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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS — **ENGLISH FILE** —

**BEST FOR UPSC | UP PCS EXAM**

DATE : **AUGUST 22, 2026**



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1. India-Bangladesh Relations: Diplomatic Communication Gaps & Extradition Friction

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Diplomatic Faux Pas:** Rashtrapati Bhavan issued and subsequently retracted a statement regarding the cancellation of the Change of Guard ceremony, which cited a ceremonial welcome for Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.
- **MEA Response:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) maintained a neutral stance, stating it had "nothing to say right now" while Dhaka confirmed no official dates have been finalized.
- **Bilateral Invitation:** India has extended invitations to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister for both a standalone bilateral visit and the upcoming BRICS Summit.
- **Underlying Strains:** Bilateral ties have experienced friction following the August 2024 ouster of Sheikh Hasina, who sought refuge in India.
- **Extradition Demands:** Tensions remain heightened due to Dhaka seeking the extradition of Sheikh Hasina, who faces legal proceedings in Bangladesh, alongside objections over her political interactions from New Delhi.
- **Protocol Discrepancy:** The incident highlights internal coordination gaps, as official state visits are traditionally announced and managed through the MEA in consultation with host governments.

## Essential Definitions

- **Diplomatic Protocol:** The formal system of rules, procedures, and etiquette governing international relations and state ceremonies.
- **Extradition:** The official process where one state surrenders an individual accused or convicted of a crime to another state.
- **Political Asylum:** Legal protection granted by a country to a foreign national fleeing political persecution in their home state.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) instructing the State to promote international peace and security and foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.
- **Extradition Act, 1962:** Governs the extradition of fugitive criminals to and from India. Under Section 31, extradition may be refused if the offence for which extradition is demanded is of a political character.
- **Transaction of Business Rules, 1961:** Mandates that matters involving foreign state dignitaries and official foreign visits fall under the operational jurisdiction of the Ministry of External Affairs.

**Conclusion** Smooth diplomatic conduct relies heavily on meticulous coordination across institutional bodies. Beyond domestic administrative errors, long

## 2. Swine Flu Surge: Epidemiological Protocols & Public Health Framework

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Spike in H1N1 Cases:** Delhi reported a significant rise in Swine Flu cases, logging 1,777 confirmed instances within two weeks, triggering heightened health monitoring across age groups.
- **Genetic Mutation Suspected:** Epidemiologists emphasize that genetic sequencing of the viral strain is crucial to determine if a mutation or increased interpersonal transmission drives the current surge.
- **Clinical Vulnerability:** High-risk groups include the elderly, pregnant women, and individuals with underlying co-morbidities like diabetes or cardiovascular conditions, who face risks of pneumonia and Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS).
- **Treatment and Diagnosis:** Early administration of the antiviral drug Oseltamivir within 48 hours remains the gold standard, while throat/nasal swab RT-PCR serves as the primary diagnostic tool.
- **Extracardiac Complications:** Emerging medical reports indicate H1N1 infection extends beyond respiratory tracks, occasionally impacting cardiac tissue and triggering arrhythmia or heart failure.
- **Administrative Preparedness:** Health authorities have confirmed adequate availability of hospital beds, essential drugs, and medical equipment, directing healthcare facilities to maintain strict vector control.

## Essential Definitions

- **H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu):** A respiratory disease caused by a strain of the Influenza A virus that infects the airways and propagates through respiratory droplets.
- **Antiviral Drug:** A class of medication specifically used to treat viral infections by inhibiting the development or replication of the pathogen.
- **Genetic Sequencing:** The process of determining the precise nucleic acid sequence in a viral genome to detect structural mutations or lineage changes.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution:** Guarantees the fundamental Right to Life, which the Supreme Court has expanded to mandate the State's duty to protect public health and provide healthcare infrastructure.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Directs the State to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living, designating the improvement of public health as a primary state obligation.
- **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:** Grants special executive powers to state governments under Section 2 to formulate temporary regulations to contain dangerous communicable outbreaks.
- **Seventh Schedule (State List - Entry 6):** Designates "Public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries" under state legislative competence.

**Conclusion** Addressing seasonal infectious surges requires a robust strategy combining genomic surveillance, early therapeutic intervention, and public awareness. Strengthening public health

### • IN A NUTSHELL

#### WHAT IS SWINE FLU or H1N1 VIRUS?



- A type of Influenza A virus that infects nose, throat, lungs.
- Spreads mainly through

droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.  
• First emerged in pigs.

### 2. THE SYMPTOMS



- Fever
- Headache
- Cough
- Muscle ache
- Tiredness

• Chills & sweating  
Mild illness can quickly turn into severe condition

### 3. MEDICINES

**OSELTAMIVIR**  
Antiviral works best if taken within 48 hours.

**PARACETAMOL**  
for fever, body ache.

**NO ANTIBIOTICS**

### WHAT DOCTORS ADVISE?

Take flu vaccine once a year.  
Best time: **October**.

- Maintain hygiene
- Stay hydrated
- Consult doctor early
- Take adequate rest

#### General precautions

- Wear a mask in crowded places
- Wash hands frequently
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Keep spaces well-ventilated



infrastructure while mitigating over-reliance on antibiotics ensures resilient management of emerging viral mutations without inducing socio-economic panic.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Governance mechanisms.
- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Awareness in the fields of Biotechnology, viral mutations, and global public health challenges.

## 3. Judicial Services Eligibility: SC Modifies Legal Practice Rule for Entry-Level Judges

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Modification of Mandate:** A 2:1 majority bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant modified the May 2025 judgment, replacing the strict 3-year Bar practice requirement for Civil Judge (Junior Division) entry with a 1-year practice mandate.
- **Two-Year Transition Window:** For judicial recruitment notifications issued between May 20, 2025, and March 31, 2027, fresh law graduates remain eligible to apply without producing prior practice certificates.
- **Deemed Practice Provision:** Candidates applying during the transition window will be deemed to have completed 1 year of practice, alleviating sudden career disruptions caused by the 2025 ruling.
- **Structured Institutional Substitute:** To compensate for reduced Bar practice, selected candidates must undergo 1 year of intensive training at a State Judicial Academy followed by 1 year of supervised law clerkship.
- **Clerkship Breakdown:** The 1-year clerkship split comprises 6 months under a District Judge/Higher Judicial Service officer and 6 months under a sitting High Court Judge.
- **Evaluation & Confirmation:** Trainees will receive half the gross remuneration of a Judicial Magistrate First Class; confirmation to regular service hinges on a satisfactory performance report submitted by the supervising High Court Judge.



### Essential Definitions

- **Civil Judge (Junior Division):** The primary entry-level judicial officer in the subordinate judiciary empowered to adjudicate civil disputes up to specified pecuniary limits.
- **Law Clerkship:** A structured training period where a law graduate assists a sitting judge with legal research, case preparation, and court proceedings.
- **Subordinate Judiciary:** The cadre of district courts and lower tribunals operating under the administrative and judicial supervision of the respective state High Court.

### Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 235 of the Indian Constitution:** Vests the control, recruitment, posting, and promotion of persons in the judicial service of a State (below District Judge) in the concerned High Court.
- **Article 234 of the Indian Constitution:** Dictates that appointments to the judicial service of a State are made by the Governor in accordance with rules framed after consultation with the State Public Service Commission and the High Court.
- **All India Judges Association Cases:** Landmark rulings established that standardizing service conditions, training, and eligibility rules across states maintains institutional efficiency and independence.

**Conclusion** The Supreme Court's balanced decision harmonizes institutional needs for courtroom familiarity with equity for young legal aspirants. Substituting raw litigation duration with structured judicial academy training and supervised clerkships modernizes judicial induction while protecting early-career professional trajectory.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Judicial appointments and administrative control over the subordinate judiciary.
- **GS Paper II (Constitutional Framework):** Separation of powers, judicial independence, and statutory rulemaking under Articles 234 and 235.

## 4. UPI Sustainability & Digital Public Infrastructure: The Debate Over Zero-MDR

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Massive Volume Scale:** In 2025–26, UPI processed roughly 24,000 crore transactions valued at 314 lakh crore, representing nearly half of the world's real-time digital payments.
- **Statutory Shift:** Parliament passed the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Act, 2026, modifying Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007. This unlocks the statutory framework for the government to notify potential payment charges rather than maintaining an absolute zero-MDR mandate.
- **Pro-Small Merchant Profile:** The vast majority of UPI transaction volumes comprise micro-payments; 86% of retail merchant transactions are under ₹500, serving vegetable vendors, auto drivers, and kirana stores.
- **Fiscal Cost Savings:** Digital transactions save the State an estimated ₹5,000 crore to ₹6,400 crore annually in physical currency printing, storage, and cash management overheads.
- **Public Good Argument:** Experts argue that digital infrastructure acts as a sovereign public good; any imposed Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) risks driving price-sensitive users back to cash exchanges.



- **Financial Value Proposition:** Banks benefit substantially through reduced counter transaction costs ₹40 - 50 for physical counters versus a fraction of a rupee for UPI) and lower idle cash float, enhancing credit issuance capacity.

## Essential Definitions

- **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR):** A percentage fee charged to a merchant by acquiring banks and payment service providers for processing digital transactions.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Open, interoperable, protocol-based technical rails that enable essential public and private service delivery at national scale.
- **Interconnection Work-Done Principle:** A telecommunication and networking regulatory concept where participating network nodes are compensated strictly for the operational processing load performed.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007:** Primary legislation designating the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as the authority for regulating and supervising digital payment mechanisms in India.
- **Section 10A Amendment (2026):** Replaces the absolute prohibition on levying charges for notified digital modes with an enabling provision giving executive discretion over transaction fees.
- **Article 39(b) of the Indian Constitution:** Directive Principle of State Policy instructing the State to direct policy toward ensuring that ownership and control of material resources serve the common good.

## Conclusion

Treating UPI as a public utility requires sustaining its open access model to protect low-value retail transactions. Funding payment infrastructure via public savings generated from reduced cash management—rather than imposing end-user levies—ensures long-term financial inclusion and preserves the velocity of India's digital economy.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Indian Economy):** Digital Public Infrastructure, financial inclusion, banking reforms, and monetary system efficiency.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Policy formulation, executive regulations under statutory frameworks, and welfare economics.

## 5. BRICS STI Ministerial Meeting: Global Technological Collaboration & Inclusive Innovation

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **14th BRICS STI Ministerial Meeting:** Held in Chennai, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Dr. Jitendra Singh delivered the inaugural address, highlighting emerging technologies as core drivers of global transformation.

- **2026 BRICS Presidency Theme:** Under India's 2026 BRICS Chairship, the overarching theme adopted is "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability".
- **4-Pillar Tech Framework:** India advocated for making global scientific innovation accessible, affordable, trusted, and sustainable to ensure equitable benefits across nations.
- **Focus on Frontier Domains:** Highlighted critical cooperation areas including Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, advanced materials, biotechnology, photonics, geospatial technologies, and high-performance computing.
- **Domestic Flagship Integration:** Referenced key national initiatives like the National Quantum Mission, BioE3 Policy, National Geospatial Policy, and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as models of human-centric development.
- **Actionable Collaboration Avenues:** Called for deeper BRICS engagement in research infrastructure sharing, talent mobility, startup partnerships, and innovation financing tailored for the Global South.

## Essential Definitions

- **Frontier Technologies:** High-impact, rapidly evolving technologies—such as Quantum Computing, AI, and BioE3—that have the potential to disrupt traditional industries and redefine national competitiveness.
- **Global South:** A collective term for developing, emerging, and lower-income countries primarily located in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Open-source, interoperable, protocol-based software platforms that enable equitable public and private service delivery at a population scale.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution:** Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) instructing the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in international affairs.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List - Entry 65 & 66):** Designates technology institutions, scientific research, higher education coordination, and scientific/technical education under exclusive Parliamentary jurisdiction.
- **BioE3 Policy (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment):** Cabinet-approved framework fostering high-performance biomanufacturing, circular bioeconomy, and bio-foundries.
- **National Quantum Mission (NQM):** Executive policy framework aimed at seeding, nurturing, and scaling scientific and industrial R&D in quantum technology.

**Conclusion** India's push at the 14th BRICS STI Ministerial Meeting underscores a shift toward human-centric, equitable technology transfer. By positioning Digital Public Infrastructure, quantum science, and biotechnology as global public goods, India reinforces its commitment to leveraging emerging tech for sustainable development across the Global South.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India (BRICS); Effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.



- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Indigenization of technology; Developing new technology; Awareness in fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotech, Biotech, and Quantum computing.

## 6. Monetary Policy Trilemma: Divergence Between Policy Stance and Rate Trajectory

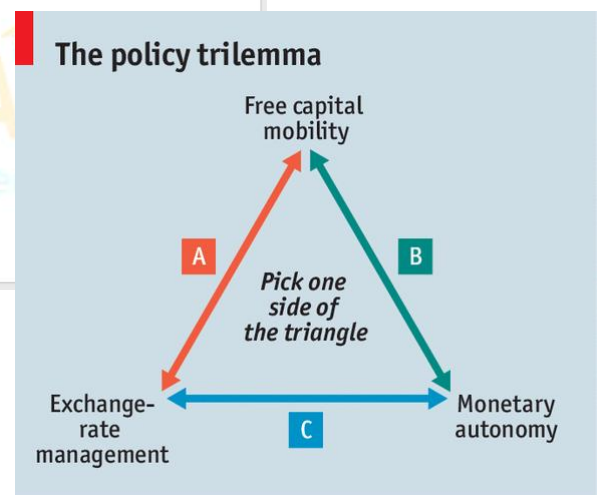
### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Repo Rate Hold:** The RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted unanimously to keep the benchmark repo rate unchanged at 5.25% while retaining a neutral monetary policy stance.
- **Stance Discrepancy:** While the policy resolution projected a dovish tone, the published MPC meeting minutes revealed strong hawkish inclinations among internal members toward eventual policy tightening.
- **Negative Real Rates:** Inflation projections (5.9% for Q3, 5.5% for Q4, and 5.3% for Q1 FY27) exceed the policy rate, pushing real interest rates into negative territory on a forward-looking basis.
- **Growth vs Inflation Dynamics:** The central bank highlighted resilient domestic demand and sustained expansion in manufacturing and services, making prolonged monetary accommodation questionable alongside elevated inflation projections.
- **Global Uncertainty Parallel:** Similar policy dilemmas are visible globally; the US Federal Reserve maintained interest rates while facing internal member support for incremental rate hikes.
- **October Policy Outlook:** Clarifications regarding monsoon coverage, agricultural output, and global energy price trajectories will determine whether the MPC shifts stance or adjusts benchmark interest rates.

### Essential Definitions

- **Hawkish vs Dovish Stance:** A hawkish stance prioritizes controlling inflation through higher interest rates, whereas a dovish stance prioritizes stimulating economic growth through lower interest rates or rate cuts.
- **Real Interest Rate:** The nominal interest rate adjusted for inflation ( $\text{Real Rate} = \text{Nominal Interest Rate} - \text{Inflation Rate}$ ); negative real rates indicate that inflation exceeds nominal yield.
- **Repo Rate:** The benchmark rate at which the Reserve Bank of India lends short-term funds to commercial banks against government securities.

### Legal and Constitutional Framework



Economist.com

- **Section 45ZB of the RBI Act, 1934:** Authorizes the Central Government to constitute a six-member Monetary Policy Committee to determine the policy rate required to achieve the inflation target.
- **Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) Framework:** Statutory mandate under Section 45ZA requiring the RBI to maintain Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of +/-2%.
- **Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, 1934:** Mandates the publication of MPC meeting minutes on the 14th day after the meeting, detailing individual voting records and member statements.

## Conclusion

The divergence between the neutral stance and underlying hawkish sentiments reflects the complex trade-off between anchoring inflation expectations and supporting economic recovery. As persistent supply-side disruptions risk unmooring real interest rates, future monetary actions will depend strictly on incoming macroeconomic data.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and monetary policy mechanisms.
- **GS Paper III (Banking & Monetary Sector):** Structure and mandate of the Monetary Policy Committee, inflation targeting, and interest rate transmission.

## 7. UDISE+ 2025-26 Report: Regional and Socioeconomic Disparities in School Education

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Macro-Educational Scale:** The UDISE+ 2025-26 report evaluates 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers across India, noting aggregate gains in gross enrolment, retention, and infrastructure.
- **Aadhaar Seeding and Distribution:** Andhra Pradesh leads in Aadhaar seeding at 99.6%, whereas Meghalaya records the lowest at 35%, against the national average of 90.2%.
- **Institutional Composition:** West Bengal holds the highest share of foundational and preparatory schools (79%), whereas Chandigarh leads in secondary school proportion (83%).

- **Social Enrolment Demographics:** At the national level, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is highest for OBCs (49%), followed by General (27%), SCs (17%), and STs (10%).
- **Pupil-Teacher Ratio Variations:** Secondary Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) shows severe inter-state variance, peaking in Jharkhand at 43 and Uttar Pradesh, compared to a low of 6 in Sikkim.
- **Dropout Disparities:** Bihar records the highest preparatory (7.9%) and middle-level (9%) dropout rates, while Ladakh records the highest secondary-stage dropout rate at 14.8%.

## Essential Definitions

- **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER):** Total enrolment at a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level.
- **Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR):** The average number of pupils per teacher at a given level of education in a given school year.
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** A socio-economic index designed to measure the relative access to education of males and females, calculated as the quotient of the number of females by the number of males.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21A:** Fundamental Right mandating the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** Statutory framework specifying norms for PTR, infrastructure standards, and non-discrimination in admissions.
- **Article 46 (DPSP):** Directs the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

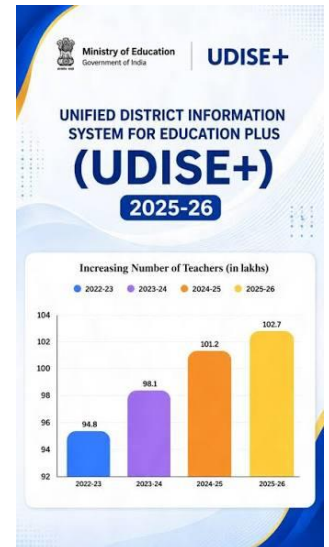
**Conclusion** While UDISE+ 2025-26 demonstrates quantitative expansion in national schooling metrics, structural inequities in PTR, infrastructure, and dropouts persist across regions and social strata. Aligning state-level interventions with NEP 2020 through targeted funding and equitable teacher allocation remains vital for achieving inclusive human capital development.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources, and social inclusion mechanisms.
- **GS Paper II (Constitutional & Statutory Framework):** Implementation of Article 21A, RTE Act, and federal coordination in educational policy execution.

## 8. Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness: Securing Trade and Maritime Security

## Key Highlights & Summary



- **Quad IPMDA Framework:** Launched under the Quad in 2022, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) provides real-time, technology-based maritime data sharing to detect and counter regional threats.
- **Crucial Geo-Economic Arteries:** The Indo-Pacific facilitates nearly \$7 trillion in annual trade across vital chokepoints like the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, Hormuz, and Bab-al-Mandeb.
- **Addressing Surveillance Gaps:** Many ocean-going and small fishing vessels bypass regulatory frameworks by disabling Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders ("going dark") to evade sanctions, smuggle, or engage in illegal fishing.
- **Countering Grey-Zone Tactics:** Multilayered technology integration is essential to counter state and non-state actors deploying non-military coercion and grey-zone operations in strategic maritime corridors.
- **Institutional Synergies:** India's Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) serves as a primary regional hub, complemented by India's procurement of SeaVision technology from the U.S. for enhanced data processing.
- **Empowering Smaller Littorals:** Capacity-constrained nations such as Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and Fiji benefit directly from shared satellite, radar, and radio-frequency monitoring infrastructure.



## Essential Definitions

- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** The effective understanding of anything associated with the global maritime domain that could impact security, safety, economy, or environment.
- **Automatic Identification System (AIS):** An automated tracking system using transponders on vessels to broadcast location, speed, and course for collision avoidance and tracking.
- **Grey-Zone Operations:** Coercive actions that fall below the threshold of conventional military conflict, designed to alter status quo arrangements while avoiding armed responses.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **UNCLOS (1982):** United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea establishing freedom of navigation (Article 87), right of innocent passage (Article 17), and states' obligations to regulate high-seas activities.
- **Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution:** DPSP directing the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in international affairs.
- **SAGAR Vision:** Security and Growth for All in the Region, India's foreign policy framework guiding collaborative maritime security in the Indian Ocean.

**Conclusion** Unimpeded maritime trade relies on comprehensive tracking and multilateral transparency. Strengthening the IPMDA architecture alongside Quad, ASEAN, and littoral partners converts shared data into robust deterrence, preserving open sea lines of communication.



## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India (Quad); Indo-Pacific strategy and maritime security architecture.
- **GS Paper III (Internal & External Security):** Security challenges in coastal areas; role of technology in surveillance and intelligence sharing.

## 9. MGNREGA Scrapped: Supreme Court Validates Legacy Scheme Amid Legal Transition

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Judicial Validation:** A three-judge Supreme Court bench praised the repealed MGNREGA as a "salutary scheme" that was neither a freebie nor exploitative, acknowledging its contribution to rural livelihoods.
- **Shift to VB-G RAM G Act:** The new Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) replaces MGNREGA, raising guaranteed work days from 100 to 125 per household annually.
- **Structural Policy Shift:** Civil rights petitioners highlighted a 50% decline in employment generation under the new framework, attributing it to a shift from a demand-driven right to a centrally controlled model.
- **Federal Cost-Sharing Alteration:** State funding contributions have increased threefold under the new law, shifting the financial burden ratio from 90:10 to 60:40.
- **Minimum Wage Debate:** Counsel argued that paying less than statutory minimum wages amounts to forced labor, whereas the bench noted wage thresholds must consider local conditions and employment availability.
- **Constitutional Status of Work:** The Supreme Court reiterated that the right to work remains a democratic aspiration under Part IV (DPSP) rather than an absolute fundamental right under Article 21.

### Essential Definitions

- **Demand-Driven Employment:** A legal mechanism where the State is statutorily bound to provide work within a specified timeframe whenever a worker demands it, failing which an unemployment allowance is paid.
- **Forced Labour:** Involuntary work extracted under compulsion or paid below the statutory minimum wage, violating personal dignity and legal standards.

- **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):** Non-justiciable constitutional guidelines set out in Part IV to guide state policy toward social and economic justice.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21:** Guarantees the Right to Life and Personal Liberty; legal arguments sought to integrate the right to work at minimum wages into a dignified life.
- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State to make effective provision for securing the right to work, education, and public assistance within its economic capacity.
- **Article 23:** Prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labor, relevant to debates surrounding sub-minimum wage payments.
- **VB-G RAM G Act:** Replaced the repealed MGNREGA, reconfiguring rural wage employment governance and fiscal allocation structures.



**Conclusion** The transition from MGNREGA to the VB-G RAM G Act highlights the challenge of balancing fiscal decentralization with guaranteed social safety nets. Ensuring that structural modifications do not dilute rural employment guarantees or state financial viability remains vital for achieving inclusive economic growth.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Welfare Schemes):** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections by the Centre and States; performance, mechanisms, and implementation issues.
- **GS Paper II (Polity & Constitution):** Fundamental Rights (Articles 21 & 23) versus Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 41); judicial review of legislative changes.

## 10. India-UK Defence Co-operation: Strategic Roadmap & Indo-Pacific Security Framework

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Strategic Review:** India and the United Kingdom reviewed their ongoing defence industrial cooperation during the 25th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting in New Delhi.
- **Institutional Blueprints:** The engagement focused on advancing joint Research & Development (R&D) under the framework of the India-UK Vision 2035 and the 10-year Defence Industrial Roadmap.
- **Armed Forces Exchanges:** Both nations agreed to expand military-to-military exchanges across the three services through joint exercises, training programs, and capacity-building initiatives.
- **Indo-Pacific Collaboration:** The dialogue acknowledged robust maritime security cooperation, highlighting the establishment of the Regional Maritime Security Centre of Excellence (RMSCE) under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Both delegates reaffirmed their commitment to regional peace, mutual security, and the preservation of strategic autonomy in their foreign policy postures.

- **Shared Values:** The partnership re-anchored its alignment on shared principles of peace, regional stability, freedom of navigation, and mutual respect.

## Essential Definitions

- **Strategic Autonomy:** A foreign policy doctrine where a state retains independent decision-making capabilities without entering into binding military alliances.
- **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):** An open, non-treaty-based global initiative focused on preserving the maritime domain through multi-pillar international cooperation.
- **Defence Industrial Roadmap:** A bilateral long-term blueprint aimed at facilitating technology transfers, co-development, and co-production of military hardware.



## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution:** Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) instructing the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in international dealings.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List - Entry 1, 2 & 14):** Grants Parliament exclusive power over Defence of India, Naval/Military/Air Forces, and Foreign Affairs/Treaties.
- **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020:** Governs the legal and procedural guidelines for international defence procurement, joint ventures, and technology transfers.

**Conclusion** The 25th Defence Consultative Group meeting underscores the transition of India-UK ties from buyer-seller arrangements to collaborative co-development. Expanding joint R&D and strengthening Indo-Pacific maritime surveillance capabilities under IPOI reinforces rules-based order while supporting domestic defence manufacturing self-reliance.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India; Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Security & Defence):** Indigenization of technology in defence; Maritime security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region.

## 11. Ganga Floodplain Regulations: NGT Challenges to Environmental Rule Modifications

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **NGT Notice to Centre:** The National Green Tribunal issued notice to the Ministry of Jal Shakti following a challenge to the River Ganga Authorities (Second Amendment) Order, 2026.

- **Shift from 2016 Order:** The amendment modifies the 2016 Order under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, replacing the earlier blanket "construction-free zone" tag with a stratified regulatory mechanism.
- **Three-Tier Zoning System:** In line with Central Water Commission guidelines, the framework categorizes land into an Active Floodplain (1-in-5-year return period), a Regulatory Zone (5-to-25-year return period), and a Warning Zone (25-to-100-year return period).
- **Active Floodplain Redefinition:** Petitioners contend that pegging the active floodplain strictly to a 1-in-5-year flood return period restricts the protected zone, deviating from previous judicial precedents that recognized broader 100-year flood lines or fixed buffers.
- **Executive Justification:** The Union Government maintains the revision corrects legal inconsistencies and provides precise definitions without lowering environmental standards or waiving clearance requirements.
- **Ecological Risk:** Environmentalists argue that easing construction prohibitions along vulnerable stretches risks promoting riverfront encroachments, altering natural hydrological flows, and reducing groundwater recharge capacity.



## Essential Definitions

- **Active Floodplain:** The low-lying riverbank area frequently submerged by water during recurring floods, specifically defined under the 2026 order as subject to a one-in-five-year flood return period.
- **Flood Return Period:** A statistical estimate representing the average time interval in years between occurrences of a flood of a given magnitude.
- **National Green Tribunal (NGT):** A specialized statutory body established for the effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and natural resources.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 21:** Guarantees the Fundamental Right to a clean and healthy environment, which encompasses the protection of natural river ecosystems.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Parent statutory legislation providing executive power to issue orders for river rejuvenation and regulate activities near eco-sensitive zones.
- **River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016:** Statutory framework constituting the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and establishing riverbank conservation norms.

**Conclusion** Balancing infrastructure development with riverine ecology requires scientific, long-term floodplain management. Ensuring that regulatory zoning does not compromise the natural flow, carrying capacity, or groundwater recharge functions of the Ganga basin is essential for preserving the river's ecological integrity.



## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Ecology):** Conservation, environmental pollution, degradation, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **GS Paper II (Governance & Statutory Bodies):** Role and jurisdiction of the National Green Tribunal, judicial review of executive notifications, and statutory enforcement under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

## 12. Indigenous Nuclear Expansion: Private Sector Adoption of 700 MWe PHWR Technology

### Key Highlights & Summary

- **Preference for Domestic PHWRs:** New private entrants in India's civil nuclear sector are prioritizing indigenous 700 MWe Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors due to established supply chains, mature domestic infrastructure, and localized technical expertise.
- **Ambitious Capacity Targets:** India aims to scale its civil nuclear capacity to 100 gigawatt-electric (GWe) by 2047, with major private and public players like NTPC targeting 30 GWe, Adani Group targeting 10 GWe, and Jindal Steel targeting 18 GWe.
- **Regulatory Modernization:** The government released draft rules under the SHANTI Act, establishing a statutory regulatory framework for private sector participation, captive generation, licensing, safety oversight, and nuclear liability.
- **Fleet Deployment Strategy:** Industry leaders advocate deploying standardized 700 MWe PHWRs in fleet mode initially, leveraging 90--95% domestic indigenization to ensure cost competitiveness.
- **Role of Advanced Technologies:** Pressurised Water Reactors (PWRs) and Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) are envisioned for subsequent phases, contingent upon local supply chain integration and cost optimization.
- **Commercial Viability Mandate:** High localization is emphasized across all reactor technologies to maintain affordable tariffs for end consumers.



### Essential Definitions

- **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR):** A nuclear reactor utilizing natural uranium as fuel and heavy water (deuterium oxide) as both coolant and neutron moderator.
- **Small Modular Reactor (SMR):** Advanced nuclear reactors with a power capacity typically up to 300 MWe per unit, designed with modular technology for factory fabrication and rapid field installation.
- **Fleet Mode Deployment:** Constructing multiple standardized nuclear reactors simultaneously across sites to optimize supply chain efficiency, reduce gestation periods, and lower capital costs.

## Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **SHANTI Act (Draft Rules):** Provides the governing regulatory architecture for private sector entry, safety protocols, captive generation, and civil nuclear liability.
- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962:** Primary statutory framework regulating the development, control, and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes in India.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List - Entry 6):** Vests exclusive legislative power over "Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production" in Parliament.

**Conclusion** Prioritizing indigenous 700 MWe PHWRs offers a commercially viable starting point for scaling India's civil nuclear energy capacity. Integrating private enterprise within a robust statutory liability framework ensures cost-effective decarbonization and aligns with long-term clean energy independence goals.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Indigenization of technology, nuclear technology advancements, and peaceful applications of atomic energy.
- **GS Paper III (Infrastructure & Economy):** Renewable energy targets, industrial decarbonization, private sector participation in infrastructure, and regulatory governance.

