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Table of Contents

1. India-New Zealand Bilateral Relations and the Indo-Pacific Geopolitics	2
2. Shifting Dynamics of India's Crude Oil Imports	3
3. Reservation Status of Religious Converts to Islam.....	4
4. Financial Implications of Replacing MGNREGS with VB-G RAM G	6
5. India-Indonesia Strategic Pact: Astra Missile Export and Geopolitical Implications	7
6. West Asian Geopolitics and the Resurgence of Iran	9
7. Indian Diaspora in Australia: Demographic Shifts and Strategic Pragmatism ..	10
8. Fiscal Asymmetry in India's Welfare Architecture	11
9. Jurisprudence of the Right to Be Forgotten in India	13
10. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, War Crimes Allegations, and the 'Hummus Trail'	14
11. India-Indonesia Joint Cultural Heritage Restoration Project	15
12. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report Analysis.....	16



1. India-New Zealand Bilateral Relations and the Indo-Pacific Geopolitics

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Historical Diplomatic Visit:** The Prime Minister of India's visit to New Zealand marks the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister in four decades, highlighting a major inflection point in deepening bilateral ties.
- **Core Pillars of Cooperation:** The bilateral engagement centers around three essential foundational pillars: economic ties, defense & security cooperation, and people-to-people relations.
- **Shift from Rules-Based to Power-Based Order:** The global geopolitical landscape is witnessing an "inflection point," increasingly transitioning from a stable rules-based system to an assertive power-based system.
- **Transition to Multipolarity:** The international order is evolving rapidly from traditional multilateral systems toward a complex multipolar dynamic.

- **Regional Strategic Challenges:** Key democratic partners are navigating a rising Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region, alongside isolationist shifts such as the US 'America First' policy.
- **Upholding Sovereign Integrity:** Joint strategic collaborations aim to stand against the illegal violation of sovereign borders, referencing broader security actions like Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Essential Definitions

- **Rules-Based International Order:** A shared commitment by sovereign states to conduct international relations according to established framework laws, global treaties, and international bodies rather than raw power dynamics.
- **Multipolarity:** A distribution of global power in which more than two nation-states hold significant structural economic, military, and diplomatic influence globally or regionally.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Constitution of India:** As part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), Article 51 explicitly mandates the state to promote international peace, maintain just and honorable relations between nations, and foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.
- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):** A foundational legal instrument critical to Indo-Pacific maritime security, outlining the preservation of freedom of navigation and the legal settlement of maritime boundaries against territorial expansionism.



Conclusion

The revitalized collaboration between India and New Zealand signals a vital push to defend a rules-based system amidst fracturing global governance. By strengthening economic, defense, and cultural ties, both nations establish a stabilizing anchor within a highly dynamic, multipolar Indo-Pacific matrix.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India and affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **Key Themes:** Indo-Pacific maritime strategy, rule of international law, and changing dynamics of multilateral organizations.

2. Shifting Dynamics of India's Crude Oil Imports

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Surge in Russian Import Share:** Russia's share in India's crude oil imports crossed 40% in May 2026, marking its highest level in nearly two years.
- **Disappearance of Russian Discount:** While Russia offered discounted crude as recently as February, it charged India a premium on oil shipments by May 2026.

- **Competitive Alternative Pricing:** Traditional and newer supply sources, including the United States and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), sold oil to India at lower-than-average prices during this period.
- **Strategic Energy Diversification:** Analysis of Ministry of Commerce and Industry data reveals India is actively broadening its oil import basket to mitigate geopolitical risks.
- **Resumption of Sanctioned Channels:** India resumed oil imports from Iran and Venezuela in April and May 2026 following eased restrictions, notably after the U.S. permitted Venezuelan exports in February.
- **Macroeconomic Balancing:** The structural pivot highlights India's balancing act between managing domestic inflationary pressures, trade deficits, and maintaining strategic autonomy.

Essential Definitions

- **Strategic Autonomy:** An approach in international relations where a nation pursues its national interests and independent foreign policy decisions without relying on or being coerced by major global powers.
- **Premium Pricing:** A market scenario where a particular commodity or trade good is priced higher than the prevailing global benchmark or average market rate due to high demand, specific supply agreements, or logistical constraints.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 73 of the Constitution of India:** Extends the executive power of the Union to matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, giving the central government sovereign authority over international trade, treaties, and foreign affairs.
- **Entries 57 and 83 of the Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Directs parliamentary jurisdiction over "Foreign Affairs" and "Duties of Customs including Export Duties," providing the statutory underpinning for regulating international energy imports and custom tariffs.

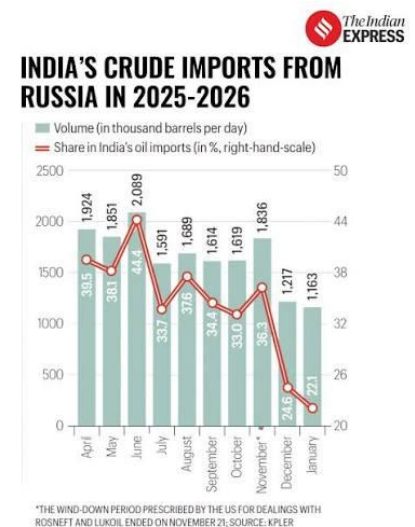
Conclusion

The evolution of India's crude sourcing strategy underlines a flexible energy diplomacy framework. Confronted with eroding Russian discounts, India's prompt pivot back toward Venezuela, Iran, and Western suppliers highlights its commitment to securing cost-effective energy reserves while maintaining its strategic independence on the world stage.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian diaspora and energy security.
- **GS Paper III (Economic Development):** Infrastructure: Energy; Mobilization of resources; Growth, development, and macro-stability.

3. Reservation Status of Religious Converts to Islam



Key Highlights & Summary

- **Supreme Court Appeal:** The Tamil Nadu government filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court, challenging a Madras High Court decision that barred religious converts to Islam from claiming Backward Class Muslim (BCM) reservation benefits.
- **Striking Down Executive Policy:** The High Court declared a March 2024 state government order (GO) unconstitutional, which had permitted converts from BC, MBC, DNC, or Scheduled Caste backgrounds to be treated as BC (Muslim).
- **Judicial Precedent Upheld:** The division bench observed that an executive notification cannot override binding judicial precedents establishing that a person converting to Islam becomes "just a Mussalman" without a carry-forward caste status.
- **Theological and Social Argument:** The High Court emphasized that because Islamic and Christian preachers historically campaigned on tenets of complete social equality, it remains disingenuous to claim a caste hierarchy for reservation advantages post-conversion.
- **Birth-Based Membership:** The ruling underscored that distinct, notified Muslim sub-communities in the state, such as the Labbai sect, are strictly birth-based social groups and cannot be joined merely via religious conversion.
- **State's Rationale for Continuity:** The Tamil Nadu government defended the 2024 policy on the grounds that conversion does not instantly erase socio-educational backwardness, and the rule aimed to protect existing affirmative action entitlements.

Essential Definitions

- **Backward Class Muslim (BCM):** A distinct category created within reservation frameworks to provide specific affirmative action benefits to historically marginalized and backward sects within the Muslim community.
- **Special Leave Petition (SLP):** An appellate mechanism under the Indian Constitution that empowers the Supreme Court to grant special leave to appeal against any judgment or order passed by any court or tribunal in the country.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 16(4) of the Constitution of India:** Empowers the State to make provisions for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- **Article 25 and Article 136:** Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. Article 136 vests discretionary power in the Supreme Court to entertain Special Leave Petitions against lower court rulings.

Conclusion

RESERVATION AND RELIGION

What does the law say?

Reservations are not based on religion

- Reservation is based on constitutional categories such as SC, ST and OBC.
- No religion has a blanket reservation.

Muslims

- Some Muslim communities are included in OBC lists.
- Eligibility varies by state & community.

Christians

- Some Christian communities are also included in OBC lists.
- There is no religion-wide reservation.

Scheduled Caste reservation

- SC status is currently limited to Hindus, Sikhs & Buddhists under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.
- Dalits who convert to Islam or Christianity generally lose SC status under the present law.

Sources: Constitution of India; Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950; Central OBC List, National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

The dispute highlights a deep legal tension between state executive measures aimed at maintaining affirmative action continuity and judicial interpretations regarding the theological egalitarianism of specific religions. The Supreme Court's intervention will provide definitive clarity on whether social backwardness can dynamically transcend religious conversion.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance and Polity):** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.
- **Key Themes:** Affirmative action, basic structure, limits of executive orders versus judicial precedents, and the intersection of fundamental rights with social justice policies.

4. Financial Implications of Replacing MGNREGS with VB-G RAM G

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Opposition to Policy Shift:** Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu stated that scraping the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS) and replacing it with the new Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (VB-G RAM G) would not serve the hill state's interests.
- **Fiscal Burden on States:** While MGNREGS was fully funded by the Central government, the newly proposed VB-G RAM G scheme requires State governments to cover 10% of the financial costs.
- **Strain on Mountainous States:** This structural change would place an acute, additional financial burden on Himachal Pradesh's already constrained and limited budgetary resources.
- **Administrative Consolidation:** The state plans to raise this funding issue with the Centre while simultaneously integrating all flagship rural development schemes with the Chief Minister's dashboard for effective online monitoring.
- **Human Resource Optimization:** To improve structural efficiency, vacant posts within the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department are being filled on a priority basis.
- **Focus on Grassroots Livelihoods:** Financial assistance is actively being extended to rural self-help groups to strengthen livelihoods and drive the empowerment of rural women across the state.

VB-G RAM G REPLACES MGNREGA WHAT CHANGES?	
	
MGNREGA	VB-G RAM G
100 wage employment days - Work scattered across categories; no robust national strategy - Centre bears unskilled wage costs; states bear unemployment allowance - No explicit statutory "pause window" - Wage payment within a stipulated time window - Gram Panchayat planning is central	125 wage employment days - Localised planning; mandates Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans - State cost-sharing for wages; 60:40 for most states; 90:10 for certain special-category regions - States can notify up to 60 days in a FY when work will not be executed - Weekly wage payments mandated; fortnight at most - Integrates institutionalised convergence and infrastructure planning

Essential Definitions

- **Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS):** Schemes funded jointly by the Central government and the State governments according to a fixed percentage ratio (e.g., 90:10 or 60:40), though implemented entirely by State governments.

- **Fiscal Federalism:** The economic framework regulating the division of governmental functions and financial relations, particularly the distribution of revenues and expenditure responsibilities, between the Centre and the constituent State units.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21 and Right to Livelihood:** The Supreme Court of India has historically interpreted the Right to Life under Article 21 to broadly include the Right to Livelihood, which statutory wage employment guarantees like MGNREGS operationalize for rural households.
- **Article 243G of the Constitution of India:** Powers, authority, and responsibilities of Panchayats to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice, including rural infrastructure and employment works.

Conclusion

The fiscal transition from a fully centrally funded employment model to a co-funded framework under VB-G RAM G presents clear challenges for resource-constrained states. For ecologically fragile hill states like Himachal Pradesh, a balanced fiscal federal architecture is essential to prevent regional disparities and protect rural social safety nets.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance and Polity):** Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels, and challenges therein; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
- **GS Paper III (Economic Development):** Employment, inclusive growth, and issues arising from it; Budgeting and fiscal resource mobilization.

5. India-Indonesia Strategic Pact: Astra Missile Export and Geopolitical Implications

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Milestone Defense Export Pact:** India and Indonesia signed a landmark agreement for the supply of India's indigenous Astra Mk1 Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (BVRAAM), marking the missile's inaugural export to a foreign nation.

- **Astra Mk1 Capabilities:** Developed indigenously by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the Astra Mk1 features an operational range of 80 to 110 km, achieves altitudes up to 20 km, and travels at supersonic speeds of Mach 4.5.
- **Integration and Fleet Arming:** The missiles will arm Indonesia's Sukhoi-30 fighter fleet, while India plans future integrations with its indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk1A and French-origin Rafale jets.
- **Advanced Indigenous Pipeline:** The DRDO is actively developing Astra Mk2 (200 km range) and Astra Mk3 (named Gandiva, with a range exceeding 350 km), which utilizes advanced Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) engine technology for sustained mid-flight thrust.
- **Strategic Regional Counterweight:** The Astra missile serves as India's tactical counter to the Chinese-developed long-range PL-15 radar-guided missile currently deployed by both China and Pakistan.
- **Expanding Footprint in South China Sea:** This pact reinforces India's growing defense export profile in the Indo-Pacific, complementing its existing BrahMos supersonic cruise missile supply deals with Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.



Essential Definitions

- **Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM):** An airborne weapon system capable of engaging and destroying enemy aerial targets at distances exceeding 20 nautical miles (37 km) without requiring visual acquisition.
- **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR):** An advanced missile propulsion technology that uses a ramjet engine with solid propellant to draw in atmospheric oxygen during flight, maintaining continuous thrust rather than burning out rapidly like conventional rocket motors.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Constitution of India:** Dictates the Promotion of International Peace and Security as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), which India advances by building credible defense partnerships with maritime neighbors.
- **Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005:** Provides the overarching statutory framework governing the rigorous end-user monitoring and export controls of advanced Indian missile technologies to ensure international compliance.

Conclusion

The export of the Astra Mk1 missile to Indonesia represents a transformative leap from defense import dependence to becoming an advanced technology exporter. By equipping ASEAN partners with indigenous precision strike systems, India effectively translates its "Make in India" defense initiative into a robust strategic stabilizer for the Indo-Pacific region.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Science and Technology):** Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Security challenges and their management in border areas.

6. West Asian Geopolitics and the Resurgence of Iran

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Strategic Geopolitical Resurgence:** Following prolonged conflicts with the U.S. and Israel, Iran is projecting a strong image of national pride, defiance, and resilience.
- **Emergence of a Second Revolution:** The post-war landscape mirrors Iran's 1979 revolution, consolidating the regime's internal authority and leaving the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in full control.
- **Shift in Regional Security Architecture:** The conflict has disrupted the long-standing U.S. security umbrella in the Gulf, prompting regional nations to seek alternative diplomacy, including potential reconciliation with Tehran.
- **Economic Recovery Pathways:** Easing economic sanctions, unfreezing assets, and the strategic monetization of the Strait of Hormuz offer a strong avenue for Iran's domestic economic revival.
- **Unaltered Strategic Assets:** Despite intense military pressure, Iran's core ballistic missile and nuclear programs remain completely non-negotiable in its international memorandums.
- **Diplomatic Tightrope for India:** Having shown recent tilts toward the Israel-U.S.-UAE bloc, India faces a critical strategic choice to rebalance its diplomatic and energy ties with a resurgent Iran and a divided Gulf region.

Essential Definitions

- **West Asian Balance of Power:** The shifting geopolitical equilibrium among key regional actors (principally Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel) and external superpowers, influencing trade, security, and global energy markets.
- **Monetization of Chokepoints:** The strategic use of leverage, transit fees, or security control over critical maritime passages—such as the Strait of Hormuz—to secure economic and diplomatic concessions.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Constitution of India:** Instructs the state to promote international peace and security, maintain just and honorable relations between nations, and foster respect for international law to balance complex ties in West Asia.

Empire of Proxies

Iran has extended its influence across the Middle East

Government relation to Iran:

■ Aligned ■ Tilting toward ■ Neutral/hedging ■ Opposed

State penetration by Iran:

⊗ High ⊘ Medium-high ≡ Medium ∴ Low



- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):** The international legal instrument regulating transit rights through straits used for international navigation, directly applicable to the contested legal dynamics surrounding the Strait of Hormuz.

Conclusion

Iran's transition from military conflict to political resurgence marks a permanent shift in the West Asian balance of power. As regional states reconsider their reliance on external security assurances, India must carefully calibrate its energy diplomacy and multi-aligned foreign policy to secure its deep strategic and economic interests in the Persian Gulf.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian diaspora; Regional and global groupings involving India.
- **Key Themes:** Strategic autonomy, energy security vectors, security of global maritime sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), and India's West Asia "Look West" policy matrix.

7. Indian Diaspora in Australia: Demographic Shifts and Strategic Pragmatism

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Historical Demographic Milestone:** The Indian diaspora has officially overtaken the England-born population to become Australia's largest overseas-born community. This marks a massive structural shift in a country historically anchored by a British-derived majority.
- **Evolution of the Bilateral Framework:** The diplomatic relationship has transitioned from a simplistic focus on the "three Cs" (Cricket, Curry, Commonwealth) to a multi-dimensional "four Ds" framework: Democracy, Defence, Diaspora, and Dosti.
- **Distinct Settlement Trajectory:** Unlike the older cohorts in the US and UK, the Australian-Indian community is younger, with a large share migrating after 2014. This recent wave maintains highly active economic, familial, and political links to India.
- **Multilateral and Security Alignment:** The Indo-Pacific partnership is strongly reinforced by mutual engagement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) to counter rising geopolitical and maritime assertiveness in the region.
- **Rising Domestic Political Counter-Narrative:** The rapid visibility and growth of the diaspora have triggered an anti-immigration backlash from right-wing populist factions within Australia's changing domestic landscape.
- **Call for Evidence-Based Engagement:** To leverage the diaspora as a strategic multiplier rather than a transactional symbol, policymakers require research on how this highly diverse community integrates into Australian civic life.



Essential Definitions

- **Diaspora Diplomacy:** The strategic engagement by a nation-state with its overseas community to advance its foreign policy, economic interests, and soft power objectives in the host country.
- **Strategic Pragmatism:** A foreign policy approach driven by shared geopolitical objectives, tangible national security interests, and trade benefits rather than ideological alignments or identical domestic values.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Constitution of India:** Part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), it directs the state to foster respect for international law, treaty obligations, and maintain just relations between nations.
- **Migration Act 1958 (Australia):** The statutory legal framework regulating immigration into Australia. Its historic amendment in the late 1960s and 1970s effectively dismantled the discriminatory "White Australia Policy," opening the door to non-European professional migration.

Conclusion

The transformation of the Indian diaspora into Australia's largest overseas-born community marks a turning point in Indo-Pacific geopolitics. By grounding bilateral ties in strategic pragmatism, the Quad alliance, and critical resource deals, both nations are translating demographic synergies into a permanent axis of regional stability.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Indian diaspora; Bilateral, regional and global groupings involving India and affecting India's interests; Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests.
- **Key Themes:** Indo-Pacific maritime dynamics, soft power diplomacy, migration frameworks, and the institutionalization of the Quad alliance.

8. Fiscal Asymmetry in India's Welfare Architecture

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Rising Share of State Expenditures:** While real overall public expenditure on social services has consistently expanded over time, the Union government's share has remained stagnant, leaving State governments to drive the funding growth.
- **Disproportionate Resource Burden:** Fiscal and tax revenues disproportionately accrue to the Union government, yet the operational onus of funding and executing critical welfare schemes falls predominantly on fiscally constrained States.
- **Transition from Rights to Cash Transfers:** India's welfare paradigm is shifting away from the legislative, rights-based regime established in the 2000s toward direct unconditional cash transfers, with States spending ₹4.14 lakh crore on cash transfers alone.

- **Diminishing Central Funding Ratios:** The transition from fully or highly funded Central initiatives (such as MGNREGA's historical 90:10 ratio) to newer frameworks like the VB-GRAM G Act increases the financial co-funding liability for States.
- **Sectoral Domain Dominance:** States heavily anchor core social sectors, bearing approximately 75.2% of school education expenditures alongside a vast majority of public health and state-level food subsidy allocations.
- **Sub-Optimal GDP Allocation:** Combined Union and State allocations for major welfare schemes stood at ₹24.20 lakh crore (6.77% of GDP) for FY2025-26, with the Union government's contribution accounting for a meager 1.89% of GDP.

Essential Definitions

- **Rights-Based Welfare Regime:** A governance framework where access to social security and basic amenities is guaranteed as a legal entitlement to citizens, creating justiciable statutory obligations for the state rather than relying on discretionary executive benevolence.
- **Unconditional Cash Transfers:** Direct welfare payments transferred into the bank accounts of beneficiaries without any prerequisite obligations, aimed at providing immediate income support and enhancing consumer purchasing power.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 280 and Article 293:** Article 280 governs the constitution of the Finance Commission to recommend the vertical and horizontal devolution of central taxes, while Article 293 regulates the borrowing powers and fiscal caps imposed on State governments.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV):** Article 38 and Article 39 mandate the State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare, minimize income inequalities, and ensure that the ownership and control of material resources subserve the common good.

States shoulder welfare

Data for the charts were sourced from Union Expenditure Budget 2025-26, 377th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee*, RBI database, Ministry of Education's Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, and 16th Finance Commission reports

Schemes/Sector	Expenditure (₹ lakh crore)
(Centre) National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	0.1
(Centre) PM KISAN	0.64
(Centre) Finance Commission Grants to local bodies (Urban and Rural)	0.75
State Cash Transfers	3.87

CHART 1: Allocations by Union government and States for select sectors (In ₹ lakh crore)

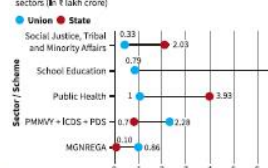
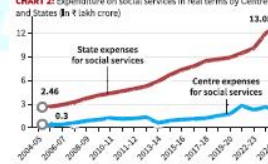


CHART 2: Expenditure on social services in real terms by Centre and States (In ₹ lakh crore)



Note: RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, State figures for 2023-24 are revised estimates and for 2024-25 are budget estimates, while Centre figures for 2024-25 are revised estimates. Real term values are calculated using the GDP deflator from the RBI database, with 2011-12 as the base year

TABLE 1: Centre and State expenses on cash transfers in FY 2025-26 (in ₹ lakh crore)

Schemes/Sector	Expenditure (₹ lakh crore)
(Centre) National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	0.1
(Centre) PM KISAN	0.64
(Centre) Finance Commission Grants to local bodies (Urban and Rural)	0.75
State Cash Transfers	3.87

TABLE 2: Estimates of budgetary allocations by Union and State Governments for the schemes/sectors (Values in the first row are in ₹ lakh crore)

Category	Union Budget Allocation 2025-26	State Budget	Union + State Budget	% of GDP
Sum of allocations on selected schemes	6.73	17.46	24.2	6.77
Share of selected schemes as a % of total government expenditure	13.29	28.16	21.47	-
Share of selected schemes as a % of GDP	1.89	4.89	6.77	-

Rekha Mathai and Rajendran Narayanan are affiliated with the Centre for the Study of the Indian Economy, Azim Premji University. Views expressed are personal. *The report was released in March by the committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports

Conclusion

The divergence between revenue collection and welfare expenditure highlights a deep structural strain in India's cooperative federalism. To transform human development and economic growth into a mutually reinforcing cycle, the Union government must expand its fiscal commitments, ensuring state-led welfare architectures do not fracture under asymmetric revenue distribution.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Government budgeting; Fiscal federalism; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

9. Jurisprudence of the Right to Be Forgotten in India

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Recognition of Digital Dignity:** The Delhi High Court ruled that the "Right to Be Forgotten" (RTBF) directly flows from Article 21's constitutional guarantees of human dignity and informational privacy.
- **Balancing Open Justice:** The ruling balances personal privacy with the principle of open justice by favoring the masking or redacting of specific party names over deleting entire judicial records.
- **Proportionality Test Applied:** The court established a structured proportionality framework requiring that data retention serve a legitimate purpose and that harm to an individual be balanced against the public's right to know.
- **Enforcement Timeline and Scope:** Legal databases are subject to a strict two-week deadline to comply with de-indexing orders, ensuring that only name-based searches are restricted while case facts remain accessible via keywords.
- **Statutory Gaps in Current Law:** Section 12 of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, provides a limited right to erasure but lacks explicit provisions for judicial archives or a completely functional enforcement board.
- **Institutional Tiered Framework:** Legal scholars propose a tiered mechanism where digital platforms handle preliminary erasure requests, contested cases go to a data protection board, and judicial redactions remain under court purview.

Essential Definitions

- **Right to Be Forgotten:** The legal right of an individual to have their personal data or historic digital footprint erased or de-indexed from public search engines when its continued accessibility is harmful and serves no overriding public interest.
- **Open Justice:** A fundamental legal principle dictating that judicial proceedings, evidence, and judgments must be conducted and maintained in a transparent and publicly accessible manner to ensure institutional accountability.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21 of the Constitution of India:** The right to privacy, which encompasses informational privacy and the right to control one's digital narrative, was recognized as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017).
- **Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India:** Guarantees freedom of speech and expression, which directly interfaces with the public's right to know and the press's freedom to publish public records, creating a constitutional counterweight to RTBF.

Conclusion

The Delhi High Court's ruling marks a significant step in developing digital privacy jurisprudence in India. However, without technical compliance by search engines, the notification of comprehensive rules under the DPDP Act, and a definitive ruling from the Supreme Court, the practical realization of this right will face persistent structural hurdles.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Fundamental Rights and judicial review; Judgments and evolution of the Constitution; Important regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies.
- **Key Themes:** Informational privacy vs. free speech, implementation challenges of the DPDP Act 2023, and the judiciary's role in creating safeguards within the digital ecosystem.

10. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, War Crimes Allegations, and the 'Hummus Trail'

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Extraterritorial Legal Complaint:** The Brussels-based Hind Rajab Foundation (HRF) filed an urgent complaint with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Bureau of Immigration, and Indian police demanding the arrest of an Israeli military reservist, Eitan Gilboa, who was vacationing in Himachal Pradesh.
- **War Crimes Accusations:** The dossier submitted geolocated social media evidence alleging that the soldier participated in and celebrated the systematic destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure in Khan Yunis and Rafah during his service in Gaza.
- **The 'Hummus Trail' and Tiul Gadol:** The accused was tracked to Old Manali and Gondla village, popular hubs along the 'Hummus Trail'—a distinct travel circuit across India (including Kasol, Hampi, and Goa) frequented by thousands of young Israeli veterans decompressing after mandatory service.
- **Universal Jurisdiction Principles:** The legal action invokes the concept of universal jurisdiction, arguing that under international conventions, signatory states are legally bound to search for and prosecute or deport individuals accused of grave humanitarian breaches.
- **Sovereign Enforcement Bottlenecks:** Although Indian laws permit extraterritorial prosecution, the domestic statute contains a major procedural limitation: courts cannot take formal cognizance of such offenses without an explicit complaint or authorization from the central government.
- **Global Precedent and Bilateral Friction:** While courts in Chile, Brazil, and Canada have recognized universal jurisdiction over Gaza conflict complaints, the situation in India highlights the deep friction between international humanitarian law commitments and strategic bilateral alliances.

Essential Definitions

- **Universal Jurisdiction:** A principle in international law that allows national courts to prosecute individuals for serious international crimes—such as war crimes, torture, or genocide—regardless of where the crime was committed, the nationality of the accused, or the nationality of the victims.

- **Hummus Trail:** A colloquial term describing the specific network of highly concentrated tourist destinations across India (e.g., Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, and Hampi) frequented by Israeli military veterans following their discharge from mandatory service.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Geneva Conventions Act, 1960:** The primary legislative bridge implementing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in India. Under Section 3, any person within or outside India who commits or abets a "grave breach" of the conventions is liable for criminal prosecution, regardless of their nationality or citizenship.
- **Article 51(c) of the Constitution of India:** Found in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), this article explicitly directs the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations, providing the ethical foundation for the Geneva Conventions Act.

Conclusion

The legal petition filed by the Hind Rajab Foundation brings a crucial spotlight onto the practical application of international humanitarian law within domestic legal systems. The intersection of international treaty mandates with India's domestic statutory requirement for central government approval highlights that the exercise of universal jurisdiction remains deeply intertwined with foreign policy priorities and strategic bilateral diplomacy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations & Polity):** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of countries on India's interests; Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive.
- **Key Themes:** International Humanitarian Law (IHL) implementation, statutory boundaries of the Geneva Conventions Act 1960, sovereignty versus universal jurisdiction, and India's strategic balancing act in the West Asian geopolitical landscape.

11. India-Indonesia Joint Cultural Heritage Restoration Project

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Bilateral Conservation Project:** India and Indonesia launched a major joint restoration and conservation initiative at the 9th-century Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta, marking a historic milestone in cultural diplomacy.
- **Lead Executive Agency:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will serve as the lead agency representing the Indian side, executing a 10-year project (2026–2036) focused on restoring the structural remnants of 218 Pervara subsidiary temples.
- **Architecture and Spiritual Significance:** Built under the Mataram Kingdom, Prambanan is Indonesia's largest Hindu temple complex, primarily dedicated to Lord Shiva, featuring towering shrines for the Hindu trinity—Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma.
- **Geopolitical Integration:** The project anchors India's "Act East" policy framework, translating shared civilizational links, rooted in the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, into modern institutional partnerships.

- **Advanced Technical Mapping:** The restoration will deploy cutting-edge technology, including LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) sensors, photogrammetric documentation, and geological-hydrological testing.
- **Track Record in Southeast Asia:** This project follows successful Indian heritage restoration footprints across Southeast Asia, including extensive historical documentation at the Borobudur temple compounds.

Essential Definitions

- **Civilizational Diplomacy:** A soft power foreign policy approach where nation-states leverage long-standing historical, cultural, religious, and social ties to enhance bilateral strategic partnerships and mutual trust.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** A landmark or area legally protected by an international convention administered by UNESCO, recognized as having cultural, historical, scientific, or other forms of outstanding universal significance.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51(c) of the Constitution of India:** Part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), it explicitly directs the state to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations, serving as the ideological bedrock for international bilateral accords.
- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958:** This statute governs the working mandate of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), enabling its experts to offer specialized technical know-how for international heritage protection agreements under central government directives.

Conclusion

The joint restoration at Prambanan elevates India-Indonesia relations beyond standard defense and maritime trade parameters. By investing economic and scientific capital into protecting shared Southeast Asian historical heritage, India successfully utilizes cultural diplomacy to cultivate deeper strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I (Indian Culture):** Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Spread of Indian art and architecture beyond geographical boundaries (Greater India concept).
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India; Effect of policies and politics of countries on India's interests; "Act East" policy matrix.

12. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report Analysis

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Substantial Enrollment Growth:** Total student enrollment in India's higher education sector rose to 4.50 crore in the 2023-24 academic year, marking a 31.5% increase from 3.42 crore in 2014-15.

- **Surge in Female Participation:** Female student enrollment witnessed an impressive 42.2% rise over the last decade, growing from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.24 crore in 2023-24.
- **Rising Gross Enrollment Ratio:** The national Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for the 18-23 age bracket reached 30 in 2023-24, with the female GER scaling independently to 31.2, outpacing the national baseline.
- **Sustained Gender Parity Index:** The Gender Parity Index (GPI) stands at 1.08 for 2023-24, remaining consistently above 1.0 for seven consecutive years, showing that female participation systematically outpaces male participation.
- **Growth Among Marginalized Communities:** Over the 10-year period, student enrollment jumped by 51.4% for Scheduled Castes (SC), 75.7% for Scheduled Tribes (ST), and 60.2% for Other Backward Classes (OBC).
- **STEM Inclusivity Strides:** Enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields climbed to 1.02 crore in 2023-24, with the female share climbing steadily to 44%, up from 38.4% a decade ago.

AISHE

All India Survey on Higher Education

Essential Definitions

- **Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER):** A statistical measure used in the education sector to determine the percentage of students enrolled in a specific level of education (here, ages 18-23 for higher education) relative to the total population of that corresponding official age group.
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** A socioeconomic index used to measure the relative access of males and females to a specific education level, where a value greater than 1.0 indicates a disparity in favor of females.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India:** Empowers the State to make any special provisions for women and children, providing the constitutional foundation for affirmative policies aimed at enhancing female literacy and higher education access.
- **Article 46 of the Constitution of India:** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) that mandates the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Conclusion

The latest AISHE data underscores a structural turnaround in India's higher education landscape, driven largely by women and marginalized social groups. The sustained increase in the female STEM footprint alongside a healthy Gender Parity Index indicates that long-term inclusion policies are successfully translating into democratic human capital formation.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Social Justice & Governance):** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.

JULY 9, 2026

- **Key Themes:** Women empowerment, demographic dividend optimization, educational inclusivity indicators, and structural progress metrics under the National Education Policy (NEP).

