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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Marco Rubio Visits Jamnagar Refinery as India–US Energy Cooperation Gains Strategic Importance Amid Global Oil Supply Disruptions

Recent Developments:

- **US Secretary of State Marco Rubio** visited **Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)** at its **Jamnagar refinery complex in Gujarat** on 21 October 2026, highlighting India's growing importance in global petroleum refining and energy security.
- The visit followed discussions with **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** in Mumbai and occurred amid **India–US trade negotiations**, tensions over Russian crude imports, and disruptions to international petroleum supplies.
- Major areas of strategic interest include:
    - **Venezuelan crude oil:** Expanding India's refining of Venezuelan heavy crude and exploring opportunities for Reliance in Venezuela's upstream petroleum sector.
    - **American energy investment:** Examining Reliance's involvement in a proposed refinery project in **Brownsville, Texas**.
    - **Russian oil imports:** Balancing American sanctions policy with India's energy requirements and bilateral trade negotiations.
- The developments demonstrate the increasing connection between **energy diplomacy, geopolitical stability, industrial investment, and national economic security**.

Jamnagar Refinery: Background and Key Features:

Location, Capacity and Infrastructure:

- Located in **Jamnagar, Gujarat**, the Reliance complex is recognised as the **world's largest single-location petroleum refining complex**.
- Its two principal refineries were commissioned in **1999 and 2008**, with combined processing capacity commonly reported at approximately **1.4 million barrels per day (bpd)**.
- The complex processes imported crude oil into **diesel, petrol, aviation turbine fuel (ATF), naphtha, and other petroleum products** for domestic consumption and international markets.
- The export-oriented refinery operates within a **Special Economic Zone (SEZ)**, supporting large-scale international trade in refined petroleum products.

Technical and Commercial Significance:

- Jamnagar possesses advanced processing infrastructure capable of handling **heavy, high-sulphur and complex crude oil grades**, including varieties that require extensive treatment.
- Its refinery configuration includes sophisticated conversion and desulphurisation facilities that transform relatively low-value crude fractions into commercially valuable fuels.
- **Refinery complexity** allows operators to process diverse crude grades, adjust feedstock combinations, and respond to changing international price differentials.
- Large-scale refining and export infrastructure makes Jamnagar an important supplier to global petroleum product markets, particularly during regional supply disruptions.

Strategic Importance of Jamnagar for the United States:

- The United States considers India's refining infrastructure strategically significant because **refined fuel availability** can become constrained even when sufficient crude oil exists globally.
- Disruptions involving **West Asia, the Strait of Hormuz, and international shipping networks** can restrict crude supplies, increase freight costs, and create shortages of diesel and aviation fuel.
- Jamnagar's production and export capabilities can contribute to international fuel availability, although actual supply depends on crude access, operating conditions, and trade restrictions.
- Ahead of the **November 2026 US midterm elections**, domestic fuel affordability remains politically significant, encouraging Washington to pursue diversified petroleum supply arrangements.
- Cooperation with major Indian refiners can strengthen American energy diplomacy while expanding commercial opportunities for US crude producers and petroleum companies.

India–US Energy Cooperation and the Texas Refinery Project:

Proposed Brownsville Refinery:

- Reliance has been associated with a proposed refinery development in **Brownsville, Texas**, involving **America First Refining**.
- Reported project-related commercial estimates include:
  - Approximately **$300 billion** in projected long-term crude procurement and refined-product transactions.
  - Around **1.2 billion barrels** of American light shale crude, with an estimated commercial value of **$125 billion**.
  - Approximately **50 billion gallons** of refined petroleum products, with an estimated value of **$175 billion**.
- These figures represent reported commercial projections, **not a confirmed $300-billion capital investment or completed refinery output**.
- The proposed refinery could support **US energy infrastructure, domestic employment, shale oil processing, and bilateral investment**, subject to financing, regulatory approvals, and project execution.

Wider Bilateral Benefits:

- For India, cooperation offers **crude-source diversification, overseas investment opportunities, technological collaboration, and improved access to American energy markets**.
- For the United States, expanded energy exports to India could support American producers and contribute to reducing its bilateral merchandise trade deficit.
- Energy cooperation also complements the broader **India–US strategic partnership**, covering critical technologies, resilient supply chains, and industrial investment.

Russian Crude Oil and India–US Trade Frictions:

Background of Russian Oil Imports:

- Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in **February 2022**, Western restrictions and reduced purchases encouraged Russia to offer crude oil at discounted prices to alternative markets.
- India substantially increased Russian crude imports, and Russia emerged as one of its principal petroleum suppliers, surpassing several traditional West Asian suppliers.
- Russian crude purchases have helped Indian refiners diversify procurement and, when discounts are available, reduce feedstock costs.

Divergent Strategic Positions:

- **United States:** Washington has sought to restrict Russian energy revenues because petroleum exports contribute significantly to Russia's external earnings.
- **India:** New Delhi maintains that crude procurement must reflect **national energy security, affordability, market conditions, and applicable international obligations**.
- In October 2026, Washington's decision to waive the application of certain proposed penalties on Russian energy purchasers was linked by Rubio to ongoing **India–US trade negotiations**.
- Such developments illustrate how **sanctions policy, economic interests, and diplomatic bargaining** can interact during international energy crises.

Venezuelan Crude Oil and Refining Opportunities:

- **Venezuela** possesses exceptionally large proven petroleum reserves, with substantial deposits of **extra-heavy crude oil**, particularly in the **Orinoco Oil Belt**.
- Heavy Venezuelan crude generally requires advanced processing because of its high density, impurities, and relatively challenging refining characteristics.
- Jamnagar's sophisticated refinery infrastructure makes Reliance technically capable of processing several Venezuelan crude grades.
- Washington has encouraged increased Venezuelan crude processing by Reliance and explored possibilities for Indian participation in Venezuelan petroleum production.
- Potential benefits include **greater crude-source diversification, increased refining flexibility, and additional commercial opportunities**.
- However, commercial viability depends on **sanctions arrangements, shipping infrastructure, crude pricing, investment security, and Venezuelan production capacity**.

India's Petroleum Sector and Energy Security:

Import Dependence and Refining Strength:

- India is among the world's largest petroleum consumers and remains heavily dependent on imported crude because domestic production is insufficient to meet demand.
- According to **Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC)** data, India's crude oil import dependence reached approximately **88.7% in FY 2025–26**, compared with **88.3% in FY 2024–25**.
- India's installed petroleum refining capacity was approximately **258 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA)** in FY 2024–25.
- Despite substantial crude import dependence, India has developed significant **refining and petroleum-product export capabilities**, demonstrating that crude production and refining strength are distinct dimensions of energy security.

Economic Implications:

- Rising international crude prices increase India's **import bill**, potentially widening the current account deficit and creating depreciation pressure on the rupee.
- Higher petroleum prices can increase **transportation, logistics, fertiliser, and manufacturing costs**, contributing to inflationary pressures.
- Conversely, efficient refineries and petroleum-product exports generate **foreign exchange earnings, industrial employment, and value addition**.

Geopolitical Significance and Strategic Autonomy:

- **Strategic autonomy** enables India to maintain energy relationships with multiple countries according to national interests without exclusive dependence on a single geopolitical bloc.
- India's petroleum partnerships with **Russia, the United States, West Asian producers, and Venezuela** demonstrate its diversified approach to external energy engagement.
- The **Strait of Hormuz**, connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, remains a strategically important passage for global petroleum shipments.
- Geopolitical instability around major maritime chokepoints highlights the importance of **alternative suppliers, secure sea lanes, strategic reserves, and domestic refining capacity**.
- Private-sector companies such as Reliance increasingly influence **economic diplomacy and international supply-chain resilience**, although commercial interests and government foreign policy remain institutionally distinct.

Challenges and Policy Priorities for India:

- **Supply vulnerability:** High crude import dependence exposes India to external price shocks, geopolitical disruptions, and shipping uncertainties.
- **Supplier diversification:** Expanding procurement across geographically dispersed producers can reduce excessive dependence on individual countries or transport corridors.
- **Strategic petroleum reserves:** Maintaining emergency crude inventories strengthens India's capacity to manage temporary supply interruptions.
- **Domestic exploration:** Improved geological assessment, investment incentives, and technological capabilities can support indigenous hydrocarbon production.
- **Energy transition:** Expanding renewable electricity, electric mobility, biofuels, and energy efficiency can gradually moderate petroleum demand growth.
- **Diplomatic balancing:** India must safeguard affordable energy supplies while managing sanctions exposure, trade negotiations, and relationships with competing international partners.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Concepts and Institutions:

- **GS Paper II:** India–US relations, strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, international sanctions, and geopolitical developments.
- **GS Paper III:** Energy security, petroleum refining, external-sector vulnerability, infrastructure, and industrial development.
- **PPAC:** The **Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell**, under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, compiles and analyses petroleum-sector statistics.
- **SEZ:** A **Special Economic Zone** is a designated area operating under a specialised regulatory and incentive framework to encourage investment and exports.
- **OPEC:** The **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries** coordinates petroleum policies among its member countries.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves:** Emergency crude inventories designed to improve resilience against serious supply disruptions.
- **Upstream, Midstream and Downstream:** Petroleum exploration and production, transportation and storage, and refining and marketing, respectively.

Mains Examination Perspective:

- **Core analytical argument:** India's advanced refining capacity strengthens its international energy influence, but high crude import dependence continues to create significant economic and strategic vulnerabilities.
- **Suggested question:** *Examine how India's petroleum refining capabilities contribute to its energy security and strategic autonomy amid evolving geopolitical tensions.*

Global Carbon Market Coalition Adopts First Work Plan as India Strengthens Domestic Carbon Trading and Climate Governance

Recent Developments:

- The **Open Coalition on Compliance Carbon Markets (OCCCM)** adopted its first work plan and approved its institutional arrangements at its second high-level meeting in **Wuhan, China, on 14 September 2026**.
- Established in **May 2026**, the coalition seeks to improve international cooperation, technical compatibility, and environmental integrity across national compliance carbon markets.
- Meanwhile, India's **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)** has entered its implementation phase, with **490 obligated industrial entities** notified under greenhouse gas emission-intensity targets.
- These developments have generated debate over whether India should join the OCCCM to influence **international carbon accounting standards, carbon pricing cooperation, and trade-related climate regulations**.

Open Coalition on Compliance Carbon Markets (OCCCM):

Establishment and Membership:

- **Nature:** The OCCCM is a voluntary international cooperation platform promoting coordination among countries operating or developing mandatory carbon pricing mechanisms.
- **Launch:** It was formally established on **7 May 2026 in Florence, Italy**, following an initiative advanced during **COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025**.
- **Leadership: Brazil** serves as Chair for the initial two-year period, while **China and the European Union** serve as Co-Chairs.
- **Members:** Participating countries include Germany, New Zealand, Canada, France, Norway, Singapore, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom.
- **Observers:** International organisations and initiatives associated with the coalition include the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, and the **World Bank's Partnership for Market Implementation**.

Objectives and Major Functions:

- **Carbon Market Interoperability:** Improve technical compatibility between national carbon markets without requiring countries to adopt identical pricing systems.
- **Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV):** Encourage credible and comparable systems for measuring emissions, reporting industrial performance, and independently verifying results.
- **Carbon Accounting:** Develop greater consistency in emissions calculation methodologies, reporting boundaries, and carbon credit assessment.

- **High-Integrity Carbon Credits:** Explore safeguards for the potential international use of carbon offsets while preventing double counting and exaggerated emission-reduction claims.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate exchanges on **Emissions Trading Systems (ETS), carbon taxes, market design, and regulatory implementation**.
- **Non-Binding Character:** The coalition does not independently impose emission-reduction targets, uniform carbon prices, or mandatory domestic climate policies on participating countries.

Understanding Carbon Markets and Carbon Pricing:

Major Carbon Pricing Mechanisms:

- **Carbon Tax:** Governments impose a specified price on greenhouse gas emissions, providing price certainty while leaving the resulting emission reductions dependent on behavioural responses.
- **Cap-and-Trade System:** Regulators establish an overall emissions ceiling and distribute or auction allowances that regulated entities can trade.
- **Baseline-and-Credit System:** Entities receive tradable credits when verified performance exceeds an established emissions-reduction benchmark.
- **Voluntary Carbon Market:** Organisations voluntarily purchase eligible carbon credits to support mitigation activities or meet specified climate commitments.

Economic Rationale:

- Carbon pricing applies the **Polluter Pays Principle** by incorporating part of the environmental cost of emissions into economic decisions.
- Tradable mechanisms encourage emission reductions where **marginal abatement costs** are relatively low, potentially reducing the overall cost of climate mitigation.
- However, effective carbon markets require credible baselines, reliable verification, adequate market liquidity, and safeguards against manipulation.

India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS):

Legislative and Institutional Framework:

- **Legal Foundation:** The **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022** empowered the Central Government to establish a carbon credit trading framework under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- **Notification:** The **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023** provides the regulatory foundation for the **Indian Carbon Market (ICM)**.
- **National Steering Committee for Indian Carbon Market:** It provides strategic oversight and recommends procedures, targets, and market development measures.
- **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):** Functions as the scheme administrator, including responsibilities for market procedures, accreditation, and carbon credit certification.
- **Grid Controller of India Limited:** Functions as the carbon market registry, while the **Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC)** regulates trading activities.

Compliance Mechanism:

- **Obligated Entities:** Identified industries must achieve notified **Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity (GEI)** targets, measured as emissions per unit of equivalent output.
- **Carbon Credit Certificates (CCCs):** Entities performing better than their prescribed targets become eligible for certificates, whereas entities failing to meet targets must acquire or surrender the required certificates.

- **Trading:** Eligible certificates are intended to be traded through regulated power exchanges, creating financial incentives for industrial decarbonisation.
- **Coverage:** By January 2026, **490 obligated entities** had been notified across seven broad industrial sectors, including aluminium, cement, chlor-alkali, pulp and paper, petroleum refineries, petrochemicals, and textiles.
- **Implementation Status:** Notification of obligated entities and submission of reports should not be confused with verified credit issuance; a March 2026 parliamentary reply confirmed that no compliance certificates had been issued at that stage.

Offset Mechanism:

- Non-obligated entities may voluntarily register eligible projects involving **emission reduction, avoidance, or removal**, subject to approved methodologies and verification.
- Eligible activities extend across sectors such as **energy, agriculture, forestry, waste management, transport, and carbon capture, utilisation and storage**.
- Each eligible certificate represents **one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent**, subject to the applicable accounting and certification rules.

CCTS and Perform, Achieve and Trade Scheme:

- The **Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) Scheme** primarily promotes industrial energy efficiency through tradable **Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts)**.
- The **CCTS** addresses greenhouse gas emissions directly through sector-specific emission-intensity targets and tradable **Carbon Credit Certificates**.
- Relevant industries are being gradually transitioned from PAT to the CCTS compliance mechanism.
- India's intensity-based framework allows industrial production to increase while requiring reductions in emissions per unit of output, unlike an absolute emissions cap that directly restricts aggregate covered emissions.

Why India Should Consider Joining OCCCM:

International Rule-Making and Strategic Influence:

- Membership could allow India to influence emerging standards on **carbon accounting, MRV, credit integrity, and market interoperability**, rather than responding to frameworks developed without its participation.
- India's experience with intensity-based regulation could provide an important developing-country perspective alongside mature emissions trading systems.
- Participation could strengthen India's capacity to advocate **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)** in international climate governance.

Trade Competitiveness and Carbon Border Measures:

- The European Union's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** entered its definitive regime on **1 January 2026**, following a transitional reporting phase from 2023 to 2025.
- CBAM initially covers selected products in **iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity, and hydrogen**.
- It seeks to address **carbon leakage** by applying carbon-related obligations to covered imports based on their embedded emissions.
- Harmonised accounting practices could reduce reporting difficulties for Indian exporters, although **OCCCM membership would not automatically provide exemption from CBAM**.

Investment and Market Opportunities:

- Improved international recognition of verified Indian emission reductions could attract **green finance, low-carbon investment, and technology partnerships**.
- Future market linkages might create additional demand for eligible Indian carbon credits, subject to bilateral arrangements, corresponding adjustments where applicable, and environmental integrity safeguards.
- Such opportunities remain prospective because **technical cooperation does not automatically establish cross-border trading rights or mutual credit recognition**.

Challenges and Risks for India:

- **Climate Equity:** Uniform standards could overlook differences in historical emissions, development requirements, financial capacity, and technological access between developed and developing economies.
- **Green Protectionism:** Carbon border measures may impose disproportionate compliance burdens on exporters from emerging economies, particularly where low-carbon technologies remain expensive.
- **Policy Autonomy:** Premature alignment with mature international trading systems could constrain India's flexibility in setting industrial emission-intensity targets.
- **MSME Vulnerability:** Smaller enterprises may face significant costs for emissions measurement, independent verification, cleaner technology, and reporting systems.
- **Environmental Integrity:** Weak baselines, non-additional projects, double counting, and carbon leakage can undermine the credibility of carbon credits.
- **Market Volatility:** Unstable carbon prices and insufficient market liquidity can weaken investment incentives and increase uncertainty for regulated industries.

Measures to Strengthen India's Carbon Market:

Regulatory and Institutional Reforms:

- **Strengthen MRV:** BEE should ensure that **Accredited Carbon Verification Agencies (ACVAs)** follow rigorous verification standards, transparent methodologies, and effective conflict-of-interest safeguards.
- **Improve Market Transparency:** Public disclosure of aggregate emissions, credit issuance, trading volumes, and compliance outcomes can strengthen confidence and discourage market manipulation.
- **Support MSMEs:** Financial assistance, shared verification facilities, technical training, and affordable digital carbon-accounting systems can reduce compliance costs.
- **Promote a Just Transition:** Targeted reskilling, industrial modernisation, and regional development programmes can protect workers and communities dependent on emissions-intensive industries.
- **Consider Absolute Caps Gradually:** India may assess sector-specific transitions towards absolute emissions limits where reliable data, technological readiness, and developmental conditions justify them.

International and Trade Policy Coordination:

- The **Ministry of Power, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry** should coordinate carbon market regulation with industrial competitiveness and trade negotiations.
- India should prioritise decarbonisation support for **steel, aluminium, cement, and other emissions-intensive industries**, particularly those exposed to international carbon-related trade requirements.
- International cooperation should preserve **domestic policy flexibility, climate equity, credible verification, and safeguards against double counting**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Concepts and Agreements:

- **GS Paper II:** International climate governance, India–EU relations, multilateral cooperation, climate equity, and trade diplomacy.
- **GS Paper III:** Climate change mitigation, carbon markets, industrial decarbonisation, environmental regulation, and sustainable development.
- **Paris Agreement Article 6:** Establishes frameworks for voluntary international cooperation, including **Article 6.2 cooperative approaches** and the **Article 6.4 crediting mechanism**.
- **India's Updated NDC:** Targets a **45% reduction in GDP emissions intensity by 2030 from the 2005 level**.
- **Net-Zero Target:** India has announced its objective of achieving **net-zero emissions by 2070**.
- **Carbon Leakage:** The relocation of emissions-intensive production to jurisdictions with comparatively weaker climate regulations.
- **Additionality:** The requirement that credited emission reductions or removals would not have occurred without the relevant mitigation activity or incentive.

Mains Examination Perspective:

- **Core Analytical Argument:** India's participation in international carbon market cooperation could strengthen regulatory influence and export competitiveness, but effective engagement requires robust domestic institutions, credible carbon accounting, and protection of developmental priorities.
- **Suggested Question:** *Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with India's participation in international compliance carbon market initiatives in the context of climate justice and industrial competitiveness.*

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UDAN Scheme Completes Ten Years as India Expands Regional Air Connectivity and Launches Modified Aviation Development Programme

Recent Developments:

- The **Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) Scheme** completed **10 years on 21 October 2026**, marking a decade of efforts to provide affordable air connectivity to unserved and underserved regions.
- Launched under the **National Civil Aviation Policy, 2016**, the scheme has expanded regional aviation infrastructure and improved access to air travel, particularly in **Tier-II and Tier-III cities, remote areas, and difficult geographical regions**.
- According to official figures released in October 2026, UDAN has operationalised **687 routes and 95 aerodromes**, facilitating more than **3.68 lakh flights and 1.72 crore passenger journeys**.
- The Government also introduced **Modified UDAN on 4 July 2026**, with an approved outlay of **₹28,840 crore** for strengthening regional aviation infrastructure and operational sustainability during 2026–2036.

UDAN Scheme: Background and Objectives:

Introduction and Institutional Framework:

- **UDAN**, meaning **Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik**, is a **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS)** launched on **21 October 2016** under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- Its primary objective is to make air travel **affordable, accessible, and economically viable** while connecting airports with inadequate or nonexistent scheduled air services.
- The scheme operates through a partnership involving the **Central Government, State Governments, Airports Authority of India (AAI), airport operators, and participating airlines**.
- The first UDAN flight was inaugurated on the **Shimla–Delhi route in April 2017**, demonstrating the scheme's emphasis on connecting smaller destinations with major urban centres.

Unserved and Underserved Airports:

- **Unserved Airport:** An airport without scheduled commercial flight operations during the reference period specified under the scheme.
- **Underserved Airport:** An airport with limited scheduled commercial operations, generally not exceeding seven departures per week under the original framework.
- The scheme also supports **heliports and water aerodromes**, extending aviation services to regions where conventional airports may be technically or economically impractical.

Key Achievements of UDAN: 2016–2026:

Expansion of Aviation Infrastructure:

- **Regional Routes:** A total of **687 routes** have been operationalised under UDAN, expanding scheduled connectivity between regional destinations.
- **Aerodromes: 95 aerodromes**, including **17 heliports and 2 water aerodromes**, have been operationalised under the scheme.
- **Flight Operations:** More than **3.68 lakh flights** have operated, carrying approximately **1.72 crore passengers**.
- **National Aviation Expansion:** India's operational airport network increased from **74 airports in 2014 to 166 in 2026**, reflecting broader aviation infrastructure development alongside UDAN.
- **Market Position:** India has emerged as the **world's third-largest domestic aviation market**, supported by rising passenger demand, infrastructure investment, and airline network expansion.

Financial and Employment Outcomes:

- **Viability Gap Funding (VGF):** Approximately **₹5,091.23 crore** had been disbursed to support regional airline operations as of **15 October 2026**.
- **Employment:** Civil aviation-related employment was estimated at approximately **3 million in 2014 and 7.7 million in 2026**, with potential to reach **25 million by 2040**.
- These sector-wide employment estimates should not be interpreted as jobs generated exclusively by UDAN because broader aviation expansion also contributes to employment growth.

North-Eastern Region:

- UDAN prioritises the **North-Eastern Region**, where mountainous terrain, dispersed settlements, and limited surface transport create substantial connectivity challenges.

- Approximately **90 priority regional connectivity routes** have been operationalised in the region.
- Of **52 identified aerodromes**, including heliports and water aerodromes, **12 have been operationalised** under the relevant regional connectivity initiatives.
- Improved aviation access supports **border-area integration, emergency healthcare, tourism, and administrative connectivity**.

How Does the UDAN Scheme Operate?

Market-Based Route Allocation:

- Airlines are selected through a **competitive bidding mechanism**, allowing operators to propose regional routes and the financial support required for their operation.
- **Viability Gap Funding** compensates eligible airlines for part of the difference between operational costs and expected revenue on commercially weak routes.
- The original scheme generally provided VGF support for **three years**, allowing time for passenger demand and route viability to develop.
- Participating airlines receive certain operational concessions, including airport-related charge reductions and other benefits provided through Central and State Government arrangements.

Affordable Airfare Mechanism:

- UDAN seeks to maintain affordable fares by limiting ticket prices for a prescribed proportion of seats on eligible regional routes.
- Under the original framework, the indicative fare ceiling was approximately **₹2,500 for a one-hour flight**, subject to subsequent revisions and applicable route-specific conditions.
- The scheme balances **consumer affordability, airline participation, and financial support**, rather than requiring every seat on every flight to be sold at a regulated fare.

Modified UDAN Scheme, 2026: Major Features:

Launch, Duration and Objectives:

- The Union Cabinet approved **Modified UDAN on 25 March 2026**, and the programme was formally launched on **4 July 2026**.
- **Implementation Period: FY 2026–27 to FY 2035–36**, covering 10 financial years.
- **Approved Outlay: ₹28,840 crore**, supported through the Union Government's budgetary resources.
- The revised scheme prioritises **sustainable regional aviation, infrastructure development, last-mile connectivity, affordable air travel, and indigenous aerospace manufacturing**.

Infrastructure Development:

- **Airport Development: 100 airports** will be developed from existing unserved airstrips, with an allocation of **₹12,159 crore over eight years**.
- **Operation and Maintenance Support:** Approximately **441 aerodromes** will receive support for three years, involving an estimated **₹2,577 crore**.
    - Annual support is capped at **₹3.06 crore per airport** and **₹0.90 crore per heliport or water aerodrome**.
- **Modern Helipads: 200 helipads** are proposed for hilly, remote, island, and aspirational regions, with an estimated allocation of **₹3,661 crore over eight years**.
    - The indicative cost is approximately **₹15 crore per helipad**, with the overall allocation incorporating applicable cost adjustments.

Airline Support and Indigenous Aviation:

- **Enhanced VGF: ₹10,043 crore** has been proposed over 10 years to support regional airline operations.
- Under Modified UDAN, eligible airlines may receive VGF for **five years**, with support tapering from the third year, while route exclusivity remains limited to three years.
- **Indigenous Aircraft Procurement:** The programme also proposes acquiring **2 HAL Dhruv helicopters for Pawan Hans** and **2 HAL Dornier aircraft for Alliance Air**.
- The aircraft initiative supports **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, domestic aerospace manufacturing, and operations in difficult terrain.

Three-Pronged Implementation Strategy:

Centre–State Coordination:

- Modified UDAN emphasises cooperation between the **Union Government, States, Union Territories, and AAI** for identifying aviation requirements and prioritising infrastructure development.
- **21 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** have been signed to facilitate coordinated planning and implementation.
- State participation helps align airport development with **regional economic priorities, tourism potential, and passenger demand**.

Challenge Mode for Aerodrome Development:

- A dedicated **Challenge Mode Portal** enables States and Union Territories to nominate existing airstrips and helipads for development or modernisation.
- Proposed projects are assessed according to **connectivity needs, feasibility, development priorities, and prescribed eligibility conditions**.
- The approach aims to reduce investment in infrastructure lacking sufficient demand and improve project selection.

Demand-Oriented Route Expansion:

- Modified UDAN seeks to connect approximately **120 additional destinations** and facilitate air travel for **4 crore additional passengers** over its implementation period.
- The new framework places greater emphasis on identifying commercially promising routes, improving airport operations, and sustaining services after initial financial assistance ends.

Significance of UDAN for India's Development:

Inclusive and Balanced Regional Growth:

- **Regional Integration:** Air connectivity reduces travel time between smaller cities and major economic centres, improving access to education, healthcare, employment, and administrative services.
- **Tourism Development:** Regional airports support tourism-related enterprises, accommodation services, local transport, and cultural tourism.
- **Economic Multiplier:** Better connectivity can encourage investment, strengthen local businesses, and facilitate transport of high-value or time-sensitive goods.
- **Social Inclusion:** Affordable regional aviation improves mobility for populations in geographically isolated areas, although affordability remains dependent on fares and household incomes.

Strategic and Industrial Importance:

- **Border Connectivity:** Aviation links in the North-East, Himalayan regions, and island territories improve accessibility and support disaster response.
- **Emergency Services:** Helicopter and regional aircraft operations can assist medical evacuation, relief distribution, and emergency transport.
- **Aviation Ecosystem:** Increased regional flying supports demand for smaller aircraft, pilot training, airport services, and **Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO)** facilities.
- **Domestic Manufacturing:** Indigenous aircraft procurement strengthens the aerospace supply chain and reduces dependence on imported aviation platforms.

Challenges and Limitations:

- **Route Sustainability:** Some routes become commercially unviable after VGF support expires because of low passenger demand, inadequate load factors, or high operating costs.
- **Underutilised Airports:** Airport development without credible demand assessments can result in idle infrastructure and recurring maintenance expenditure.
- **Fiscal Dependence:** Continued public subsidies create concerns about long-term financial sustainability and efficient allocation of government resources.
- **Airline Viability:** Smaller regional operators face high **Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF)** prices, aircraft leasing costs, maintenance expenses, and limited access to suitable aircraft.
- **Operational Constraints:** Mountainous terrain, adverse weather, short runways, and insufficient technical support can increase cancellations and operating risks.
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** Poor road, rail, and public transport connections may limit airport accessibility even when scheduled flights are available.

Way Forward: Strengthening Regional Aviation:

Financial and Operational Reforms:

- **Demand-Based Planning:** Conduct rigorous passenger-demand and catchment-area assessments before approving new routes or airport investments.
- **Gradual Subsidy Reduction:** Adopt tapered VGF support, route bundling, and commercially viable network combinations to reduce long-term subsidy dependence.
- **ATF Tax Rationalisation:** Examine harmonisation of State-level value-added taxes and the feasibility of bringing aviation turbine fuel under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** framework.
- **Regional Airline Support:** Improve access to aircraft leasing, domestic MRO services, pilot training, and appropriate small-aircraft fleets.

Infrastructure and Sustainability:

- **Multimodal Integration:** Connect regional airports with highways, railways, buses, and local public transport to strengthen last-mile accessibility.
- **Safety and Reliability:** Improve navigation systems, weather forecasting, runway infrastructure, and emergency response capabilities.
- **Green Aviation:** Encourage energy-efficient airport infrastructure, sustainable aviation fuel, and improved aircraft operational efficiency.
- **Performance Monitoring:** Evaluate outcomes through **passenger load factors, route survival rates, airport utilisation, fiscal cost per passenger, and regional economic benefits**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Concepts and Institutions:

- **GS Paper II:** Government schemes, cooperative federalism, inclusive development, and public service delivery.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure, civil aviation, regional development, economic growth, and public-private partnerships.
- **Ministry of Civil Aviation:** Nodal Union Ministry responsible for civil aviation policy and regional connectivity initiatives.
- **Airports Authority of India (AAI):** Statutory organisation established under the **Airports Authority of India Act, 1994**, responsible for specified airport and air navigation infrastructure functions.
- **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA):** Principal aviation safety regulator responsible for civil aviation regulatory oversight.
- **Viability Gap Funding:** Public financial assistance provided to make socially or economically desirable projects commercially feasible.
- **Passenger Load Factor:** The proportion of available airline seating capacity occupied by passengers.
- **UDAN and SDGs:** Supports **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)**.

Mains Examination Perspective:

- **Core Analytical Argument:** UDAN has strengthened regional connectivity and widened access to aviation, but its long-term success depends on commercially sustainable routes, efficient infrastructure utilisation, affordable operations, and effective Centre–State coordination.
- **Suggested Question:** *Evaluate the contribution of the UDAN Scheme to inclusive regional development in India. Discuss the measures required to ensure the financial and operational sustainability of regional aviation.*

Supreme Court Rules Religious Conversion Alone Cannot Confer Backward Class Muslim Reservation Benefits

Recent Developments:

- **Supreme Court Judgment (15 October 2026):** In *The Secretary to Government v. Sameer Ahamed N.*, the Supreme Court upheld the Madras High Court's decision striking down Tamil Nadu's Government Order dated 9 March 2024, which allowed certain persons converting to Islam to claim **Backward Class (Muslim)** status for reservation purposes.
- **Core ruling:** Conversion to Islam does not automatically establish membership of a specific Muslim community included in the State's notified backward-class list. Previous caste or backward-class status cannot, by itself, establish eligibility for reservation under a different notified community.
- **Constitutional significance:** The judgment distinguishes religious freedom from eligibility for affirmative action, emphasising that statutory reservation benefits must satisfy the applicable constitutional and legal criteria.

Understanding Religious Conversion and Reservation:

How Does Conversion Affect Reservation Eligibility?

- **Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation:** Paragraph 3 of the **Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950**, issued under Article 341, restricts Scheduled Caste recognition to persons professing Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism. Conversion to Islam or Christianity therefore generally makes a person ineligible for SC status under the existing Order.
- **Other Backward Classes (OBC) and State Backward Classes:** Backward-class lists can include communities belonging to different religions. However, conversion alone does not establish membership of a particular notified community or prove that the person meets the applicable eligibility requirements.
- **Key distinction:** SC recognition is governed by the Presidential Order under Article 341, whereas backward-class reservation under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) depends on the identification of socially and educationally backward classes through the applicable constitutional and legal framework.

Background of the Case:

Tamil Nadu Government Order, 2024:

- **Purpose of the order:** The Tamil Nadu Government issued G.O. (Ms.) No. 31 on 9 March 2024, providing a mechanism through which certain converts to Islam from Backward Classes (BC), Most Backward Classes (MBC), Denotified Communities (DNCs) and Scheduled Castes could seek certificates under the **Backward Class (Muslim)** category.
- **Existing reservation framework:** Tamil Nadu recognises seven Muslim communities as Backward Class Muslims and provides a separate **3.5% reservation** for Backward Class Muslims under its state legislation.
- **Legal concern:** The order permitted eligible converts to be considered for inclusion within the notified Muslim backward-class communities. The dispute concerned whether the executive could treat conversion and previous backward-class status as sufficient grounds for such recognition.

Facts of Sameer Ahamed's Case:

- **Claim for a community certificate:** Sameer Ahamed, who was born into a Hindu family and later converted to Islam, sought a community certificate identifying him as a **Muslim Labbai**, a community recognised under Tamil Nadu's Backward Class (Muslim) framework.
- **Administrative rejection:** The revenue authorities rejected his application, reasoning that conversion to Islam did not automatically establish membership of the claimed community.
- **Madras High Court judgment (25 June 2026):** The Court invalidated the 2024 Government Order, holding that conversion alone could not confer membership of a specific notified Muslim backward-class community.
- **Supreme Court appeal:** The Tamil Nadu Government challenged the High Court's decision, arguing that the order sought to protect the interests of persons who had already experienced social disadvantage and reservation eligibility before conversion.

Constitutional and Legal Framework:

Important Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 14 — Equality before Law:** State action relating to reservation and community classification must satisfy constitutional standards of equality and non-arbitrariness.

- **Article 15(4) — Special Provisions for Backward Classes:** It enables the State to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4) — Reservation in Public Employment:** It enables reservation in appointments or posts for backward classes of citizens that, in the State's opinion, are not adequately represented in its services.
- **Article 25 — Freedom of Religion:** It protects freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to constitutional limitations. However, religious conversion does not automatically confer every statutory benefit associated with a different social or community identity.
- **Article 341 — Scheduled Castes:** The President specifies Scheduled Castes for each State or Union Territory, while Parliament may include or exclude groups from the notified list through legislation.
- **Article 342A — Socially and Educationally Backward Classes:** It governs the identification of SEBCs for constitutional purposes. Following the **105th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2021**, States and Union Territories can maintain their own lists of socially and educationally backward classes for their respective purposes, subject to the constitutional framework.

Major Commissions and Their Contributions:

- **Mandal Commission (1980):** The Second Backward Classes Commission used an 11-indicator framework covering social, educational and economic criteria to identify backward classes. It reinforced the importance of assessing disadvantage through multiple indicators rather than relying solely on religious identity.
- **Sachar Committee (2006):** It documented significant socio-economic and educational disadvantages among sections of India's Muslim population. Its findings highlighted the importance of reliable data and targeted policies while recognising that Muslims are not a socially homogeneous group.
- **Justice Ranganath Misra Commission (2007):** It recommended delinking Scheduled Caste status from religious identity, including by removing the religious restriction in Paragraph 3 of the 1950 Order. The recommendation has not been implemented through the corresponding amendment to the Order.
- **Justice K. G. Balakrishnan Commission (2022):** The Union Government constituted a commission headed by former Chief Justice of India K. G. Balakrishnan to examine whether Scheduled Caste status could be extended to persons who converted to religions other than those currently specified in the 1950 Order.

Key Findings of the Supreme Court:

Rejection of Automatic Community Membership:

- **Conversion is not sufficient:** A person does not automatically become a member of a particular notified backward-class Muslim community merely by converting to Islam. Eligibility requires satisfaction of the applicable legal criteria for that community.
- **Community certificates record legal eligibility:** A certificate cannot independently create community membership or reservation eligibility when the underlying legal requirements are not met.
- **Limits of religious institutions:** A Jamath or another religious body may certify religious conversion, but such certification does not conclusively determine eligibility for statutory reservation benefits.

Requirement of Evidence-Based Classification:

- **Insufficient empirical basis:** The Court found the State's approach legally unsustainable because it permitted people from different social backgrounds to be placed within notified Muslim backward-class communities without establishing the necessary basis for that classification.
- **Executive power has limits:** A Government Order cannot override existing constitutional requirements or judicially established legal principles governing community recognition and reservation.
- **Existing lists remain significant:** Eligibility must be determined according to the applicable notified community and legal framework, rather than through an automatic transfer of the applicant's previous status.

Significance of the Judgment:

- **For constitutional governance:** The ruling reinforces the principle that executive welfare measures must operate within constitutional and statutory limits and cannot independently alter the criteria governing notified communities.
- **For affirmative action:** It emphasises that reservation is intended to address identified social and educational backwardness and inadequate representation, not simply to transfer benefits between categories after a change in religious identity.
- **For federalism:** States retain an important role in identifying backward classes for State purposes, but classifications must comply with constitutional requirements and be supported by an appropriate evidentiary basis.
- **For religious freedom:** The judgment concerns the legal consequences of conversion for reservation eligibility; it does not prohibit religious conversion or remove the constitutional protection of freedom of conscience.
- **For policy design:** Governments seeking to extend benefits to disadvantaged converts must develop a legally valid framework supported by evidence and consistent with the relevant constitutional provisions.

Critical Analysis: Arguments For and Concerns About the Judgment:

Arguments Supporting the Judgment:

- **Protects notified communities:** It prevents arbitrary additions to existing backward-class categories and safeguards the integrity of reservation lists.
- **Promotes evidence-based policy:** It discourages classifications based solely on administrative convenience or religious conversion and reinforces the need for legally defensible identification of backward classes.
- **Strengthens the rule of law:** It clarifies that executive orders cannot bypass constitutional conditions or replace the legally prescribed process for determining eligibility.

Concerns and Limitations:

- **Possible continuity of discrimination:** Social exclusion and caste-based prejudice may persist after conversion. A change of religion does not necessarily eliminate inherited social disadvantages in everyday life.
- **Risk of welfare discontinuity:** Individuals who experience disadvantage before conversion may lose access to a previous reservation category without automatically qualifying for another one.
- **Need for better evidence:** A rigid approach without effective assessment mechanisms may leave genuine cases of continuing social and educational backwardness insufficiently addressed.
- **Distinction between legal status and social reality:** Formal community classification and lived social disadvantage do not always correspond perfectly. Public policy must recognise this complexity without disregarding constitutional requirements.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen backward-class commissions:** State commissions should conduct rigorous socio-economic surveys, field studies and consultations before recommending changes to backward-class classifications.
- **Use disaggregated data:** Assess educational attainment, occupation, income, access to public employment and experiences of social exclusion across relevant communities, while respecting privacy and constitutional safeguards.
- **Clarify certification procedures:** States should establish transparent rules for verifying community membership and eligibility, reducing inconsistent administrative decisions and unnecessary litigation.

- **Protect disadvantaged groups lawfully:** Governments should explore constitutionally valid welfare measures for people experiencing continuing deprivation, ensuring that any reservation-related classification meets the applicable legal standards.
- **Maintain constitutional balance:** Policy should reconcile equality, freedom of conscience, social justice and the protection of existing beneficiary groups through evidence-based and legally sustainable measures.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **GS Paper II — Polity and Governance:** Articles 14, 15(4), 16(4), 25, 341 and 342A; affirmative action; judicial review; constitutional limits on executive power; Centre–State relations.
- **GS Paper II — Social Justice:** Identification of backward classes, minority socio-economic conditions, access to education and public employment, and targeted welfare policies.
- **GS Paper IV — Ethics:** Equality, fairness, evidence-based policymaking, protection of vulnerable groups and balancing individual liberty with distributive justice.
- **Key analytical distinction: Religious conversion, Scheduled Caste status and Backward Class membership are legally distinct questions.** The applicable eligibility rules differ across categories, and conversion alone does not establish entitlement to a notified backward-class reservation.
- **Mains-oriented question:** "Religious freedom and affirmative action raise complex questions when social disadvantage persists after conversion. Discuss the constitutional and policy challenges involved in determining reservation eligibility."

Conclusion:

- The Supreme Court's judgment in *The Secretary to Government v. Sameer Ahamed N.* establishes that conversion to Islam does not automatically confer membership of a notified Backward Class (Muslim) community or entitlement to its reservation benefits.
- The ruling reinforces constitutional limits on executive classification and the need for evidence-based identification of backward classes.
- At the same time, persistent social disadvantage among converts remains an important policy concern.
- A sustainable approach requires rigorous empirical assessment, transparent certification procedures and constitutionally valid welfare measures that advance social justice without bypassing the law.

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Supreme Court Clarifies Why Adultery Remains Relevant to Military Discipline Despite Its Decriminalisation in India

Recent Developments:

- **Army disciplinary action, October 2026:** An Indian Army Armoured Corps officer was issued a show-cause notice proposing administrative termination of service over allegations of adultery. The officer has contested the proposed action, and a show-cause notice does not itself establish guilt or constitute a final termination order.
- **Legal context:** Although the Supreme Court decriminalised adultery in *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (2018), it clarified in 2023 that the judgment did not invalidate disciplinary provisions under the Army Act, 1950, the Air Force Act, 1950, or the Navy Act, 1957.
- **Core issue:** The case highlights the distinction between **criminal liability under general law** and **disciplinary accountability under service-specific legislation**, particularly where conduct may affect military discipline, professional standards or unit cohesion.

Understanding Adultery and Its Legal Status:

Meaning and Former Criminal Provision:

- **Adultery:** It generally refers to voluntary sexual relations between a married person and someone other than their spouse. Its legal consequences depend on the applicable criminal, matrimonial and service laws.
- **Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860:** The provision criminalised certain sexual relations with another man's wife without that man's consent or connivance. It was gender-discriminatory because only the man involved could be prosecuted, while the wife was exempt from punishment.
- **Punishment under the former law:** Section 497 prescribed imprisonment for up to five years, a fine, or both. The offence was structured around the husband's consent rather than the equal autonomy of both spouses.
- **Present legal position:** The Supreme Court struck down Section 497 in 2018. Adultery is therefore not a criminal offence under the former provision, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which came into force on 1 July 2024, does not recreate that offence.

Decriminalisation of Adultery: Joseph Shine Judgment, 2018:

Supreme Court's Constitutional Reasoning:

- **Case:** In *Joseph Shine v. Union of India*, decided on 27 September 2018, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court declared Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code and the associated procedural provision, Section 198 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, unconstitutional.
- **Article 14 — Equality before Law:** The provision treated women as subordinate to their husbands and created unequal legal consequences based on gender. Its discriminatory structure violated the constitutional guarantee of equality.
- **Article 15(1) — Prohibition of Discrimination:** The provision relied on gender stereotypes and denied women equal legal agency in marital relationships.
- **Article 21 — Life and Personal Liberty:** The Court emphasised individual dignity, privacy, personal autonomy and the freedom to make intimate choices within constitutional limits.
- **Marriage and state intervention:** The Court held that adultery should not be punished through criminal law merely to enforce marital fidelity. Criminal prosecution was an excessive intrusion into personal relationships.

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What Decriminalisation Does Not Mean:

- **Moral and civil consequences remain:** The judgment did not endorse adultery as desirable conduct. It recognised that adultery may remain a moral wrong and can have consequences under civil law.
- **Ground for divorce:** Adultery continues to be a ground for matrimonial relief, including divorce, under applicable personal and matrimonial laws.
- **Criminal and civil law are distinct:** Decriminalisation removes criminal punishment under Section 497; it does not automatically eliminate consequences under matrimonial law or other valid statutory frameworks.

Why Adultery Can Attract Military Disciplinary Action:

Constitutional Basis — Article 33:

- **Article 33:** It empowers Parliament to modify or restrict the application of fundamental rights to members of the Armed Forces and certain other services in order to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline.

- **Rationale:** Military personnel operate within a hierarchical organisation that depends on discipline, trust, cohesion, operational readiness and adherence to service obligations. Conduct that undermines these requirements may attract service-specific consequences even when it is not a criminal offence under general law.

Relevant Provisions of the Army Act, 1950:

- **Section 45 — Conduct unbecoming of an officer:** This provision addresses conduct that is unbecoming of an officer and inconsistent with the character expected of an officer.
- **Section 63 — Acts prejudicial to good order and military discipline:** It covers acts or omissions prejudicial to good order and military discipline where the conduct falls within the provision.
- **Application to adultery:** An extramarital relationship does not automatically establish a violation of every military provision. The relevant authorities must assess the facts, the applicable statutory requirements and whether the conduct falls within the relevant disciplinary provision.
- **Possible administrative action:** Depending on the applicable service rules and circumstances, authorities may initiate disciplinary proceedings or consider administrative termination. The process must follow the governing law and prescribed procedure.

Supreme Court Clarification, 2023:

Joseph Shine and the Armed Forces:

- **Clarification dated 31 January 2023:** In proceedings seeking clarification of *Joseph Shine*, the Supreme Court considered the Union Government's request concerning disciplinary provisions applicable to members of the Armed Forces.
- **Scope of the 2018 judgment:** The Court clarified that the earlier judgment had not examined the effect or operation of Sections 45 and 63 of the Army Act, the corresponding provisions of the Air Force Act, or the relevant provisions of the Navy Act.
- **Legal consequence:** The decriminalisation of adultery under general criminal law does not, by itself, prevent the Armed Forces from taking action under applicable service legislation.
- **Important qualification:** The 2023 clarification did not declare every extramarital relationship punishable in the military. Whether action is justified depends on the relevant law, the facts established and the proper exercise of disciplinary authority.

Arguments in Favour of Decriminalising Adultery:

- **Gender equality:** The former provision punished only men and treated women as objects of their husbands' interests. Decriminalisation removed this unequal criminal-law framework.
- **Personal autonomy and privacy:** Intimate relationships fall within the sphere of personal liberty. Criminal punishment should not be used merely to enforce a particular moral view of marital fidelity.
- **Proportionate use of criminal law:** Matrimonial disputes can be addressed through civil remedies, counselling or other lawful processes without automatically invoking criminal prosecution.
- **Judicial efficiency:** Removing adultery as a criminal offence avoids criminal proceedings under an outdated provision and allows law-enforcement agencies to focus on recognised criminal offences.

Arguments Against Decriminalising Adultery:

- **Protection of marital relationships:** Critics argue that legal consequences may reinforce the importance of fidelity and the stability of marriage.

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- **Deterrence concerns:** Some contend that removing criminal punishment may weaken the perceived deterrent against extramarital relationships, although this does not by itself establish that criminalisation is effective.
- **Social and family consequences:** Adultery may cause emotional distress, marital breakdown and wider family disputes. These consequences remain relevant even without criminal liability.
- **Gender and social context:** Critics are concerned that unequal social conditions may expose women to disproportionate consequences when marital relationships break down. However, a gender-discriminatory criminal provision is not a constitutionally valid solution to this problem.
- **Malimath Committee (2003):** The Committee on Reforms of the Criminal Justice System recommended retaining adultery as an offence in a gender-neutral form. The Supreme Court subsequently struck down the existing provision in 2018.

Critical Analysis and Way Forward:

- **Balance liberty with discipline:** The Armed Forces have legitimate requirements of discipline and operational effectiveness, but service rules must not become a means of imposing arbitrary or disproportionate punishment for private conduct unrelated to service responsibilities.
- **Follow due process:** Authorities must comply with statutory requirements, provide a meaningful opportunity to respond to allegations and observe the principles of natural justice.
- **Distinguish allegations from findings:** A show-cause notice initiates or advances a process in which the officer can respond. It must not be treated as proof of misconduct or as a final decision on termination.
- **Ensure judicial and tribunal oversight:** Courts and the Armed Forces Tribunal can examine whether the authorities acted within their powers, followed the required procedure and respected applicable legal protections.
- **Apply the law to established facts:** Decisions should consider the nature of the alleged conduct, its connection with military discipline, the applicable statutory provisions and the proportionality of the proposed action.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **GS Paper II — Polity and Governance:** Fundamental rights, Articles 14, 15(1), 21 and 33, judicial review, separation between criminal and civil liability, and constitutional limits on state action.
- **GS Paper II — Judiciary:** *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (2018), decriminalisation of adultery, constitutional morality and the judicial review of discriminatory laws.
- **GS Paper III — Security:** Military discipline, operational cohesion, service-specific accountability and the legal framework governing the Armed Forces.
- **GS Paper IV — Ethics:** Professional conduct, integrity, privacy, fairness, proportionality, natural justice and the distinction between personal morality and enforceable legal obligations.
- **Key conceptual distinction: Decriminalisation does not mean legal immunity from every consequence.** Conduct may cease to be a criminal offence under general law while remaining relevant to civil proceedings or disciplinary action under a valid, separate statutory framework.
- **Mains-oriented question:** "The decriminalisation of adultery does not eliminate all consequences of extramarital conduct, particularly within disciplined services. Examine this statement in the light of constitutional rights, military discipline and natural justice."

Conclusion:

- The legal position reflects a distinction between personal liberty under the Constitution and the special disciplinary requirements of the Armed Forces.
- The *Joseph Shine* judgment removed an unconstitutional criminal offence that discriminated on the basis of gender and intruded into individual autonomy.

- The Supreme Court's 2023 clarification preserved the independent operation of applicable military disciplinary provisions.
- Any proposed action against service personnel must nevertheless rest on the relevant law, established facts and fair procedure, with allegations clearly distinguished from final findings of misconduct.

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QUESTIONS

1. With reference to India's petroleum sector, energy security, and institutional framework, consider the following statements:

(1) India's crude oil import dependence exceeds 85%, leaving its balance of payments highly vulnerable to external price shocks.

(2) The Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), which compiles national energy statistics, functions as an autonomous statutory body established under an Act of Parliament.

(3) Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) in India are managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle operating under the administrative control of the Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB).

(4) Having a large domestic petroleum refining capacity automatically guarantees complete immunity from global supply disruptions, irrespective of crude oil import access.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 2 and 4 only

(C) 1, 2, and 3 only

(D) 1, 3, and 4 only

2. Consider the following functional descriptions within international carbon governance:

Term X: A policy mechanism that imposes a fixed price per tonne of greenhouse gas emitted, providing price certainty but uncertain emission reduction volumes.

Term Y: A policy mechanism that sets a hard ceiling on aggregate national or sectoral emissions and allows entities to trade limited emission allowances.

Term Z: The risk that strict domestic climate regulations will cause energy-intensive industries to relocate production to countries with lenient environmental rules.

Which one of the following correctly identifies Terms X, Y, and Z?

(A) X = Baseline-and-Credit; Y = Carbon Tax; Z = Additionality

(B) X = Carbon Tax; Y = Offset Mechanism; Z = Green Protectionism

(C) X = Cap-and-Trade System; Y = Carbon Tax; Z = Carbon Leakage

(D) X = Carbon Tax; Y = Cap-and-Trade System; Z = Carbon Leakage

3. Consider the following statements regarding the structural evolution of the Indian aviation sector over the last decade (2016–2026):

(1) India's total operational airport network expanded significantly, more than doubling its active operational aerodromes compared to 2014.

(2) India emerged as the world's third-largest domestic aviation market by volume of passenger traffic.

(3) Under the Modified UDAN framework, the maximum tenure for providing Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to regional airlines was reduced from three years to one year to cut public expenditure.

(4) In the North-Eastern Region, regional air connectivity initiatives have operationalized priority routes to address geographical accessibility bottlenecks.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 2 and 4 only

(C) 1, 2, and 4 only

(D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

4. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: A religious convert does not automatically acquire the right to claim statutory reservation benefits designated for a notified backward class community in their new faith.

Statement 2: Affirmative action under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) addresses group-based social and educational backwardness, whereas Article 25 guarantees individual freedom of conscience.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

(A) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and Statement 2 is the correct explanation for Statement 1.

(B) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct but Statement 2 is NOT the correct explanation for Statement 1.

(C) Statement 1 is correct but Statement 2 is incorrect.

(D) Statement 1 is incorrect but Statement 2 is correct.

5. With reference to Article 33 of the Constitution of India and military discipline, consider the following statements:

(1) Article 33 empowers Parliament to enact legislation modifying or restricting the application of Fundamental Rights to members of the Armed Forces to ensure proper discharge of duties.

(2) State Legislative Assemblies possess concurrent powers under Article 33 to enact service-specific exceptions for state police forces without parliamentary assent.

(3) The decriminalisation of an offence under general penal law automatically strikes down all corresponding disciplinary provisions in the Army, Navy, and Air Force Acts.

(4) A show-cause notice issued proposing administrative action against an officer does not by itself establish guilt or constitute a final order of service termination.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1, 3, and 4 only

(B) 1 and 4 only

(C) 2 and 3 only

(D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

ANSWER KEY

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

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