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Thursday, October 15, 2026

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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls: Constitutional Framework, Voter Exclusion Concerns and Electoral Integrity Reforms in India

Recent Developments:

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** initiated the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in Bihar on **24 June 2025**, triggering a wider debate over electoral integrity, citizenship verification, voter inclusion and procedural fairness.
- The exercise subsequently expanded to other States and Union Territories during **2025–26**, attracting protests, judicial scrutiny and competing assessments from former election officials, judges and civil society organisations.
- Reports of large-scale omissions from draft electoral rolls raised concerns about **wrongful exclusion, inadequate field verification, documentation requirements and procedural safeguards**.
    - A reported figure of approximately **13.3 crore deleted or omitted entries** across multiple phases requires independent verification against official, phase-wise ECI data. Draft-roll omissions should not automatically be equated with final deletions or loss of voting eligibility.
- The controversy centres on whether the ECI can simultaneously ensure **accurate electoral rolls** and protect eligible citizens from **arbitrary disenfranchisement**.

Special Intensive Revision: Meaning and Objectives:

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** is a comprehensive electoral-roll verification exercise undertaken by the ECI to reassess voter entries, establish eligibility and update constituency-wise electoral records.
- Unlike routine **summary revisions**, intensive revision involves extensive field verification, household enumeration, scrutiny of existing entries and publication of revised electoral rolls.
- Its principal objectives include:
    - Identifying **deceased electors, duplicate registrations, permanently shifted voters and otherwise ineligible entries**, while ensuring the inclusion of eligible citizens who remain unregistered.
    - Improving **electoral transparency, accuracy and public confidence**, thereby reducing opportunities for impersonation, multiple registration and administrative manipulation.
- **Electoral-roll revision** is distinct from **citizenship determination**. The ECI examines citizenship as an eligibility condition for voter registration but does not exercise the general statutory powers of citizenship authorities.

Constitutional and Legal Framework: GS Paper II

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 324:** Vests the ECI with the superintendence, direction and control of electoral-roll preparation and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of President and Vice-President.
- **Article 325:** Provides for one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and prohibits exclusion or special electoral rolls solely on grounds of **religion, race, caste or sex**.
- **Article 326:** Establishes **adult suffrage**, under which Indian citizens aged at least **18 years**, satisfying statutory eligibility requirements, may register as electors.
- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and protection against arbitrary State action, making fairness and consistency relevant to electoral administration.

- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty, including recognised privacy interests, which become relevant when electoral verification involves extensive collection or processing of personal data.
- **Article 327:** Empowers Parliament to legislate on electoral matters, including the preparation of electoral rolls, subject to the Constitution.

Representation of the People Act, 1950:

- **Section 19:** Establishes the principal conditions for voter registration, including the prescribed age and ordinary residence in a constituency.
- **Section 20:** Explains **ordinary residence**, which is not necessarily identical to permanent residence, ownership of property or continuous physical presence.
- **Section 21(2):** Governs ordinary electoral-roll revisions, including revisions before specified elections, subject to statutory provisions.
- **Section 21(3):** Authorises the ECI to direct a **special revision** of electoral rolls for any constituency or part of a constituency, at any time, for **reasons recorded**, in a manner it considers appropriate.
    - Its **proviso** preserves the existing electoral roll until completion of the special revision, subject to other provisions of the Act.
- **Section 22:** Permits correction, amendment, transposition or deletion of entries following the prescribed inquiry and applicable safeguards.
- **Section 23:** Governs inclusion of names in electoral rolls, subject to statutory conditions and relevant electoral deadlines.
- **Section 24:** Provides an appellate mechanism against specified decisions relating to electoral-roll entries.
- The **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, prescribe procedures governing registration, verification, claims, objections and publication.

SIR Procedure and Administrative Structure:

Principal Stages of Revision:

- **Household Enumeration:** Booth Level Officers (BLOs) undertake field verification, distribute or collect enumeration forms and assist electors in confirming relevant particulars.
- **Verification of Eligibility:** Electoral authorities examine available records and supporting evidence, including earlier electoral rolls and documents required under the applicable SIR instructions.
    - Documentation requirements vary according to the particular SIR order and the elector's circumstances; it is inaccurate to assume that every voter registered after 2003 must follow an identical documentary procedure.
- **Draft Electoral Roll:** The ECI publishes a provisional roll to enable public scrutiny and identification of omitted or incorrect entries.
- **Claims and Objections:** Eligible applicants may seek inclusion, correction or deletion of entries through prescribed procedures within the notified period.
- **Inquiry and Adjudication: Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)** examine relevant evidence, conduct necessary inquiries and decide claims and objections under the applicable legal framework.
- **Final Publication:** Electoral rolls are finalised after the prescribed processes, with statutory correction, inclusion and appeal mechanisms remaining subject to relevant restrictions.

Bihar SIR Timeline, 2025:

- **24 June 2025:** ECI issued instructions initiating the Bihar SIR.
- **25 June–26 July 2025:** Scheduled enumeration-form submission period.
- **1 August 2025:** Draft electoral roll published.
- **1 August–1 September 2025:** Scheduled claims-and-objections period.

- **30 September 2025:** Scheduled publication of the final electoral roll.

Institutional Responsibilities:

- **ECI:** Determines revision policy, issues directions and supervises the overall process.
- **Chief Electoral Officer (CEO):** Coordinates implementation at the State level.
- **District Election Officer (DEO):** Supervises district-level electoral administration.
- **Electoral Registration Officer (ERO):** Exercises statutory responsibility for maintaining electoral rolls and deciding registration-related matters.
- **Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO):** Assists the ERO in assigned electoral functions.
- **Booth Level Officer (BLO):** Conducts grassroots enumeration, verification and voter assistance.
- **Booth Level Agent (BLA):** Represents a political party at the booth level and assists with identifying discrepancies through authorised procedures.

Electoral Registration Forms and Citizen Participation:

- **Form 6:** Application for registration as a new elector, subject to eligibility requirements.
- **Form 6A:** Registration application for eligible **overseas Indian electors** who have not acquired foreign citizenship.
- **Form 7:** Application seeking deletion of an existing electoral-roll entry or raising an objection to inclusion.
- **Form 8:** Used for **shifting residence within or between constituencies, correcting particulars, replacing EPIC and marking disability status**.
    - **Form 8A** belonged to the earlier procedure for transposition within a constituency; its function is now covered by Form 8.
- Citizens should verify their entries through the **ECI Voters' Services Portal**, submit accurate applications and preserve acknowledgement details for follow-up.
- **Political parties, BLAs and civil society organisations** can support awareness, identify possible omissions and assist vulnerable voters, without substituting for statutory verification or adjudication.

Comparison Between the 2002–04 and 2025–26 SIR Exercises:

Earlier Intensive Revision Framework:

- The **2002–04 revision guidelines**, as described in the available historical account, emphasised door-to-door enumeration, multilayered verification and careful treatment of electors who had shifted residence.
- **Household verification:** Enumerators used preliminary electoral rolls, visited households and recorded information on residents and shifted electors.
- **Supervisory checks:** The historical guidelines reportedly required:
    - Supervisors to verify at least **25% of enumerated households** through random checks.
    - AEROs, EROs and DEOs to inspect at least **12%, 5% and 2%** of households, respectively.
    - Supervisors to personally verify certain locked premises and cases involving the shifting of entire families.
- **Shifted electors:** Entries were reportedly marked with an **"S"**, with arrangements for coordinating enrolment at the new address and removal of the previous entry.
- **Citizenship-related scrutiny:** Existing electoral-roll entries were treated as relevant evidence, while first-time applicants remained subject to eligibility verification.
- **Claims and objections:** Individualised scrutiny and completion of pending proceedings were central procedural safeguards.

Concerns in the 2025–26 Exercise:

- **Non-submission of enumeration forms:** The Bihar process initially linked inclusion in the draft roll to receipt of enumeration forms, creating risks for temporarily absent, elderly, migrant or otherwise inaccessible electors.
- **Supervisory coverage:** The Bihar notification reportedly prescribed **10% supervisory verification**, compared with the historically reported 25% requirement, raising questions about the adequacy of error detection.
- **Shifted electors:** Critics questioned whether adequate arrangements existed to ensure continuity of registration when voters moved between constituencies.
- **Documentation burden:** Reliance on historical electoral rolls, parental records or additional documents could disadvantage individuals lacking accessible family records.
- **Administrative consistency:** Differences in enumeration, documentary scrutiny and objection handling could produce unequal outcomes unless accompanied by transparent standards.

Important distinction: Historical supervision percentages and reported differences in implementation should be assessed against the original ECI instructions for each revision period; they do not automatically establish a statutory violation.

Major Concerns and Democratic Implications: GS Paper II

Risk of Wrongful Voter Exclusion:

- **Eligible electors** may be omitted because of temporary migration, absence during enumeration, incorrect addresses, missing documents or errors in digital records.
- **Seasonal workers, interstate migrants, homeless persons, elderly citizens, women and persons with disabilities** may face disproportionately high compliance costs.
- Exclusion from a draft roll does not necessarily constitute final disenfranchisement, but delayed restoration may prevent participation if electoral deadlines are reached.
- **Ordinary residence** must be assessed according to law rather than treating every temporary absence as proof of permanent relocation.

Burden of Proof and Documentation:

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- The requirement to establish eligibility must operate within the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**, applicable rules and lawful ECI directions.
- Historical electoral-roll records may help establish continuity of registration but can be difficult to locate because of **spelling differences, missing archives, changes in family circumstances and migration**.
- Documentary requirements can disproportionately affect individuals without birth certificates, inherited records or stable residential documentation.
- A fair process should recognise **reasonable alternative evidence**, provide assistance and avoid treating minor discrepancies as conclusive evidence of ineligibility.

Aadhaar, Citizenship and Privacy:

- **Aadhaar** can support identity-related verification but is **not conclusive proof of Indian citizenship**.
- Judicial directions concerning Aadhaar during the SIR controversy must be understood within their specific procedural context; acceptance of Aadhaar for identification does not automatically establish citizenship or every other electoral eligibility condition.
- Excessive dependence on digital identity systems can create **authentication failures, data-matching errors, privacy risks and exclusion of individuals with incomplete records**.

- Electoral data processing should follow principles of **purpose limitation, data minimisation, accuracy, security and proportionality**.

Automated Verification and Data Quality:

- Reported software-generated flags included **spelling variations, unusual family-linkage patterns and parent-child age differences** outside specified ranges.
- Such indicators may justify further inquiry but cannot independently establish ineligibility.
- **False positives** arise when genuine electors are incorrectly flagged because of inconsistent data, clerical mistakes or atypical family circumstances.
- Automated tools should therefore support, rather than replace, **human verification, recorded reasons and accessible correction procedures**.

Objections, Transparency and Institutional Accountability:

- **Bulk objections**, including objections submitted through Form 7, raise concerns about possible coordinated misuse when unsupported by individualised evidence.
- Legitimate objections must remain available, but safeguards should discourage frivolous applications and protect electors against unsubstantiated deletion requests.
- Reported differences of opinion within the Election Commission, if established through reliable records, would raise questions about **institutional deliberation, transparency and reasoned decision-making**.
- Public confidence requires clear communication of procedures, publication of relevant aggregate data and timely resolution of individual grievances.

Significance of Accurate Electoral Rolls:

- **Electoral integrity:** Reliable rolls reduce duplicate registrations, impersonation risks and administrative inconsistencies.
- **Universal adult franchise:** Inclusive registration gives practical effect to Article 326 by enabling eligible citizens to exercise their electoral rights.
- **Political equality:** Unwarranted exclusion can distort representation and disproportionately affect socially or economically vulnerable communities.
- **Administrative efficiency:** Accurate voter databases improve polling-station planning, electoral logistics and constituency-level management.
- **Public trust:** Transparent verification and accessible remedies strengthen confidence in the impartiality of election administration.
- The central policy challenge is to minimise both **wrongful inclusion** and **wrongful exclusion**, rather than prioritising one objective without regard to the other.

Reform Priorities and Way Forward: GS Paper II

Procedural and Institutional Reforms:

- **Independent audit:** Undertake risk-based examination of revised rolls, including samples of omitted entries, restoration claims and reasons for deletion.
- **Robust field verification:** Strengthen door-to-door enumeration, repeat visits and supervision in areas with high migration, difficult terrain or vulnerable populations.
- **Individual notice:** Ensure that potentially affected electors receive legally required notice, adequate opportunities to respond and reasoned decisions.
- **Timely restoration:** Establish accessible mechanisms for correcting erroneous omissions and processing valid inclusion applications before relevant electoral deadlines.

- **Transparent statistics:** Publish comparable, disaggregated information on deaths, migration, duplicates, non-submission of forms, objections and subsequent restorations.
- **Effective appeals:** Improve the accessibility and speed of statutory appellate remedies while maintaining clear accountability for decisions.

Technology and Inclusive Administration:

- **Human-supervised technology:** Use automated discrepancy detection only as a screening mechanism, with meaningful human review before adverse decisions.
- **Privacy safeguards:** Limit unnecessary data collection, prevent unauthorised sharing and avoid treating Aadhaar linkage as an automatic determination of electoral eligibility.
- **Targeted voter assistance:** Provide multilingual outreach, mobile facilitation, accessible services and support for migrants, women, senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
- **Phased scheduling:** Allocate sufficient time and administrative resources for enumeration, scrutiny, claims, objections and appeals.
- **Continuity of existing rolls:** Apply the **proviso to Section 21(3)** where relevant, recognising that the roll already in force continues until completion of the directed special revision, subject to other statutory provisions.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Constitutional and Judicial Dimensions:

- **Universal Adult Franchise:** Article 326 establishes the constitutional foundation of broad-based electoral participation.
- **Free and Fair Elections:** Recognised as an essential feature of India's constitutional democracy and linked to the **basic structure doctrine**.
- **Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner (1978):** Examined the scope of the ECI's powers under Article 324 and their relationship with electoral legislation.
- **Lakshmi Charan Sen v. A.K.M. Hassan Uzzaman (1985):** Addressed issues concerning electoral-roll preparation and judicial intervention in electoral processes.
- **Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995):** Emphasised procedural fairness and adequate opportunity when electoral registration is questioned on citizenship-related grounds.
- **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017):** Recognised privacy as a fundamental right, providing a constitutional framework relevant to personal-data processing.

Important Conceptual Distinctions:

- **Electoral Roll vs EPIC:** An electoral roll determines registration as an elector; an **Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC)** is an identification document and does not independently guarantee that a person's name appears on the current roll.
- **Citizenship vs Ordinary Residence:** Citizenship establishes nationality-related eligibility, while ordinary residence determines the constituency in which an eligible person may register.
- **Draft Omission vs Final Deletion:** Absence from a provisional roll may be challenged through prescribed procedures and should not automatically be interpreted as permanent loss of eligibility.
- **Summary Revision vs Intensive Revision:** Summary revision primarily updates existing records through prescribed claims and objections, whereas intensive revision involves more extensive enumeration and verification.
- **Right to Vote:** The right to vote in Indian elections is generally characterised as a **statutory right**, although its exercise is grounded in the constitutional framework of representative democracy.

Mains Answer Enrichment:

- **GS Paper II:** Election Commission, electoral reforms, constitutional bodies, democratic participation, accountability and judicial review.
- **GS Paper III:** Digital governance, cybersecurity, data protection and the risks of automated administrative decision-making.
- **GS Paper IV:** Institutional integrity, impartiality, procedural justice, transparency and ethical public administration.
- **Central analytical framework:** Electoral-roll quality should be assessed through **accuracy, inclusiveness, transparency, proportionality and effective remedies**.
- **Concluding argument:** A credible electoral revision system must eliminate demonstrably ineligible entries without imposing disproportionate procedural burdens on eligible citizens. **Electoral integrity and voter inclusion are complementary constitutional-democratic objectives, not competing alternatives.**

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Supreme Court Restricts Illegal Detentions During Delhi Protests, Reinforcing Constitutional Safeguards for Peaceful Assembly and Public Order

Recent Developments:

- On **11 October 2026**, the Supreme Court held an **extraordinary Sunday hearing** following allegations of mass detentions, restrictions on public movement and disruption of transport services during protests in New Delhi.
- A Special Bench comprising **Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana** directed authorities to prevent **illegal detention**, particularly of peaceful, unarmed protesters outside areas covered by valid prohibitory orders.
- The Court also directed the restoration of **normal Metro and railway operations, internet connectivity and public movement**, subject to lawful restrictions necessary for public order and traffic regulation.
    - It emphasised that **lawyers, journalists and other professionals** should not be obstructed in performing their duties and that access to courts must remain unhindered.
- The proceedings followed allegations that authorities had violated the Court's **9 October 2026 directions** against blanket restrictions on public transport.
    - The Bench issued notices in contempt-related proceedings and sought compliance reports, without conclusively determining the allegations of contempt or unlawful detention at that hearing.
- The controversy revived comparisons with the **1975–77 Emergency** and raised fundamental questions concerning **Article 19 freedoms, personal liberty, preventive policing and proportionality**.

Detention and Arrest: Meaning and Legal Distinctions:

Understanding Different Forms of Custody:

- **Detention** broadly refers to a restriction or deprivation of personal liberty by lawful authority. Its legality depends on the statutory power exercised, the purpose of custody and compliance with constitutional safeguards.
- **Arrest** is a formal legal restraint on personal liberty, ordinarily connected with criminal investigation, prosecution or prevention of an anticipated cognizable offence.

- **Preventive police action:** Temporary intervention under criminal procedure to prevent an anticipated offence, subject to statutory conditions and safeguards.
- **Preventive detention:** Executive custody intended to prevent specified future activities threatening national security, public order or other legally recognised interests, without requiring a prior criminal conviction.
- **Punitive detention or imprisonment:** Custody imposed as punishment following conviction by a competent court.
- **Important distinction:** An arrest is not itself punishment, and an arrest under ordinary criminal procedure is legally distinct from detention under preventive-detention legislation.

Key Differences Between Arrest and Preventive Detention:

BASIS	ORDINARY CRIMINAL ARREST	PREVENTIVE DETENTION
PURPOSE	Investigation, prosecution or prevention of an offence	Prevention of specified anticipated harmful activities
LEGAL BASIS	Criminal procedure and relevant substantive law	Special preventive-detention legislation
CRIMINAL CONVICTION	Not required for arrest	Not required
MAGISTRATE	Production ordinarily required within 24 hours, excluding journey time	Ordinary 24-hour production rule under Article 22(2) does not apply
LEGAL COUNSEL	Constitutional safeguards under Article 22(1)	Article 22(3) excludes Article 22(1) safeguards; other protections depend on law and jurisprudence
REVIEW	Judicial supervision and applicable bail procedures	Advisory Board review and judicial scrutiny of legality

Constitutional Framework: GS Paper II

Fundamental Rights and Safeguards:

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and protection against arbitrary State action, including discriminatory or unreasonable policing.
- **Article 19(1)(a):** Protects freedom of speech and expression, including peaceful criticism of government policies and public authorities.
- **Article 19(1)(b):** Guarantees citizens the right to **assemble peaceably and without arms**, subject to reasonable restrictions under **Article 19(3)** in the interests of sovereignty, integrity and public order.
- **Article 19(1)(d):** Protects citizens' freedom of movement throughout India, subject to constitutionally permissible restrictions.
- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty, requiring deprivation of liberty to follow a **just, fair and reasonable procedure established by law**.
- **Article 22(1)–(2):** Provides safeguards for ordinary arrests, including communication of grounds, consultation with a legal practitioner and production before a magistrate within 24 hours, excluding journey time.
- **Article 22(3)–(7):** Establishes exceptions and safeguards concerning preventive detention.
    - **Article 22(4):** Ordinarily prohibits preventive detention beyond three months without the constitutionally required Advisory Board process, subject to the provisions of Article 22.
    - **Article 22(5):** Requires communication of detention grounds as soon as practicable and the earliest opportunity to make a representation.
    - **Article 22(6):** Permits withholding facts considered against the public interest to disclose.

- **Articles 32 and 226:** Enable judicial remedies, including **habeas corpus**, against unlawful detention through the Supreme Court and High Courts.

Preventive Policing Under the BNSS, 2023:

Section 163: Urgent Prohibitory Orders:

- **Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, replaces **Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973**.
- It authorises a **District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate or specially empowered Executive Magistrate** to issue written directions where immediate prevention or speedy remedy is necessary.
- Orders must state **material facts** and may address anticipated obstruction, danger to human life or safety, disturbances of public tranquillity, riots or affrays.
- **Duration:** An order ordinarily remains effective for a maximum of **two months**, while the State Government may extend its operation within the statutory limit of **six months**.
- The provision does not automatically prohibit all gatherings of five persons; restrictions depend on the actual order.
    - An **unlawful assembly** under Section 189 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita requires five or more persons sharing one of the legally specified unlawful common objects.
- **Judicial safeguards:** Orders must satisfy statutory necessity, procedural requirements and constitutional standards of reasonableness and proportionality.

Sections 170 and 172: Preventive Police Powers:

- **Section 170:** Permits a police officer to arrest without warrant a person known to be planning a **cognizable offence**, when the officer considers that its commission cannot otherwise be prevented.
    - Custody under this provision cannot exceed **24 hours** unless further detention is authorised under another applicable legal provision.
- **Section 172:** Requires compliance with lawful police directions issued in performing preventive duties under the relevant chapter.
    - Police may detain or remove persons resisting or disregarding such directions, produce them before a magistrate or, in petty cases, release them as soon as possible within **24 hours**.
- Neither provision authorises indiscriminate detention merely because an individual participates in a peaceful protest.

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Preventive Detention Laws in India:

- **National Security Act, 1980:** Authorises preventive detention on specified grounds involving national security, public order and essential supplies, with detention potentially extending to **12 months** subject to statutory safeguards.
- **Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978:** Provides preventive-detention powers with different maximum periods depending on the grounds, including up to **two years** for specified security-related cases.
- **Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974:** Addresses preventive detention connected with smuggling and foreign-exchange-related activities.
- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967:** Primarily establishes substantive offences and special investigation, custody and bail provisions.
    - Its provision for extending the investigation period up to **180 days**, subject to judicial authorisation and statutory conditions, must not be confused with executive preventive detention under the National Security Act.

Public Order and Legislative Competence:

Law and Order, Public Order and State Security:

- In **Ram Manohar Lohia v. State of Bihar (1966)**, the Supreme Court distinguished these concepts through **three concentric circles**:
  - **Law and Order:** The broadest category, covering ordinary violations of law that may primarily affect individuals.
  - **Public Order:** A narrower category involving disturbances affecting the normal life and tranquillity of the community.
  - **Security of the State:** The narrowest and most serious category, involving threats to the State's security.
- Every disturbance of law and order does not constitute a public-order threat; the **nature, gravity, reach and consequences** of the disturbance are relevant.

Distribution of Constitutional Powers:

- **State List, Entries 1 and 2:** Assign public order and police primarily to State Governments, subject to constitutional exceptions.
- **Union List, Entry 9:** Covers preventive detention for reasons connected with defence, foreign affairs or the security of India.
- **Concurrent List, Entry 3:** Covers preventive detention for reasons connected with State security, public order and essential supplies or services.
- **Concurrent List, Entries 1 and 2:** Cover criminal law and criminal procedure.
- **Delhi's Special Position:** Under **Article 239AA**, public order, police and land are excluded from the Delhi Legislative Assembly's legislative competence and remain within the Union's constitutional authority.

Landmark Supreme Court Judgments: GS Paper II

Preventive Detention and Personal Liberty:

- **A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950):** Adopted an early, relatively compartmentalised interpretation of fundamental-rights protections in preventive-detention matters.
- **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978):** Established that procedures affecting personal liberty must be **fair, just and reasonable**, with Articles 14, 19 and 21 operating in an interconnected constitutional framework.
- **Rekha v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011):** Emphasised that preventive detention is an exceptional measure and should not substitute for ordinary criminal-law mechanisms without sufficient justification.
- **Pramod Singla v. Union of India (2023):** Reaffirmed strict scrutiny of preventive detention and the importance of compliance with statutory and procedural safeguards.

Right to Protest and Proportionality:

- **Babulal Parate v. State of Maharashtra (1961):** Upheld the constitutional validity of urgent prohibitory powers while recognising that their exercise remains legally constrained.
- **Madhu Limaye v. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (1970):** Emphasised the exceptional, urgent and preventive character of prohibitory powers.
- **In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012):** Scrutinised police action against a gathering and emphasised the necessity of proportionate, restrained use of force.
- **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018):** Required a fair balance between the right to demonstrate and the rights of residents and other members of the public, rejecting indiscriminate restrictions.

- **Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020):** Held that restrictions must satisfy constitutional scrutiny and that repeated prohibitory orders cannot be used to suppress legitimate expression.
- **Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020):** Recognised peaceful protest while holding that public roads and spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely in a manner that obstructs public rights.

Major Constitutional and Administrative Concerns:

- **Arbitrary detention:** Detaining peaceful participants without a lawful basis undermines personal liberty, due process and public confidence in law enforcement.
- **Blanket restrictions:** Extensive prohibitory orders, transport closures and indiscriminate movement restrictions may impose disproportionate burdens on persons unconnected with demonstrations.
- **Chilling effect:** Excessive police intervention may discourage lawful criticism, journalism, civic participation and peaceful assembly.
- **Misclassification of threats:** Treating routine law-and-order concerns as serious public-order emergencies can enable excessive use of preventive powers.
- **Limited accountability:** Inadequate custody records, unclear detention grounds and delayed access to legal remedies can weaken procedural protections.
- **Public inconvenience:** Unregulated demonstrations may disrupt mobility and essential services, requiring authorities to protect both protesters and the wider public.
- The constitutional requirement is therefore to balance **public safety, lawful dissent, individual liberty and the rights of non-participants** through evidence-based restrictions.

Reform Measures and Way Forward:

- **Proportionate restrictions:** Apply the principles of legitimate purpose, rational connection, necessity and balancing of competing rights before imposing preventive measures.
- **Individualised assessment:** Distinguish peaceful demonstrators from persons engaging in violence or credible preparations for cognizable offences.
- **Transparent orders:** Publish applicable prohibitory directions, record material grounds and provide effective opportunities for legal challenge.
- **Minimum necessary force:** Adopt graduated crowd-management procedures, prioritising communication, de-escalation and targeted intervention.
- **Custodial accountability:** Maintain arrest and detention records, communicate applicable legal grounds and ensure timely access to judicial remedies.
- **Police transparency:** Strengthen identification requirements, operational documentation and appropriately regulated use of body-worn cameras, with privacy safeguards.
- **Facilitation of peaceful assembly:** Provide accessible protest locations and reasonable arrangements for public transport, emergency services and ordinary civic movement.
- **International standards:** The **UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 (2020)** emphasises State obligations to facilitate peaceful assemblies and apply necessary, proportionate restrictions.
- **Institutional oversight:** Strengthen judicial review, police training, independent complaints mechanisms and accountability for proven unlawful detention.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Constitutional and Historical Linkages:

- **Emergency of 1975–77:** Illustrates the historical dangers of executive overreach, restrictions on civil liberties and misuse of detention powers.
- **44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978:** Strengthened constitutional protections by ensuring that **Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended** through an order under Article 359.

- **Habeas Corpus:** A constitutional remedy requiring authorities to justify a person's custody before a court.
- **Doctrine of Proportionality:** State restrictions must pursue a legitimate objective through suitable, necessary and appropriately balanced measures.
- **Democratic Dissent:** Peaceful disagreement with public authorities is protected by constitutional freedoms, although protest methods remain subject to lawful restrictions.

Mains Examination Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** Fundamental rights, judicial review, preventive detention, Centre–State relations, police powers and constitutional governance.
- **GS Paper III:** Internal security, public-order management, policing and institutional capacity.
- **GS Paper IV:** Accountability, restraint in the exercise of power, public-service ethics and protection of individual dignity.
- **Analytical framework:** Evaluate preventive action through **legality, necessity, proportionality, procedural fairness and accountability**.
- **Concluding argument: Public order and civil liberty are mutually reinforcing constitutional objectives.** Effective policing must prevent genuine threats without criminalising peaceful dissent, normalising exceptional powers or imposing unjustified restrictions on the wider public.

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Delhi Police De-Notifies Jantar Mantar as Protest Site, Reviving Constitutional Debate Over Peaceful Assembly and Public Order

Recent Developments:

- On **12 October 2026**, the **Delhi Police de-notified Jantar Mantar** as an officially designated protest venue following recommendations from a committee constituted by the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
- Three alternative venues were identified for public demonstrations:
  - **Ramlila Ground**, Central Delhi; **Burari Ground**, North Delhi; and **Central Business District (CBD) Ground**, Shahdara, East Delhi.
- The decision followed the **Supreme Court's 9 October 2026 directions**, which recorded the need to identify suitable alternative locations for protests.
- On **13 October 2026**, Additional Solicitor General **Chetan Sharma** informed the Delhi High Court about the de-notification during proceedings before **Justice Amit Mahajan**.
  - The proceedings concerned a petition filed by **Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib**, challenging the earlier denial of permission to demonstrate at Jantar Mantar.
- The development has renewed debate over **freedom of peaceful assembly, accessibility of protest venues, public order and the proportionality of administrative restrictions**.

Constitutional Framework of the Right to Protest: GS Paper II

Fundamental Rights and Reasonable Restrictions:

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Guarantees citizens the **freedom of speech and expression**, including peaceful criticism of government policies and public authorities.
- **Article 19(1)(b):** Guarantees the right to **assemble peaceably and without arms**, forming the principal constitutional foundation of peaceful public demonstrations.

- **Article 19(2):** Permits reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech and expression on constitutionally specified grounds, including **public order, sovereignty and integrity of India**.
- **Article 19(3):** Permits reasonable restrictions on peaceful assembly in the interests of **public order and the sovereignty and integrity of India**.
- **Article 19(1)(d):** Protects citizens' freedom of movement throughout India, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(5).
- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty, including recognised interests in dignity, safety and a healthy environment.
- The Constitution protects **peaceful protest**, but does not establish an unrestricted entitlement to occupy any particular public road, monument precinct or government-sensitive location indefinitely.

Constitutional Principles Governing Restrictions:

- **Legality:** Restrictions must be authorised by valid law and imposed by a competent authority.
- **Legitimate objective:** Measures must address constitutionally permissible concerns, particularly public order and safety.
- **Necessity and proportionality:** Restrictions should not exceed what is reasonably required to address a demonstrable risk.
- **Non-arbitrariness:** Similar applications should receive consistent treatment, without discrimination based on political viewpoint.
- **Effective access:** Alternative protest venues should allow meaningful participation, public visibility and reasonable accessibility while protecting other citizens' rights.

Regulation of Protest Sites in Delhi:

Administrative and Constitutional Jurisdiction:

- **Article 239AA**, introduced through the **69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991**, provides Delhi with a special constitutional arrangement involving an elected Legislative Assembly and a Lieutenant Governor.
- Under **Article 239AA(3)(a)**, the Delhi Legislative Assembly cannot legislate on **State List Entries 1, 2 and 18**, covering **Public Order, Police and Land**, along with specified related entries.
- Consequently, the **Delhi Police operates under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs**, unlike police forces ordinarily controlled by State Governments.
- The police administration regulates demonstrations through applicable laws, standing orders, permissions, traffic arrangements and public-safety requirements.
- **Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023**, replacing Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, empowers competent Executive Magistrates to issue urgent preventive orders under prescribed conditions.
    - Such powers are **preventive and exceptional**, not an unrestricted mechanism for permanently excluding peaceful demonstrations from all accessible public spaces.

Implications of the New Protest Venues:

- **Ramlila Ground:** A historically important venue for large public gatherings, offering substantial capacity and relatively central access.
- **Burari Ground:** A North Delhi location capable of accommodating large assemblies, but considerably farther from Parliament and central government institutions.
- **CBD Ground, Shahdara:** An East Delhi alternative providing geographical dispersal of protest activity, although its distance from the principal institutions of national governance raises accessibility concerns.
- **Administrative rationale:** Alternative venues may reduce congestion, improve crowd management, protect residents and facilitate emergency services.

- **Democratic concern:** Relocating protests far from the institutions being addressed may reduce their visibility, symbolic impact and practical accessibility.
- The key constitutional question is whether **reasonable regulation** is being achieved without imposing a **disproportionate burden on peaceful political expression**.

Landmark Supreme Court Judgments on Protest Sites:

Judicial Evolution of the Right to Peaceful Assembly:

- **Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police (1973):**
  - Recognised that citizens' constitutional freedoms extend to peaceful meetings in public places, subject to lawful regulation.
  - Held that the State may regulate public assemblies but cannot confer uncontrolled discretionary powers that effectively extinguish the right.
- **In Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012):**
  - Examined police action against a public gathering and emphasised constitutional protections against arbitrary interference.
  - Highlighted the importance of **necessity, restraint and proportionate use of force**.
- **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018):**
  - Considered restrictions on demonstrations at **Jantar Mantar Road and the Boat Club area**, including the National Green Tribunal's prohibition.
  - Rejected the approach of completely extinguishing one group's rights to protect another group's rights.
  - Directed authorities to formulate appropriate regulations balancing **peaceful protest, residential tranquillity and public convenience**.
  - The judgment supported regulated demonstrations rather than an unconditional prohibition, making it particularly relevant to the 2026 de-notification.
- **Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020):**
  - Arising from the **Shaheen Bagh protests**, the Court held that public roads and spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely in ways that obstruct public movement.
  - Reaffirmed that peaceful protest must coexist with the rights of commuters and other citizens.

Judicial Test for Administrative Restrictions:

- A restriction should be assessed through **legal authority, the seriousness of the public-order concern, availability of less restrictive alternatives and its effect on constitutional freedoms**.
- The **2018 Jantar Mantar judgment** did not create an absolute constitutional right to protest at that particular location forever.
- Equally, the identification of alternative venues does not automatically establish that every prohibition at Jantar Mantar is constitutionally proportionate.
- The legality of the **2026 de-notification** depends on the governing orders, their factual justification and their consistency with constitutional standards and applicable judicial directions.

Jantar Mantar: Historical and Cultural Significance — GS Paper I

Origin and Astronomical Importance:

- **Jantar Mantar, New Delhi**, is an eighteenth-century astronomical observatory constructed around **1724** under **Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II of Jaipur**.
- It was part of a network of five observatories established at **Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura** to improve astronomical observation and calculations.

- The name is commonly associated with **Yantra**, referring to an instrument, and **Mantra**, associated in this context with calculation or a formula.
- The Delhi complex contains monumental astronomical structures designed for observations without telescopes.
- Its important instruments include:
    - **Samrat Yantra:** A monumental sundial used to determine local solar time through the movement of shadows.
    - **Misra Yantra:** A composite astronomical instrument associated with observations and calculations involving seasonal solar positions.
    - **Jaya Prakash Yantra:** A hemispherical instrument used to determine celestial positions.
    - **Ram Yantra:** A cylindrical instrument used to measure the **altitude and azimuth** of celestial bodies.
- The Delhi observatory is protected as a **Monument of National Importance** under the framework administered by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**.

Delhi and Jaipur Jantar Mantar: Important Distinction:

- **Delhi Jantar Mantar:** Built around 1724 and historically associated with political demonstrations in the national capital.
- **Jaipur Jantar Mantar:** A separate observatory, inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010** under criteria **(iii) and (iv)**.
- UNESCO recognises the Jaipur observatory for its exceptional collection of monumental astronomical instruments and its importance in the history of observational astronomy.
- The **UNESCO World Heritage designation belongs to Jaipur Jantar Mantar, not Delhi Jantar Mantar**, an important distinction for preliminary examinations.

Historical Evolution of Jantar Mantar as a Protest Venue:

From Boat Club to Jantar Mantar:

- **Before 1993:** The **Boat Club lawns near India Gate** were a prominent venue for mass political rallies, labour mobilisations and farmers' demonstrations.
    - The **1988 farmers' mobilisation led by Mahendra Singh Tikait** illustrated the scale of agrarian protests organised in central Delhi.
- **1993:** Restrictions on demonstrations near the Boat Club were introduced amid concerns involving security, traffic congestion and the functioning of central government institutions.
- **Mid-1990s onward: Jantar Mantar Road** emerged as a principal designated location for demonstrations because of its relative proximity to Parliament and central ministries.
- Over time, the area became a nationally recognised space for expressing grievances concerning governance, social justice, corruption, education and public policy.

Major Protest Movements:

- **2011 Anti-Corruption Movement:** Demonstrations associated with **Anna Hazare** and demands for a stronger Lokpal framework increased Jantar Mantar's national prominence.
- **2012 Women's Safety Protests:** Public mobilisation following the Delhi gang-rape case contributed to wider demands for criminal-law reform and institutional accountability.
- **2019 Citizenship-Related Protests:** Demonstrations concerning citizenship legislation and constitutional rights reflected the site's continuing political importance.
- **2023 Wrestlers' Protest:** Prominent wrestlers used the location to raise allegations of sexual harassment and demand institutional accountability.

- **Student and Examination-Related Demonstrations:** Various student organisations have used the area to raise concerns about recruitment, examinations and educational administration.

Environmental Restrictions and Judicial Intervention:

- **2017:** The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** prohibited demonstrations at Jantar Mantar Road, citing noise pollution, sanitation problems and the adverse impact on residents.
- **2018:** The Supreme Court, in the **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan case**, favoured balanced regulation over an absolute prohibition.
    - The Court acknowledged that demonstrators and residents possessed legitimate interests requiring protection.
    - It directed the formulation of appropriate guidelines for peaceful demonstrations in the affected central Delhi areas.
- **2026:** The Delhi Police's fresh de-notification marks another significant change in the regulation of public demonstrations at this historically prominent location.

Evolution of Protest Methods in India: GS Paper I and II

Colonial Period: Satyagraha and Mass Mobilisation:

- **Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha** emphasised truth, non-violence, moral persuasion and disciplined resistance against unjust authority.
- Major methods included **non-cooperation, civil disobedience, Swadeshi boycotts, marches and peaceful refusal to comply with unjust laws**.
- The **Salt March of 1930** demonstrated how a specific economic grievance could become a nationwide political movement.

Post-Independence Period: Mass Political Movements:

- During the **1950s–1980s**, protests frequently involved trade unions, farmers' organisations, student groups and political parties.
- Common methods included **strikes, demonstrations, gheraos, road blockades and large public rallies**.
- The **1974 Jayaprakash Narayan Movement**, associated with **Sampoorna Kranti**, became an important example of mass mobilisation against perceived failures of governance.
- Centralised protest venues, including the **Boat Club**, provided high public visibility and direct political pressure.

Civil Society and Issue-Based Activism:

- From the **1990s to the 2010s**, public mobilisation increasingly focused on corruption, transparency, environmental protection, gender justice and governance reforms.
- **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)** enabled organisations and citizens to seek judicial intervention in matters of wider public concern.
- **Public hearings, social audits and grassroots transparency campaigns** contributed to the movement for the **Right to Information Act, 2005**.
- **Candlelight marches, hunger strikes and televised demonstrations** expanded participation beyond conventional political organisations.

Contemporary Digital and Decentralised Protests:

- Modern movements increasingly combine physical demonstrations with **social media campaigns, online petitions, digital coordination and decentralised leadership**.
- The **Shaheen Bagh protests of 2019–20** demonstrated the role of prolonged sit-ins in public spaces.
- The **farmers' protests of 2020–21** illustrated sustained mobilisation at the borders of the national capital.
- Digital platforms can accelerate awareness and coordination, but also create challenges involving **misinformation, surveillance, polarisation and crowd management**.

Democratic Significance and Governance Challenges:

- **Political accountability:** Peaceful demonstrations allow citizens to communicate grievances between electoral cycles.
- **Participatory democracy:** Protest complements elections, parliamentary debate, petitions and judicial remedies by enabling public engagement with governance.
- **Public visibility:** The location of a demonstration influences its ability to reach decision-makers, journalists and wider society.
- **Competing rights:** Residents, commuters, traders and emergency-service users possess legitimate interests that must be considered alongside protesters' freedoms.
- **Administrative discretion:** Unclear permission standards can produce inconsistent decisions, selective enforcement and allegations of political discrimination.
- **Urban governance:** Large gatherings require planning for sanitation, emergency access, transport, noise management and heritage conservation.
- Effective regulation must therefore distinguish **legitimate public-order management** from measures that unnecessarily diminish the practical exercise of constitutional freedoms.

Reform Priorities and Way Forward:

- **Transparent permission framework:** Publish objective criteria, application procedures, permissible restrictions and reasons for refusal.
- **Accessible demonstration venues:** Assess alternative sites through transport connectivity, public visibility, capacity, safety and proximity to relevant institutions.
- **Proportionate regulation:** Prefer reasonable conditions on timing, crowd size, sound levels and traffic arrangements over blanket prohibitions wherever feasible.
- **Equal treatment:** Apply permission requirements consistently, irrespective of political affiliation or the viewpoint expressed.
- **Institutional coordination:** Strengthen cooperation among the **Delhi Police, civic agencies, transport authorities and emergency services**.
- **Judicial accountability:** Preserve effective legal remedies against arbitrary refusal of permission and disproportionate restrictions.
- **Heritage and environmental protection:** Safeguard protected monuments and residential areas through site-specific regulation rather than assuming that every demonstration requires total exclusion.
- **Public consultation:** Involve residents, civil society organisations and protest organisers when framing durable guidelines for designated demonstration spaces.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Constitutional and Conceptual Linkages:

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression.
- **Article 19(1)(b):** Freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms.

- **Article 19(3):** Reasonable restrictions on assembly in the interests of public order and India's sovereignty and integrity.
- **Article 239AA:** Delhi's special constitutional framework, including Union authority over public order, police and land.
- **Doctrine of Proportionality:** Government action restricting fundamental rights must pursue a legitimate objective through suitable, necessary and appropriately balanced measures.
- **Spatial Dimension of Democracy:** The accessibility, location and visibility of protest spaces influence the effectiveness of public participation.
- **Right to Protest vs Right to Occupy Public Space:** Peaceful assembly is constitutionally protected, but indefinite occupation of public roads is not an unrestricted fundamental right.

Preliminary Examination Facts:

- **Delhi Jantar Mantar:** Built around **1724** by **Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II**.
- **Five Historic Observatories:** Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura.
- **UNESCO Recognition: Jaipur Jantar Mantar**, inscribed in **2010**, not the Delhi observatory.
- **2017:** National Green Tribunal imposed restrictions on demonstrations at Jantar Mantar.
- **2018:** Supreme Court emphasised regulated protests and the balancing of competing rights.
- **2026:** Delhi Police de-notified Jantar Mantar and identified **Ramlila Ground, Burari Ground and CBD Ground** as alternative protest venues.

Mains Examination Application:

- **GS Paper I:** Cultural heritage, astronomical observatories, social movements and the historical evolution of public protest.
- **GS Paper II:** Fundamental rights, judicial review, constitutional governance, police powers and democratic participation.
- **GS Paper III:** Internal security, crowd management and urban public infrastructure.
- **GS Paper IV:** Administrative impartiality, accountability, public-service ethics and responsible exercise of discretionary powers.
- **Analytical framework:** Evaluate protest-site regulation through **legality, accessibility, proportionality, equality, public safety and effective judicial remedies**.
- **Concluding argument: Peaceful protest and public order are complementary requirements of constitutional democracy.** A legitimate regulatory framework must protect residents and public infrastructure while ensuring that the right to dissent remains meaningful, accessible and capable of influencing democratic decision-making.

Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences 2026 Recognises Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford for Advancing Macroeconomic Stabilisation

Recent Developments:

- On **12 October 2026**, the **Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences** awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2026 to **Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford** for their contributions to the **microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation**.

- The laureates developed macroeconomic models that explain how decisions made by individual households and firms influence broader economic outcomes, improving the theoretical basis for governments and central banks to respond to recessions, inflation and other economic shocks.
- The prize carries **12 million Swedish kronor**, to be shared equally between the two recipients. Established by Sweden's central bank, the award was first presented in 1969 and is distinct from the original Nobel Prizes.

Understanding Macroeconomic Stabilisation:

- **Macroeconomic stabilisation** refers to fiscal and monetary measures used by governments and central banks to reduce excessive fluctuations in **economic growth, output, inflation and employment**.
- Its objective is to maintain a relatively stable economic environment in which households can consume, firms can invest and produce, and inflation remains consistent with the economy's broader policy objectives.
- **During an economic slowdown**, lower policy interest rates, targeted tax relief and higher productive public expenditure may stimulate demand, investment and employment, subject to prevailing economic conditions.
- **During inflationary overheating**, higher interest rates and appropriately calibrated fiscal restraint can moderate excessive demand and help contain inflation, although their effectiveness depends on whether inflation originates from demand pressures or supply shocks.

Microeconomic Foundations of Macroeconomic Stabilisation:

- **Microeconomic foundations** involve explaining economy-wide outcomes through the decisions and constraints of individual economic agents, particularly households and firms, rather than relying exclusively on statistical relationships between aggregate variables.
- Traditional macroeconomic indicators, such as inflation, consumption, output and unemployment, describe overall economic performance but do not fully explain why people change their spending or why firms adjust prices after a policy announcement.
- Micro-founded models incorporate factors such as **income constraints, consumption choices, price-setting behaviour and expectations** to explain how policy decisions influence aggregate demand and economic fluctuations.
- These models improve policy analysis by examining how different households and businesses respond differently to the same economic shock or government intervention.

Key Contributions of the Laureates:

Robert E. Hall: Household Consumption and Economic Behaviour

- **Robert E. Hall**, an economist associated with Stanford University, made important contributions to understanding consumption, business cycles and the relationship between household decisions and aggregate economic activity.
- His research helped explain how households make consumption decisions in response to current resources and expectations about future income. The distinction between households is important because not everyone can borrow or save easily to smooth consumption over time.
- **Hand-to-mouth households** have limited liquid savings and therefore depend heavily on current disposable income to meet consumption needs. A change in wages, taxes or transfers can consequently produce a relatively immediate change in their spending.
- This insight helps policymakers assess why targeted transfers or tax relief may support demand more effectively when directed towards households with high propensities to consume.

Michael Woodford: Monetary Policy, Price-Setting and Expectations

- **Michael Woodford**, a professor at Columbia University, significantly advanced modern monetary economics by explaining how monetary-policy decisions influence economic activity through interest rates, expectations and firms' price-setting behaviour.
- His work demonstrated that firms' pricing decisions depend not only on current costs and demand but also on expectations about future economic conditions and monetary policy. When prices adjust slowly, current policy decisions can influence output and inflation over time.
- **Credible monetary policy** affects expectations about future interest rates and inflation, influencing present borrowing, consumption, investment and pricing decisions.
- **Forward guidance**, or communication by a central bank about the likely future direction of monetary policy, can influence current economic decisions even before the policy rate changes. Its effectiveness depends on the credibility and clarity of the central bank's commitments.

Evolution of Stabilisation Theory:

- **Keynesian approach:** Following the **Great Depression of the 1930s**, John Maynard Keynes emphasised government intervention to address deficient aggregate demand and support output and employment, particularly during economic downturns.
- **Stagflation and policy challenges:** The 1970s witnessed **stagflation**, characterised by high inflation alongside weak economic activity and elevated unemployment. Oil-price shocks exposed the limitations of relying exclusively on conventional demand-management prescriptions.
- **Development of micro-founded models:** Subsequent macroeconomic research increasingly incorporated individual decisions, expectations and market rigidities into aggregate analysis. Hall's work on consumption and Woodford's research on monetary policy helped strengthen the theoretical foundations of modern stabilisation frameworks.
- **Contemporary application:** Modern central banks and governments use macroeconomic models to assess policy transmission, anticipate economic responses and evaluate alternative measures during recessions, inflationary episodes and other disruptions.

Significance for Economic Policy:

- **Evidence-based policymaking:** Micro-founded models connect aggregate economic outcomes with the decisions of households and firms, enabling policymakers to analyse the mechanisms through which policy interventions operate.
- **Expectations management:** Credible policy announcements can influence current spending, saving, investment and price-setting decisions because economic agents consider future conditions when making choices.
- **Improved policy transmission:** Understanding household constraints and firms' pricing behaviour helps policymakers estimate how interest-rate changes, taxes and public expenditure may affect consumption, output and inflation.
- **Better responses to economic shocks:** Models incorporating expectations and behavioural differences can help distinguish between demand-driven inflation and supply-side disruptions, supporting more appropriate policy responses.
- **Limitations:** Economic models depend on assumptions, data quality and uncertain forecasts. Policymakers must therefore combine model-based analysis with empirical evidence, judgement and continuous reassessment.

Relevance for India:

- **Inflation management:** The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** can benefit from analysing inflation expectations, household consumption patterns and firms' pricing behaviour while framing monetary policy. Supply-side shocks, particularly those affecting food and energy prices, require additional attention because interest-rate changes cannot directly increase supply.
- **Demand revival:** During an economic slowdown, targeted transfers, tax measures and productive public expenditure can support consumption and investment. The impact depends on beneficiaries' spending behaviour, fiscal space and the condition of the broader economy.
- **Monetary-policy communication:** Clear and credible RBI communication can shape expectations about inflation and future interest rates, influencing household borrowing and saving decisions as well as firms' investment plans.
- **Inclusive policymaking:** Household-level data can help distinguish between consumption responses among low-income households with limited savings and wealthier households with greater capacity to smooth expenditure. This improves the design and assessment of welfare transfers.
- **Policy coordination:** Monetary and fiscal authorities need to consider the interaction between interest rates, public spending, taxation and private-sector expectations. Consistent policy signals can improve effectiveness, while conflicting signals may weaken confidence and complicate stabilisation.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **GS Paper III — Indian Economy:** Link the award to macroeconomic stability, inflation targeting, fiscal policy, business cycles and monetary-policy transmission.
- **Key terms:** *Microeconomic foundations, macroeconomic stabilisation, hand-to-mouth households, price stickiness, inflation expectations, forward guidance,* and *policy transmission*.
- **Prelims fact:** The 2026 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel was awarded to **Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford** for their work on the microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation.
- **Mains analytical point:** Effective stabilisation requires more than adjusting interest rates or government expenditure; it also requires understanding how households and firms respond to policy, current constraints and expectations about the future.
- **Critical perspective:** Model-based policymaking must account for distributional differences, supply-side constraints, uncertainty and the limits of forecasting to avoid uniform policy responses producing unequal or unintended effects.

Best Institute for OAS/IAS

Super El Niño Threatens India's Winter and Summer of 2027 Amid a Deficient Monsoon and Rising Climate Risks

Recent Developments:

- In October 2026, the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** and the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** reported that El Niño was intensifying and could become one of the strongest events recorded since 1950. Forecasts indicate exceptionally warm sea-surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific, although the eventual peak and regional impacts remain uncertain.
- India's 2026 southwest monsoon rainfall was reported to be approximately **13% below normal**, increasing concerns about soil moisture, reservoir storage, rabi crop prospects and water availability. The combined

influence of deficient rainfall and a potentially very strong El Niño could heighten climate risks during the winter of 2026–27 and summer of 2027.

- These developments are **probabilistic forecasts, not guaranteed outcomes**. Indian rainfall also depends on the Indian Ocean Dipole, intra-seasonal atmospheric variability, regional weather systems and local ocean conditions.

Understanding El Niño and Super El Niño:

Definition, Threshold and Mechanism:

- **El Niño** is the warm phase of the **El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**, a recurring coupled ocean–atmosphere phenomenon in the tropical Pacific. ENSO alternates between El Niño, neutral conditions and **La Niña**, the cool phase, and typically recurs every **2–7 years**.
- **Identification:** NOAA uses the **Oceanic Niño Index (ONI)** to monitor sea-surface temperature anomalies in the Niño 3.4 region. An anomaly of at least **+0.5°C**, sustained over five consecutive overlapping three-month periods alongside consistent atmospheric changes, is the conventional criterion for an El Niño episode.
- **Formation mechanism:** Under normal conditions, easterly trade winds push warm surface water towards the western Pacific, supporting rising air and rainfall near Indonesia. During El Niño, these winds weaken, warm water spreads eastward, and the main zone of tropical convection shifts towards the central or eastern Pacific. This changes atmospheric circulation and influences rainfall and temperature patterns across the world.
- **Super El Niño:** This is an **informal, non-official classification** commonly used for an exceptionally strong event, often associated with Niño 3.4 temperature anomalies reaching approximately **+2.0°C or more**. The label does not itself determine the severity of drought, flooding or heat in any particular country.

Historical Context and Implications for India:

- **Great Drought and Famine of 1876–78:** Severe drought affected large parts of India and contributed to the Great Famine, including the Madras famine. The crisis was associated with prolonged rainfall failure and was compounded by socioeconomic vulnerability and colonial-era policies; it should not be attributed to El Niño alone.
- **The 1997–98 El Niño:** Despite the exceptionally strong Pacific warming, India's southwest monsoon did not experience a drought of the severity that a simple El Niño–rainfall relationship might suggest. The episode illustrates how other oceanic and atmospheric conditions, including the **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)**, can modify the monsoon response.
- **The 2015–16 El Niño:** India experienced deficient southwest monsoon rainfall in consecutive years, while Tamil Nadu suffered severe flooding during the northeast monsoon in late 2015. This demonstrates that El Niño can influence different regions and seasons differently rather than producing uniform dryness across India.

Factors Influencing El Niño's Impact on India:

Walker Circulation and the Indian Monsoon:

- **Walker circulation** is an east–west atmospheric circulation pattern over the tropical Pacific, involving rising air in regions of convection and descending air elsewhere. During El Niño, the zone of rising air and rainfall shifts eastward, altering pressure patterns and tropical circulation.
- These changes can weaken conditions that normally support the **southwest monsoon**, increasing the probability of deficient rainfall over India. However, the strength of this relationship varies across events and regions.

Indian Ocean Dipole:

- The **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)** is a pattern of sea-surface temperature differences between the western and eastern tropical Indian Ocean. Its positive and negative phases influence atmospheric circulation and rainfall distribution.
- A **positive IOD** can sometimes support Indian monsoon rainfall and partly offset an El Niño-related deficit, whereas a **negative IOD** can worsen unfavourable rainfall conditions. Neither phase guarantees a particular monsoon outcome.

Location of Pacific Warming and the Madden–Julian Oscillation:

- **Canonical El Niño** involves substantial warming in the eastern and central equatorial Pacific, while **El Niño Modoki** is characterised by relatively greater warming in the central Pacific, with cooler waters towards the eastern and western ends. These patterns can produce different atmospheric responses, so their impacts on Indian rainfall and cyclone activity are not identical.
- The **Madden–Julian Oscillation (MJO)** is an eastward-moving pattern of tropical clouds, rainfall and winds that typically travels around the equator over **30–60 days**. Its active phase can temporarily enhance rainfall over the Indian Ocean and parts of India, even when the broader ENSO background is unfavourable.

Why Tamil Nadu Can Experience El Niño Differently:

- **Dependence on the northeast monsoon:** Unlike much of India, which receives its principal rainfall from the June–September southwest monsoon, Tamil Nadu receives a substantial share of its annual rainfall during the **October–December northeast monsoon**. This makes its rainfall response to El Niño different from the response of many other Indian states.
- **Pacific–Indian Ocean connections:** Research has found that El Niño can be associated with enhanced northeast monsoon rainfall over Tamil Nadu, although the strength and direction of the relationship vary. The outcome depends on the wider atmospheric circulation, moisture availability and regional weather systems.
- **Bay of Bengal conditions:** Warm sea-surface temperatures can increase the moisture available to low-pressure systems and depressions. If atmospheric conditions are favourable, these systems can produce intense rainfall or cyclones along the Tamil Nadu coast. Warm water alone, however, is insufficient to guarantee cyclone formation or extreme rainfall.
- **East India Coastal Current:** The **East India Coastal Current (EICC)** changes direction seasonally along India's eastern coastline. These circulation changes affect the transport of water and heat, but their specific influence on an individual northeast monsoon season depends on the broader ocean–atmosphere conditions. Claims of an exceptional current reversal in 2026 require independent verification before being treated as established fact.

Potential Consequences for India in 2026–27:

- **Agriculture and food security:** Deficient monsoon rainfall can reduce soil moisture and reservoir storage before rabi sowing. Higher winter or summer temperatures could increase irrigation demand, crop-water stress and the risk of lower yields, particularly where groundwater availability is limited.
- **Water security:** Reduced rainfall and increased evaporation can intensify pressure on reservoirs, groundwater and urban water supplies. Water-intensive crops and inefficient irrigation can amplify these vulnerabilities.
- **Power demand and infrastructure:** Higher temperatures can increase cooling demand and electricity consumption, while water shortages may affect hydropower generation and water-dependent power plants. Heat can also strain transmission infrastructure.

- **Public health:** Elevated temperatures increase the risk of heat exhaustion, heatstroke and dehydration, particularly among outdoor workers, older people and those with limited access to cooling. Drought, water scarcity and subsequent heavy rainfall can create additional sanitation and disease-management challenges.
- **Regional extremes:** El Niño can increase drought risk in some areas while favourable local oceanic and atmospheric conditions generate heavy rainfall elsewhere. Disaster preparedness must therefore account for both water scarcity and flood risk rather than assuming uniform dry conditions.

Policy Priorities and Risk Reduction:

- **Climate-informed agriculture:** Improve seasonal advisories, promote drought-tolerant crop varieties, adjust sowing decisions to soil moisture and strengthen crop insurance and contingency planning.
- **Integrated water management:** Expand rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed restoration, micro-irrigation and the reuse of treated wastewater, while monitoring reservoir storage and groundwater extraction.
- **Heat and disaster preparedness:** Strengthen heat-action plans, early-warning systems, public cooling facilities and occupational safety measures. Coastal districts should maintain cyclone shelters, evacuation plans and flood-response capacity.
- **Reliable forecasting:** Combine IMD seasonal outlooks with NOAA and WMO assessments, ENSO and IOD monitoring, reservoir data and district-level rainfall information. Update decisions as new observations become available rather than relying on a single long-range forecast.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **GS Paper I — Geography:** Link El Niño with ENSO, Walker circulation, ocean–atmosphere interactions, monsoon variability and regional differences in rainfall.
- **GS Paper III — Environment and Disaster Management:** Connect the phenomenon with agricultural vulnerability, water security, heatwaves, food inflation and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- **Prelims facts:** El Niño is the warm ENSO phase; La Niña is the cool phase; ONI monitors sea-surface temperature anomalies in the Niño 3.4 region; the IOD describes temperature differences across the tropical Indian Ocean.
- **Mains analytical argument:** El Niño is an important driver of Indian monsoon variability, but it is not a deterministic predictor. The IOD, MJO, regional circulation and local ocean conditions can alter the outcome.
- **Conclusion:** India's best response to a possible super El Niño is **anticipatory risk management**—improving climate forecasting, agricultural resilience, water conservation, heat preparedness and coordination between central and state agencies.

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QUESTIONS

1. In the context of electoral administration in India, consider the following terms:

(1) Booth Level Officer (BLO)

(2) Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)

(3) Booth Level Agent (BLA)

(4) Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO)

How many of the above functionaries exercise statutory quasi-judicial authority under the Representation of the People Act, 1950 to adjudicate claims and objections regarding voter entries?

(A) Only one

(B) Only two

(C) Only three

(D) All four

2. Consider the following constitutional and statutory provisions governing individual rights and state powers in India:

(1) Article 22(1) guarantees the right to be informed of grounds of arrest and to consult a legal practitioner for persons detained under preventive detention laws.

(2) Article 22(4) mandates that no law providing for preventive detention shall authorize detention for a period longer than three months unless an Advisory Board reports sufficient cause.

(3) Article 359 permits the suspension of the right to move any court for the enforcement of fundamental rights, including Articles 20 and 21, during a National Emergency.

(4) Entry 9 of the Union List empowers Parliament to enact laws for preventive detention for reasons connected with Defence, Foreign Affairs, or the Security of India.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(A) Only one

(B) Only two

(C) Only three

(D) All four

3. With reference to the special constitutional status of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi under Article 239AA, consider the following statements:

(1) Article 239AA was inserted into the Constitution of India via the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991.

(2) The Legislative Assembly of Delhi has full legislative competence over all entries in the State List except for Public Order and Police.

(3) Because Land, Police, and Public Order fall under the Union's constitutional authority in Delhi, the Delhi Police functions under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

(4) Executive Magistrates in Delhi derive their power to issue urgent prohibitory directions from Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 2 only

(C) 2, 3 and 4 only

(B) 1, 3 and 4 only

(D) 1, 2, 3 and 4

4. Given below are two statements, one labeled as Assertion (A) and the other as Reason (R):

Assertion (A): Direct cash transfers and tax relief measures during an economic downturn generate a larger and more immediate boost to aggregate demand when targeted at low-income "hand-to-mouth" households.

Reason (R): "Hand-to-mouth" households possess limited liquid financial assets and a high marginal propensity to consume out of current disposable income.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(A) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A

(B) Both A and R are true but R is NOT the correct explanation of A

(C) A is true but R is false

(D) A is false but R is true

5. In tropical meteorology and climate science, which one of the following best defines the term "Super El Niño"?

(A) A permanent alteration in global ocean currents caused by deep-sea thermal extraction.

(B) A rare phenomenon where La Niña and El Niño occur simultaneously in opposite hemispheres.

(C) A sudden collapse of the Indian Ocean Dipole triggered by arctic jet stream disruptions.

(D) An informal term for an exceptionally strong El Niño with Niño 3.4 anomalies +2.0°C.

ANSWER KEY

1 – Answer (B), 2 – Answer (B), 3 – Answer (C), 4 – Answer (A), 5 – Answer (D)

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