premier global sporting power depends on institutional integrity alongside medal tallies. Eradicating systemic doping requires combining the statutory powers of the **2025 Amendment** with **uncompromising regulatory autonomy**, relentless supply interdiction, and cultural reform across the athletic ecosystem.

Q. *The National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025, aims to strengthen institutional autonomy and align India with global anti-doping standards. Discuss its key provisions and the associated challenges in eradicating doping from Indian sports. 15 Marks*

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Prelims Test Series

2.1. ENVIRONMENT

2.1.1. PYGMY HOG CONSERVATION: FROM SPECIES RECOVERY TO ALLUVIAL GRASSLAND RESTORATION

Context

The pygmy hog's recovery in Assam demonstrates that species conservation cannot succeed through captive breeding alone; its long-term survival depends upon restoring dynamic alluvial grassland ecosystems.



Introduction

The pygmy hog (*Porcula salvinia*), the world's smallest wild suid, is **Critically Endangered** and confined to Assam, making its conservation an important test of ecosystem-based wildlife management.

Present Situation

1. **Extremely restricted distribution:** The species historically occupied tall, wet grasslands along the Himalayan foothills, but its wild distribution has contracted drastically, with **Manas National Park remaining its principal stronghold**.
2. **Small and difficult-to-monitor population:** Estimates have generally placed the wild population in the **150–250 range**, although precise enumeration remains difficult because the animal is secretive and inhabits dense grasslands.
3. **Captive breeding has created an insurance population:** The Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP), launched in **1995**, developed captive-breeding facilities in Assam and subsequently reintroduced captive-bred individuals into protected grasslands.
4. **Significant recovery through reintroduction:** Between **2008 and 2023, around 170 captive-bred pygmy hogs were released** at different sites in Assam, demonstrating the feasibility of conservation breeding combined with habitat restoration.
5. **Recent rewilding continues:** In 2026, **15 captive-bred pygmy hogs were released into Kuribeel grasslands of Manas**, returning the species to an area associated with its original conservation efforts.

Factors Responsible for the Threat

1. **Conversion of grasslands:** Alluvial floodplains have been converted for **agriculture, settlements, tea plantations and infrastructure**, reducing the continuous grassland habitat required by pygmy hogs.
2. **Flood-control interventions:** Embankments and other flood-control measures can modify the **natural flooding, sediment deposition and vegetation dynamics** of floodplains, thereby altering suitable grassland habitats.

3. **Invasive vegetation:** Invasive plants can replace native tall grasses, reducing food availability and the dense vegetation required for **foraging, nesting and concealment**.
4. **Unsustainable fire regimes:** Dry-season burning, when poorly timed or excessively extensive, can destroy the dense grass cover required by pygmy hogs; conversely, complete fire suppression can allow woody vegetation to invade grasslands.
5. **Habitat fragmentation:** Fragmentation isolates small populations, restricts dispersal and increases vulnerability to **local extinction and genetic erosion**.

Challenges Faced by the Ecosystem

1. **Grassland–forest succession:** Alluvial grasslands are naturally dynamic; excessive suppression of ecological processes can allow shrubs and trees to encroach, converting grassland into woodland.
2. **Balancing fire ecology:** Fire is an ecological process in many grasslands, but inappropriate timing, frequency or intensity can eliminate the vegetation structure needed by pygmy hogs and other grassland specialists.
3. **Multiple-species conservation dilemma:** Grassland management must simultaneously accommodate species such as the **Bengal florican, hispid hare, hog deer and greater one-horned rhinoceros**, rather than focusing exclusively on one flagship species.
4. **Small isolated populations:** Concentration of the remaining population in limited habitats increases vulnerability to **disease outbreaks, extreme floods, fires, demographic fluctuations and stochastic events**.
5. **Monitoring difficulty:** The animal's small size, secretive behaviour and dense habitat make conventional population estimation difficult, necessitating **camera traps, field signs, telemetry and genetic monitoring**.

Ecological Significance of the Pygmy Hog

1. **Indicator species:** The pygmy hog is closely associated with healthy **tall, wet alluvial grasslands**; therefore, its population trends can signal broader degradation of floodplain ecosystems.
2. **Umbrella-species potential:** Conserving its grassland habitat can simultaneously protect several threatened species, including the **Bengal florican, hispid hare and hog deer**, generating wider biodiversity benefits.
3. **Soil ecosystem functions:** Its rooting and foraging behaviour disturbs and aerates soil while searching for **roots, tubers, invertebrates and other food**, contributing to nutrient cycling.
4. **Seed dispersal:** Its feeding and movement behaviour can contribute to **seed dispersal**, thereby supporting vegetation dynamics within grassland ecosystems.
5. **Grassland conservation indicator:** Recovery of the pygmy hog therefore represents more than saving a rare mammal; it indicates progress towards restoring the ecological integrity of the **Brahmaputra–Terai alluvial grassland landscape**.

Government and Conservation Initiatives

1. **Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (1995):** Established through collaboration involving conservation organisations and government agencies, the PHCP combines **research, captive breeding, habitat management, reintroduction and community participation**.
2. **Captive breeding:** Six wild pygmy hogs were brought into the breeding programme in the 1990s, establishing a founder population from which subsequent captive-bred animals were produced.
3. **Habitat restoration:** Conservation programmes have worked to create and restore open grasslands, including through **invasive-species removal and planting of native grasses**.
4. **Reintroduction programme:** Earlier releases included **116 captive-bred hogs across Sonai Rupai, Orang and Barnadi between 2008 and 2018**, demonstrating the use of multiple protected landscapes rather than relying exclusively on one site.
5. **Legal protection:** The pygmy hog receives **Schedule I protection under India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, providing the highest level of statutory protection under the Act.

Way Forward

1. **Adopt ecosystem-first conservation:** Shift from merely increasing captive numbers towards restoring the **entire alluvial grassland–floodplain ecological process** on which wild populations depend.
2. **Restore habitat connectivity:** Reconnect fragmented grasslands and strengthen buffer zones around **Manas, Orang and Sonai Rupai**, enabling dispersal and reducing isolation.
3. **Restore native vegetation:** Establish nurseries for indigenous grass species and systematically remove invasive plants, as demonstrated by recent habitat-restoration work at Manas.
4. **Improve scientific monitoring:** Combine **camera trapping, radio/GPS telemetry, environmental DNA and genetic sampling** to obtain more reliable population estimates and understand dispersal.
5. **Landscape-level planning:** Integrate pygmy-hog conservation with management of **Bengal florican, rhino, hog deer and hispid hare**, converting species-specific programmes into grassland ecosystem restoration.

Conclusion

The pygmy hog symbolises the health of India's threatened floodplain grasslands; securing its future therefore requires moving beyond captive breeding towards landscape restoration, ecological connectivity and adaptive management.

Q. *The conservation of the pygmy hog is inseparable from the conservation of India's threatened alluvial grassland ecosystems." Discuss the ecological significance of the pygmy hog, the threats to its survival, and the conservation measures required for its long-term recovery. 15 marks*

2.2. INTERNAL SECURITY

2.2.1. ANATOMY OF MANIPUR'S HILL-VALLEY FAULT LINES

Context

Following the end of **President's Rule** in February 2026 and the return of select tribal legislators to the Assembly, political channels have begun reopening; however, an outbreak of **Naga-Kuki-Zo clashes** has created a destabilizing second ethnic fault line in the hill districts.



Introduction

Internal security in multi-ethnic border states requires preserving institutional legitimacy alongside the **rule of law**. In Manipur, while the political divide between the valley and the hills shows tentative signs of thawing, resurgent territorial conflicts within the hills and severe **humanitarian crises** present a complex challenge to state capacity.

Transition Towards Political Normalcy

- **Restoration of Civilian Governance:** The revocation of **President's Rule** in February 2026 led to the installation of an elected government under a new Chief Minister, accelerating reconciliation efforts.
- **Abatement of Routine Violence:** Everyday physical clashes between the **Meitei and Kuki-Zo** communities have abated over the three years following the May 2023 unrest.
- **Reclaiming Constitutional Space:** Two Kuki-Zo MLAs attended the Assembly session, defying the boycott directive issued by the **Kuki Inpi Manipur** that demanded a separate administration prior to political re-engagement.
- **Institutional Dialogue:** The return of legislators reflects an acknowledgment that formal legislative platforms must function even while core ideological contestations persist.

Resurgence of Intra-Hill Conflict

- **Spread of Inter-Tribal Violence:** Localized disputes expanding across the hills since February resulted in the deaths of **15 Kuki-Zo persons, 11 Nagas, three security personnel, and a truck driver** by July, with casualties continuing to rise.
- **Role of Armed Militias:** Non-state armed groups claiming community mandates have actively revived hostilities, leading to the burning of villages and fresh displacement.
- **Echoes of the 1990s:** The clashes revive historic contestations regarding **territorial control of the hills** and the primacy of competing **customary laws**.

Humanitarian Distress and Blockades

- **Protracted Displacement:** Thousands of internally displaced persons are entering their fourth year in relief camps.
- **Relief Camp Mortality:** A reply under the **Right to Information Act, 2005** confirmed over **700 deaths** inside relief camps, caused primarily by acute deficits in basic healthcare and essential nutrition.
- **Weaponization of Supply Lifelines:** Partisan economic blockades along **National Highway 2 (NH-2)** and **National Highway 37 (NH-37)** have stranded essential drugs and rations, leaving hill medical centers dysfunctional and impacting the smaller Kuki-Zo population heavily.

Significance of Establishing Peace and Stability in Manipur

- **Restoration of Legislative Primacy:** Validates the authority of constitutional forums over uncompromising **civil society boycotts**.
- **Multi-Front Security Overstretch:** A triangular conflict dynamic (Meitei, Kuki-Zo, and Naga) severely strains central and state **peacekeeping resources**.
- **Strategic Border Vulnerability:** Instability in a frontier state impairs cross-border connectivity and exposes critical administrative fault lines.
- **Humanitarian Benchmark:** Emphasizes that peace-building cannot succeed through security operations alone without basic **human security**.
- **Efficacy of Special Provisions:** Highlights the necessity of activating mechanisms under **Article 371C** to resolve hill governance impasses.

Major Challenges Confronting the Restoration of Peace in Manipur

- **Unregulated Non-State Armed Groups:** Armed groups operating outside formal oversight undermine settlements, accentuated by disputes surrounding the **Suspension of Operations (SoO)** framework.
- **Weaponized Economic Blockades:** Recurrent disruptions on **NH-2 and NH-37** serve as coercive leverage, causing severe localized inflation and medical shortages.
- **Institutionalization of Relief Camps:** Prolonged camp stays create persistent public health and nutritional failures that standard welfare grants fail to mitigate.
- **Unsettled Land and Customary Jurisdictions:** Friction persists between statutory bodies under the **Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971** and hereditary village chiefs exercising customary authority.
- **Narrow Electoral Timelines:** The upcoming Assembly elections risk incentivizing polarizing campaign rhetoric among competing ethnic constituencies.

Way Forward

- **Verifiable Militia Containment:** Condition security restraint on strict, verified encampment and total **weapons accounting** for all armed groups.

- **Securing Arterial Highways:** Designate **NH-2 and NH-37** as protected transit corridors, enforcing dedicated armed convoys and treating blockades as criminal offenses.
- **Dated Resettlement Roadmap:** Replace open-ended relief camp maintenance with a time-bound, secure **rehabilitation plan** for villages of return.
- **Harmonizing Customary and Statutory Laws:** Convene a statutory boundary and rights settlement process led by the **Hill Areas Committee (HAC)**.
- **Institutionalized Multi-Track Dialogue:** Establish a formal tripartite consultative platform involving Meitei, Naga, and Kuki-Zo stakeholders to defuse communal rhetoric.
- **All-Party Electoral Code:** Formulate binding ground rules among political parties to prohibit communal mobilization ahead of the Assembly elections.

Conclusion

Sustainable peace in Manipur requires the state to manage both the hill-valley divide and intra-hill contestations simultaneously. Lasting stability hinges on strict legal even-handedness, uniform enforcement of criminal law, and equitable protection of all citizens irrespective of ethnic identity.

Q. *What are the major challenges to internal security and peace process in the North-Eastern States? Map the various peace accords and agreements initiated by the government in the past decade. 15 Marks*

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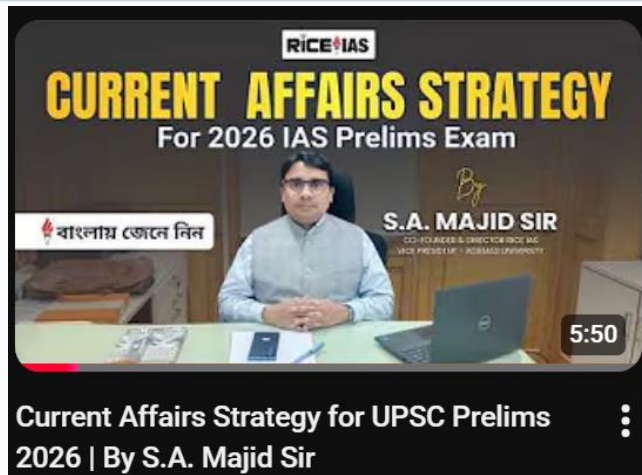
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