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1. Supreme Court Restricts Retrospective Environmental Clearances

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Quashing Executive Order:** The Supreme Court quashed the Union Government's 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) that allowed a perpetual mechanism for granting *ex-post facto* (retrospective) Environmental Clearances (EC).
- **Prospective Overruling:** To safeguard public exchequer investments (e.g., AIIMS, airports) and prevent immediate infrastructure disruptions, the judgment applies prospectively; existing cleared projects remain protected.
- **Administrative vs. Statutory Power:** The Bench ruled that executive instructions cannot alter or supplant subordinate legislation like the EIA Notification, 2006.

- **Amnesty via Proper Route:** The Centre retains power to grant post-facto ECs for exceptional projects in "supervening public interest," but strictly through valid statutory notifications under Section 3 of EPA, 1986, rather than administrative orders.
- **Rejection of Perpetual Amnesty:** The court emphasized that amnesty measures must be finite in duration, narrowly tailored, and confined to specific classes of deserving projects rather than operating as a permanent parallel regime.
- **Plenary Powers Safeguarded:** The ruling explicitly does not restrict the apex court's inherent constitutional powers to grant ex-post facto relief in fit cases to achieve complete justice.

Essential Definitions

- **Ex-Post Facto Environmental Clearance:** Approval granted to developmental or industrial projects after construction or operations have already commenced without prior green permissions.
- **Office Memorandum (OM):** An executive order or administrative instruction issued by government departments to regulate internal procedure, which lacks statutory power to overwrite delegated laws.
- **Precautionary Principle:** An environmental management doctrine requiring preventative regulatory evaluation *before* undertaking activities that carry risks of severe environmental degradation.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 14 & Article 21:** The Court held that indefinite, unguided retrospective clearances fail the tests of reasonableness and proportionality, violating equality before law and the right to a clean environment under Article 21.
- **Article 142:** Preserves the Supreme Court's plenary power to pass decrees necessary for doing complete justice, allowing judicial intervention for special cases.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (Section 3):** Empowers the Central Government to take measures for protecting the environment, which must be executed through formal statutory notifications.
- **EIA Notification, 2006:** The primary delegated legislation establishing mandatory prior environmental clearance regimes across key developmental sectors.



Conclusion

The judgment strikes a balanced chord between environmental protection and economic reality. By barring perpetual executive amnesties while leaving scope for statutory, public-interest exceptions, the Supreme Court re-anchored the core tenet of environmental law—prior evaluation—without causing chaotic disruptions to public infrastructure.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Polity):** Separation of powers, limits of delegated executive discretion, judicial review of administrative action, and constitutional mandates under Articles 14, 21, and 142.

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Economy):** Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework, environmental governance, sustainable development vs. infrastructure growth, and precautionary principle.

2. Proposed US Sanctions Act and Tariffs on Russian Energy Buyers

Key Highlights & Summary

- **US Legislative Action:** The U.S. Senate voted 86–12 to invoke a cloture motion, fast-tracking the 'Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026' with rare bipartisan support.
- **Targeted Secondary Tariffs:** The proposed Act envisages levying tariffs of up to 100% on key trade partners importing Russian crude oil and natural gas to curtail Moscow's energy revenues.
- **Downward Revision:** The revised bill scaled back from its original 2025 proposal, which had initially sought a steep 500% tariff on entities purchasing Russian energy.
- **Direct Exposure for India and China:** The sanctions target the largest energy buyers, directly affecting China (accounting for 47-50% of Russian crude exports) and India (accounting for 36-38%).
- **Comprehensive Economic Pressure:** Beyond crude sales, the draft law targets Russian financial institutions, political leadership, and international sanctions-evasion networks.
- **Strategic Imperatives:** The developments test India's policy of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy in balancing energy security with diplomatic ties to Washington and Moscow.



Essential Definitions

- **Secondary Sanctions:** Regulatory penalties imposed by a country on foreign individuals or entities for engaging in trade with a target nation already under primary sanctions.
- **Cloture Motion:** A parliamentary rule in the U.S. Senate used to limit further debate on a bill and force a vote, effectively overriding filibuster attempts.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** A nation's policy framework allowing it to pursue independent foreign policy decisions guided strictly by national interests without giving in to external pressure.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Guides the State to foster international peace, security, and maintain just relations, underpinning India's sovereign diplomatic position.
- **WTO Norms:** Unilateral secondary tariffs risk conflicting with World Trade Organization rules on non-discrimination and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment.
- **U.S. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction:** Follows legislative precedents like CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), extending domestic regulatory authority to international trade networks.

Conclusion

The fast-tracking of this U.S. legislation highlights growing systemic friction between Western economic sanctions and global energy needs. For India, maintaining affordable crude supplies requires careful diplomatic negotiation and strategic energy diversification to protect economic stability without compromising foreign policy sovereignty.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Indian foreign policy, strategic autonomy, bilateral relations with US and Russia, and foreign policies of developed nations affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Energy):** Energy security, foreign trade, supply chain vulnerabilities, inflation management, and international economic sanctions.

3. BS-III Vehicles May Need Minor Modifications for E20 Fuel: Centre

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Parliamentary Disclosure:** The Union Government informed Parliament that certain BS-III vehicles manufactured between 2005 and 2016 may require replacement of select rubber components and gaskets when using E20 fuel.
- **No Major Engine Overhaul:** A multi-institutional study confirmed that engine modifications are unnecessary for existing two-wheelers and four-wheelers to run on E20 petrol.
- **Servicing Integration:** Replacement of susceptible rubber and gasket parts in legacy vehicles can be seamlessly managed during regular servicing routines.
- **Research Consortium:** The technical evaluation was jointly conducted by IOCL, Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP) Dehradun, SIAM, and ARAI.
- **Consumer Concerns:** The statement addresses growing public queries regarding engine misfiring, reduced fuel efficiency, and long-term vehicle durability linked to higher ethanol blends.
- **Broader E20 Rollout:** The government maintains that E20 adoption aligns with India's phased bio-fuel roadmap without compromising broader vehicular performance.



Essential Definitions

- **E20 Fuel:** A blended fuel mixture consisting of 20% ethanol derived from biomass and 80% conventional petrol.
- **Bharat Stage (BS) Norms:** Nationally mandated emission standards regulated by the government to control air pollutant outputs from internal combustion engines.
- **Corrosivity of Ethanol:** The chemical property of ethanol to absorb water and degrade certain elastomers, plastics, and non-ferrous metals in older fuel delivery systems.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988:** Provides the statutory backbone for establishing vehicular safety standards, emission norms, and technical compliance across India.

- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Empowers the Central Government to formulate fuel quality standards and mandates to mitigate environmental degradation.
- **National Policy on Biofuels:** Sets strategic targets for ethanol blending in petrol to advance energy security and decarbonization goals.

Conclusion

While E20 fuel implementation marks a critical milestone in reducing crude oil imports and carbon emissions, addressing material compatibility in legacy BS-III vehicles through consumer guidance and routine maintenance remains essential for ensuring a seamless green energy transition.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Public Policy):** Policy implementation strategies, parliamentary oversight, and balancing consumer interests with national environmental goals.
- **GS Paper III (Environment & Economy):** Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), bio-fuel policy, energy security, emission reduction under climate commitments, and technological adaptation in auto manufacturing.

4. CAQM Directs States to Deploy Drones for Monitoring Stubble Burning

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Advisory to NCR States:** The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) urged Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Punjab to adopt drone surveillance for effective monitoring of crop residue burning.
- **Technological Advantage:** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)/drones provide rapid deployment, high-resolution real-time imaging, and flexible flight patterns to complement existing satellite imagery and ground inspections.
- **Evidence-Based Enforcement:** Drones can accurately detect active fire locations, smoke plumes, map affected fields, and generate time-stamped evidence for swift law enforcement action.
- **Focus on Hotspot Areas:** State governments are advised to prioritize monitoring across paddy cultivation belts, with special focus on identified hotspot villages and fire-prone locations.
- **Multi-Layered Surveillance:** Integrating aerial drone technology bridges the gap between macro-level satellite remote sensing and local field-level physical verification.
- **Seasonal Air Pollution Mitigation:** The directive forms part of comprehensive regional measures to curb winter smog and deteriorating air quality in the National Capital Region.



Essential Definitions

- **Stubble Burning:** The practice of intentionally setting fire to straw stubble/crop residue remaining after paddy harvesting to rapidly clear fields for wheat sowing.

- **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV):** An aircraft operated without a human pilot on board, utilized for real-time aerial reconnaissance and data collection.
- **CAQM:** A statutory body established to ensure better coordination, research, identification, and resolution of air quality issues in the NCR and adjoining areas.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21:** Guarantees the right to life, which the Supreme Court has expanded to include the fundamental right to clean air and a healthy environment.
- **Article 48A:** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **CAQM Act, 2021:** Empowers the Commission to issue binding directions, inspect premises, and enforce strict compliance measures against air pollution across northern states.
- **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** Provides statutory powers to State Pollution Control Boards to penalize agricultural burning activities.

Conclusion

Deploying drone surveillance marks a progressive shift toward technology-driven environmental governance. By generating verifiable, real-time evidence, CAQM aims to strengthen field enforcement, reduce farm fires, and safeguard regional air quality during peak harvest seasons.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Polity):** Statutory bodies (CAQM), inter-state administrative coordination, fundamental rights under Article 21, and e-governance mechanisms in law enforcement.
- **GS Paper III (Environment & Technology):** Air pollution control measures, applications of UAV technology in environmental monitoring, and sustainable agricultural practices.

5. CWRC Head Proposes Permanent Distress-Sharing Plan for Cauvery Water

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Call for Formula:** Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) chairperson urged Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to jointly formulate a scientific, permanent distress-sharing mechanism.
- **Water Release Directive:** CWRC directed Karnataka to release 3,500 cusecs of water daily for 15 days to Tamil Nadu based on rainfall, reservoir inflows, and IMD data.
- **High Release Quantum:** To realize 3,500 cusecs at the Biligundlu measuring site, Karnataka must release 6,000 to 6,500 cusecs due to a dry intermediate catchment area.
- **Appeal by Upper Riparian State:** Karnataka decided to appeal against the CWRC direction before the apex Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA).
- **Severe Basin Deficit:** The directive comes amid a 60% deficit in net inflow into Karnataka reservoirs compared to the 30-year long-term average.
- **Institutional Role:** CWRC and CWMA function as the executive framework enforcing the CWDT 2007 award as amended by the Supreme Court in 2018.

Essential Definitions

- **Distress-Sharing Formula:** An institutionalized framework to proportionally divide reduced river water flows among riparian states during lean or drought years.
- **Riparian State:** A state situated along the banks of a natural watercourse, categorized as upper or lower riparian based on relative river flow direction.
- **Cusec:** A unit measuring water flow rate equal to one cubic foot per second (28.317 liters per second).

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 262:** Empowers Parliament to enact laws for adjudicating disputes relating to the use, distribution, or control of waters of inter-state rivers.
- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:** Enacted under Article 262 to set up tribunals like CWDT for resolving inter-state river disputes.
- **Seventh Schedule Allocations:** Water is a State subject (Entry 17, List II), subject to Union regulation of inter-state rivers (Entry 56, List I).
- **Supreme Court 2018 Verdict:** Re-allocated Cauvery waters and mandated establishing CWMA and CWRC to enforce the final award.



Conclusion

The recurrent friction between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu during deficit rainfall years underscores the urgent need for a consensus-based, data-driven distress-sharing formula. Institutionalizing such a framework under CWMA can reduce frequent litigation and strengthen cooperative federalism during dry spells.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Inter-state river disputes, cooperative federalism, statutory authorities (CWMA/CWRC), and constitutional remedies under Article 262.
- **GS Paper III (Environment & Agriculture):** Integrated river basin management, agricultural water security, climate variability impacts, and drought risk mitigation.

6. Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Legislative Resumption:** The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, reintroduced in the Monsoon Session, seeks to overhaul the regulatory mechanism for civil society organizations (CSOs) receiving foreign funds.
- **Vesting of Assets:** Section 16A(2) mandates that upon cancellation or surrender of registration, all foreign contributions and assets created (even partly) through them will provisionally, and subsequently permanently, vest in a Central Government designated authority.

- **Asset Liquidation:** Unutilized foreign funds and proceeds from the sale or auction of seized assets will be credited directly to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Expanded Cancellation Grounds:** Registration certificates can be cancelled on broad grounds such as "public interest" under Section 14(1)(c) or mere initiation of prosecution for alleged forced religious conversions or communal disharmony.
- **Surrender Penalty:** Voluntary surrender of an FCRA certificate under Clause 16A(1)(b) results in the forfeiture of all previously created assets and residual foreign funds to the state authority.
- **Broad Exemption Powers:** Clause 16L empowers the executive to grant complete exemptions from FCRA provisions to select organizations or individuals based on public interest.

Essential Definitions

- **Foreign Contribution:** Any donation, delivery, or transfer made by a foreign source of any currency, security, or article (excluding personal gifts up to a specified value).
- **Intelligible Differentia:** A legal doctrine under Article 14 requiring a clear, rational standard that distinguishes persons or things grouped together from others left out of the group.
- **Designated Authority:** A state-appointed body tasked with taking custody, managing, liquidating, or transferring assets created through foreign funding upon FCRA non-compliance or cancellation.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Statutory Genesis:** First enacted during the 1976 Emergency to curb foreign interference in national politics, replaced by FCRA 2010 to restrict political figures, media, judges, and public servants from receiving foreign funding.
- **Article 14 (Right to Equality):** Clause 16L's discretionary executive power to grant selective exemptions lacks an explicit rational nexus to the statutory object, inviting judicial review for arbitrary state action.
- **Article 19(1)(c) (Freedom of Association):** Harsh provisions on asset forfeiture and operational termination create a severe chilling effect on the fundamental right of citizens to form associations and NGOs.
- **Article 25 (Freedom of Religion):** Easy cancellation triggers based on mere prosecution or police complaints regarding conversions disproportionately affect minority religious and charitable institutions.

Conclusion

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, reflects a shift from mere regulatory oversight to rigid state control over civil society. While safeguarding national security and preventing illicit financial flows are legitimate state objectives, provisions penalizing voluntary surrenders and granting broad executive exemptions risk choking legitimate humanitarian, educational, and environmental work. Striking a balanced equilibrium between national sovereignty and civil society autonomy remains vital for a robust democracy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Articles 14, 19, 25), Statutory Bodies, Role of NGOs, Microfinance, and Civil Society in Development, Executive Arbitrariness and Judicial Review.
- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security threats, Money Laundering, and Regulation of Foreign Money Inflow.

7. ILO Convention 193 and India's Stand on Gig Workers

Key Highlights & Summary

- **ILO Convention No. 193:** Adopted at the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Convention 193 "Decent Work in the Platform Economy" is the first legally binding international treaty providing core rights for platform workers.
- **Voting & Abstention:** Passed lopsidedly (406 in favor, 8 against, 36 abstentions). India's government delegate abstained, whereas its employer and worker delegates voted in favor.
- **Core Rights Floor:** Mandates statutory minimum pay, occupational safety, health protections, social security, and fair employment classification based on actual work performance.
- **Algorithmic Transparency:** Addresses opaque algorithmic management by requiring platforms to disclose, explain, and maintain human oversight for automated decisions like work allocation and deactivation.
- **Explosive Workforce Growth:** NITI Aayog projects India's gig workforce to expand from 7.7 million in 2020-21 to 23.5 million (2.35 crore) by 2029-30, accounting for nearly 6.7% of the non-agricultural labor force.
- **Implementation Gap:** Despite the Code on Social Security, 2020 creating enabling provisions, central welfare schemes remain largely un-operationalized, shifting legislative momentum toward states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Telangana.



Essential Definitions

- **Platform/Gig Worker:** Individuals performing work or earning livelihoods through online digital platforms or non-traditional work arrangements outside standard employer-employee relationships.
- **Algorithmic Management:** Automated software systems that monitor performance, assign tasks, calculate payouts, and deactivate accounts without direct human intervention.
- **Tripartite System:** The structural framework of the ILO where delegates representing governments, employers, and worker unions independently deliberate and vote on global labor policy.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Enacted under central labor reforms, it officially defines gig and platform workers and mandates platform aggregators to contribute 1-2% of annual turnover towards dedicated welfare funds.
- **Seventh Schedule (Concurrent List):** Labor falls under Entry 22 (Trade Unions; industrial and labor disputes) and Entry 24 (Welfare of labor), granting legislative jurisdiction to both the Parliament and State Assemblies.
- **Article 39(a) & 43 (Directive Principles):** Mandates state policy toward securing an adequate means of livelihood, a living wage, decent conditions of work, and full enjoyment of leisure for all workers.
- **Article 21 (Right to Life & Dignity):** Extended judicially to guarantee the right to livelihood, fair remuneration, and safe working environments under constitutional jurisprudence.

Conclusion

India's abstention from ILO Convention 193 highlights an ongoing policy tension between fostering digital economy growth and enforcing labor standards. While domestic legislative efforts like the Code on Social Security, 2020 exist on paper, operationalizing tangible benefits, regulating automated platform governance, and curbing arbitrary account deactivations are vital. Bridging domestic enforcement gaps will ensure that economic expansion does not compromise basic workplace dignity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Labour and Employment; Important International Institutions (ILO); Federalism (Concurrent List issues).
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to employment, growth, and inclusive development; Impact of digital economy and automation on labor markets.

8. China's Open-Weight AI Strategy: Geopolitics and Compute Constraints

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Global Public Good vs. Closed APIs:** At the Ninth World AI Conference in Shanghai, China positioned its AI models as open-weight global public goods, contrasting with US proprietary, closed-source API models like OpenAI and Anthropic.
- **Data Sovereignty and Accessibility:** Open-weight models allow developing nations to run advanced AI locally on their own servers, ensuring strict data sovereignty without risking sudden service revocation or ongoing subscription fees.
- **Compute Bottlenecks Driving Openness:** US export controls on high-end chips (e.g., Nvidia H100/H200) and EUV lithography tools severely limit China's ability to scale cloud inference services, despite accumulating enough chips for model training.
- **Outsourcing Inference Costs:** Training requires a fixed chip fleet (e.g., DeepSeek V3 trained on ~2,000 H800s), but serving global users requires continuous GPU expansion; releasing open-weight models strategically offloads inference compute costs to end-users.

- **Surging Western Adoption:** Cost-effective Chinese models have gained widespread popularity, accounting for up to 60% of AI query routing on platforms like OpenRouter among US firms.
- **Future Securitization:** Beijing is actively considering restrictions on overseas access to its top-tier frontier models, signaling that current openness is a structural compromise rather than a permanent policy.

Essential Definitions

- **Open-Weight AI Model:** An AI model whose trained parameter weights are publicly downloadable, allowing developers to modify, fine-tune, and self-host the software locally.
- **API (Application Programming Interface):** A software intermediary allowing users to query models hosted on remote vendor servers, keeping model weights and underlying code proprietary.
- **Training vs. Inference:** Training is the computationally intensive, one-time process of creating an AI model; inference is the continuous, real-time generation of outputs for user queries.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Constitution of India:** Directs the State to foster international peace, security, and just relations, aligning with global governance frameworks for emerging technologies like AI.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** Regulates cross-border data flows and mandates data minimization; open-weight models align with domestic data localization requirements by processing data on local infrastructure.
- **Wassenaar Arrangement & Export Controls:** International multilateral regimes governing dual-use technologies, under which multilateral chip and lithography export restrictions are enforced against foreign nations.
- **IT Act, 2000 & Intermediary Guidelines:** Establishes liability standards, algorithmic accountability, and safety compliance for deployed AI software and digital platforms operating within India.



Conclusion

China's promotion of open-weight AI represents a pragmatic synthesis of geopolitical diplomacy and technical necessity. By leveraging open models, Beijing projects global soft power while circumventing Western semiconductor export controls that limit its inference capacity. For developing nations, including India, this dynamic offers immediate access to advanced AI capabilities and data sovereignty, while underscoring the urgent necessity to build indigenous hardware compute infrastructure to avoid long-term technological dependencies.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; International AI Governance.

- **GS Paper III: Science and Technology**—developments and their applications in everyday life; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Cyber Security, Data Localisation, and Artificial Intelligence.

9. The IACS and the Making of Modern Indian Science

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Sesquicentennial Legacy:** Established on July 29, 1876, the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) completes 150 years as India's first indigenous national institution for scientific research.
- **Bengal Renaissance & Science:** Founded by Dr. Mahendralal Sircar, IACS emerged from the Bengal Renaissance to foster intellectual self-reliance and counteract colonial neglect of native scientific education.
- **Hub of Breakthrough Research:** Served as the premier research center where Sir C.V. Raman discovered the Raman Effect (announced February 28, 1928), earning Asia's first Nobel Prize in Physics (1930).
- **Indigenous Institutional Model:** Pioneered non-governmental, community-supported research infrastructure, enabling native scholars to create scientific knowledge independently.
- **Current Status:** Deemed-to-be University under the De-Novo category, funded directly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology.
- **Pioneering Scientific Temper:** Established the foundational template for institutional scientific research in pre-independence India, inspiring national institutions like CSIR and IISc.

Essential Definitions

- **Raman Effect:** The inelastic scattering of a photon by molecules when light traverses a transparent material, resulting in a shift in frequency that reveals molecular composition.
- **Bengal Renaissance:** A 19th and early 20th-century intellectual, social, cultural, and scientific awakening in Bengal that laid the groundwork for modern Indian nationalism and scientific inquiry.
- **Scientific Self-Reliance:** The capacity of a nation to independently conduct advanced research, innovate technologies, and build sustainable institutional infrastructure without foreign dependency.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51A(h) of the Constitution:** Mandates a Fundamental Duty for every Indian citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- **Entry 64 (Union List, 7th Schedule):** Places institutions for scientific or technical education financed by the Government of India wholly or in part and declared by Parliament by law to be institutions of national importance under Central jurisdiction.

- **National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP):** The overarching executive policy framework guiding indigenous R&D, institutional funding, and public-private research partnerships.
- **UGC Act, 1956 (Section 3):** Empowers the Central Government to declare institutions of higher learning like IACS as "Deemed-to-be Universities" on the recommendation of the UGC.

Conclusion

The 150-year journey of the IACS symbolizes India's historical transition from scientific colonialism to self-reliant global leadership. Dr. Mahendralal Sircar's vision demonstrated that indigenous institutions could produce world-class breakthroughs like the Raman Effect. As India advances toward Viksit Bharat@2047, strengthening autonomous research bodies, nurturing basic sciences, and fulfilling Article 51A(h) remain pivotal for building a knowledge-driven economy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Modern Indian History (Bengal Renaissance, 19th-century socio-cultural reform movements, contribution of key personalities like Mahendralal Sircar and C.V. Raman).
- **GS Paper II:** Government Policies and Interventions for Higher Education and R&D; Statutory and Autonomous Bodies under DST.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology—developments and their applications; Indigenization of technology; Achievements of Indians in science & technology.

10. Centre's Assurance Cannot Override Statutory Processes on FIR Withdrawal

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Statutory Supremacy:** Legal experts emphasize that executive assurances by the Union Government cannot bypass or override the statutory provisions governing the criminal procedure for withdrawing First Information Reports (FIRs).
- **Supreme Court Interim Order:** A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant permitted police to continue investigations into FIRs registered against student protesters, while granting protection from coercive action only to those without criminal antecedents.
- **Procedural Routes for Case Closure:** Once an FIR is registered, it cannot be arbitrarily cancelled or deregistered; it can only be closed through an Investigating Officer's closure report or via a formal withdrawal application filed by the Public Prosecutor.
- **Federal Division of Powers:** Law and order is a State subject. Except for the Delhi Police, police forces operate under the administrative control of respective State Governments, limiting the Union Government's authority to grant unilateral amnesties for State FIRs.



- **Judicial Oversight Mandate:** Both the acceptance of a closure report and the approval for prosecution withdrawal are strictly subject to judicial scrutiny, requiring mandatory hearing of the victim/complainant before final orders are passed.

Essential Definitions

- **First Information Report (FIR):** A written document prepared by police officers upon receiving information about the commission of a cognizable offence, initiating the formal investigation process.
- **Closure Report:** A final report submitted by the investigating agency to the magistrate under Section 173 of the CrPC/BNSS when insufficient or no evidence is found against the accused.
- **Public Prosecutor:** An officer of the court appointed by the state to represent the prosecution in criminal proceedings and authorized to apply for withdrawal of prosecution.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Section 321 CrPC / Section 360 BNSS:** Governs the withdrawal from prosecution, requiring the Public Prosecutor to obtain consent from the competent court before a judgment is pronounced.
- **Seventh Schedule (State List - Entry 2):** Grants exclusive legislative and administrative domain over "Police" and "Public Order" to State Governments, restricting executive overreach by the Centre.
- **Article 21 (Right to Fair Trial):** Guarantees due process of law, ensuring that victims and complainants receive an opportunity to be heard before a registered criminal case is dropped.

Conclusion

The legal controversy over executive assurances regarding FIR withdrawals underscores the primacy of statutory procedural law over political commitments. Criminal procedure requires that once judicial mechanisms are set in motion through an FIR, dropping charges necessitates rigorous judicial evaluation and respect for federal division of police powers. Safeguarding procedural integrity ensures that genuine peaceful protesters are protected while preventing unchecked executive interference in judicial processes.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—Federal Structure, Separation of Powers, Executive vs Judiciary, Statutory Bodies, and Criminal Justice System Reforms.
- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security—Public Order, Police Administration, and Rule of Law.

11. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Stricter Penalties:** The Bill drastically enhances punishments for paper leaks and exam malpractices, raising individual offender imprisonment to 5-10 years (fine up to ₹50 lakh) and organised crime sentences to 7-10 years with a minimum ₹10 crore fine.

- **Service Provider Debarment:** Increases the debarment period for service providers involved in cheating from 4 to 8 years, while elevating fines up to ₹5 crore.
- **Specialised Investigation:** Empowers the Central Government to constitute a Special Task Force (STF) and mandates a strict 2-month timeline for completing investigations.
- **Special Fast Track Courts:** Requires States/UTs to designate Session Courts as Special Fast Track Courts to conduct daily trials and conclude proceedings within 3 months of chargesheet submission.
- **Appeals & Bar on Limitation:** Directs appeals to a two-Judge High Court Bench to be disposed of within 3 months, placing a absolute outer limitation bar of 90 days for filing appeals.
- **Implementation Challenges:** Mandatory trial limits face potential judicial conflict, as Supreme Court precedents caution against rigid outer limits on criminal proceedings.

Essential Definitions

- **Unfair Means:** Unauthorised assistance, paper leaks, impersonation, manipulation of computer networks, or tampering with examination documents during public tests.
- **Organised Crime (Exam Fraud):** Unlawful activities undertaken by a syndicate, collusion of examination service providers, or coaching networks to commit systemic paper leaks or commercial cheating.
- **Special Fast Track Court:** A designated Sessions Court mandated to try specific statutory offences on a day-to-day basis to expedite justice delivery.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21 (Right to Speedy Trial):** Fast-tracking trial mechanisms aligns with Article 21 guarantees, though rigid outer limits without judicial discretion risk violating due process norms.
- **Article 14 (Equality Before Law):** Ensures uniform standards and institutional integrity across major central examination bodies like UPSC, SSC, NTA, and IBPS.
- **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023:** Interlinks investigation and trial timelines with criminal procedure codes, including joint trials for connected offences under BNS.
- **Seventh Schedule (Concurrent List - Entry 25):** Covers Education, empowering the Parliament to enact legislation securing meritocracy and standardized assessment frameworks nationwide.

Conclusion

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, aims to restore public trust in central recruitment and entrance tests following widespread paper leak controversies. While deterrence through heavier financial and custodial penalties is necessary, addressing structural delays—such as judicial pendency in fast-track courts and police

investigation backlogs—will be crucial to achieving true time-bound justice without compromising fair trial principles.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory Bodies (UPSC, NTA, SSC); Government Policies & Interventions; Issues Arising out of Design and Implementation of Policies; Judiciary & Criminal Justice System Reforms.
- **GS Paper IV:** Governance Ethics, Integrity, Public Service Values, and Transparency in Conduct of Public Recruitment.

12. Demand for Parallel E10 and Pure Petrol Supply Amid E20 Fuel Row

Key Highlights & Summary

- **E10 and Pure Petrol Advocacy:** Citizens' advocacy group Team Bharat met Union Petroleum Ministry officials to urge the government to continue supplying E10 petrol (10% ethanol blend) alongside pure, unblended petrol at affordable prices.
- **Vehicle Compatibility Concerns:** The representation stems from public concern over potential engine wear, component degradation, and reduced fuel efficiency in older vehicles designed for E10 or unblended petrol when using E20 (20% ethanol blend).
- **Pricing Parity & Discount Demands:** Advocates requested that E20 fuel be offered at a 20% discount relative to pure petrol variants to reflect its lower energy density and encourage voluntary adoption.
- **Public Transparency and Redressal:** The group demanded the public release of all technical assessments regarding E20 fuel, along with a formal mechanism to assess vehicle damage caused by blended fuel and address consumer grievances.
- **No Rollback Call:** Clarified that the group is not seeking a complete rollback of the E20 blending program, but rather a balanced approach ensuring consumer choice and vehicle safety.
- **Joint Inspection Framework:** Discussions between ministry officials and civil society representatives aim to establish an inspection mechanism for reportedly damaged vehicles and arrive at a middle-ground consensus.



Essential Definitions

- **Ethanol Blending:** The practice of mixing anhydrous ethyl alcohol derived from agricultural sources (like sugarcane, maize, or broken rice) with petrol to reduce crude oil imports and carbon emissions.
- **E20 Fuel:** A blend composed of 20% ethanol and 80% petrol by volume, requiring modified engine components and fuel lines to prevent corrosion.
- **Energy Density:** The amount of energy stored in a given system or region of space per unit volume; ethanol possesses roughly two-thirds the energy density of pure petrol.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **National Policy on Biofuels (2018):** Target amended in 2022 to advance the national mandate of achieving a 20% ethanol blend in petrol across India by 2025–26.
- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Guarantees consumer rights to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard, and price of goods to protect against unfair trade practices.
- **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988:** Regulates vehicle standards, emission rules, and safety compliances under the Central Motor Vehicles Rules (CMVR).
- **Article 19(1)(g) & Article 21:** Implicates consumer choice in business transactions, environmental rights, and public safety under constitutional guarantees.

Conclusion

The debate surrounding E20 fuel highlights the challenge of balancing ambitious clean energy transition targets with consumer protection and legacy vehicle compatibility. While ethanol blending reduces India's fossil fuel import bill and lowers net carbon emissions, maintaining transparent testing standards, providing parallel fuel options, and compensating for vehicle damage are essential to maintaining public trust. A phased, consumer-centric rollout will ensure that environmental policies achieve sustainable, long-term success.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors; Consumer Protection and Public Governance.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Energy Security and Import Dependence); Environment and Ecology (Biofuels, Emission Reductions, and Climate Change Commitments); Scientific Innovations (Engine Technology & Alternate Fuels).