OAS HUB

Best Institute for OAS/IAS

IDEAL FOR

UPSC,OPSC and Other Competitive Examinations

English

DAILY CHRONICLE CURRENT AFFAIRS

NEWS CREDIT

PIB/ PTI/ News On Air/ The Hindu/ IANS/ Business Standard/ Times Of India/ Deccan Herald/ Hindustan Times/ BBC News/ Aljazeera/ Mirror.Uk/ Times Now/ Economic Times/ Financial Express/ Indian Express...

NEWS COVERED

Business News, financial news, economy news, company news, politics news, India news, breaking news, Indian economy, International News, Sports News, and many more topics...

Wednesday, July 29, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENT

----------********----------

IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Government Constitutes Nandan Nilekani-led High-Powered Task Force to Transform NTA and Strengthen India's Public Examination System

Recent Developments:

- The **Union Government** has constituted a **High-Powered Task Force** under **Nandan Nilekani** to recommend next-generation reforms for the **National Testing Agency (NTA)** and India's public examination system.
- The initiative follows repeated controversies relating to **paper leaks, examination irregularities, cybersecurity concerns and technological failures**, particularly in **NEET-UG** and other national-level entrance examinations.
- The announcement coincides with the proposed **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026**, which seeks to impose stricter punishments and strengthen the legal framework against examination fraud.

Why were the Reforms Initiated?

Need for Comprehensive Examination Reforms:

- **Repeated paper leaks** and examination malpractices have weakened the credibility of India's competitive examination system.
- **Technological vulnerabilities** and cybersecurity gaps have exposed weaknesses in large-scale examination management.
- **Judicial scrutiny, public protests and demands for accountability** have highlighted the need for structural reforms.
- The Government aims to create a **secure, transparent, technology-driven and student-centric examination ecosystem** capable of conducting high-stakes examinations efficiently.

National Testing Agency (NTA):

About NTA:

- The **National Testing Agency (NTA)** is an **autonomous body** established in **2017** under the **Union Ministry of Education**.
- It is registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
- The Agency conducts several national-level entrance examinations including **NEET-UG, JEE (Main), CUET, UGC-NET** and other recruitment or admission-related examinations.
- Its mandate is to ensure **standardised, transparent, efficient and merit-based assessment** through professional examination management.

High-Powered Task Force on Examination Reforms:

Composition of the Task Force:

- **Chairperson: Nandan Nilekani**, Infosys Co-founder and architect of the **Aadhaar** programme.

- **Members: S. Somanath**, **Tapan Deka**, **V. Kamakoti**, **Anita Karwal** and **Amrit Lal Meena**, representing expertise in technology, education, national security, governance and logistics.

Objectives of the Task Force:

- Restore **credibility, transparency and integrity** in public examinations.
- Maximise the use of **digital technology** throughout the examination cycle.
- Prevent **paper leaks, organised malpractice and cyber threats** through robust technological safeguards.
- Strengthen the **institutional capacity, governance framework and operational efficiency** of the NTA.
- Develop a **future-ready examination architecture** capable of handling large-scale examinations securely.

Major Areas of Reform:

Technology-driven Reforms:

- Develop a **secure digital examination infrastructure** supported by advanced cybersecurity mechanisms.
- Introduce **digital authentication, encrypted question paper transmission and real-time monitoring systems**.
- Strengthen technological safeguards against **question paper leaks, unauthorised access and cyber intrusions**.
- Expand the use of **data analytics, artificial intelligence and digital audit trails** for risk detection and examination monitoring.

Institutional Reforms:

- Improve the governance structure of the NTA through enhanced **accountability, transparency and professional management**.
- Standardise examination processes across different national examinations.
- Strengthen internal oversight, risk management and quality assurance mechanisms.

Operational Reforms:

- Improve logistics, examination centre management and coordination among stakeholders.
- Enhance transparency throughout the examination process, from paper preparation to result declaration.
- Strengthen operational protocols for conducting large-scale examinations without disruptions.

Legislative and Policy Support:

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026:

- Proposes **higher imprisonment** for examination-related offences.
- Enhances **financial penalties** for paper leaks and organised examination fraud.
- Strengthens the statutory framework for investigation and prosecution of examination malpractices.
- Supports **fast-track courts** for speedy disposal of examination-related offences.

Related Institutional Developments:

- Following recent administrative changes, the Ministry of Education initiated a comprehensive review of educational institutions and examination governance.

- Opposition leaders have sought clarity regarding the implementation of recommendations made by the **K. Radhakrishnan Committee**, constituted after the **2024 NEET-UG controversy**.

Important Recommendations of the K. Radhakrishnan Committee:

Key Reform Proposals:

- Gradual transition towards **Computer-Based Testing (CBT)** wherever feasible.
- Adoption of a **hybrid secure examination model**, involving encrypted digital transmission of question papers with controlled local printing at examination centres.
- Introduction of **multi-session and multi-stage examinations** to minimise systemic risks.
- Strengthening cybersecurity, examination logistics and standard operating procedures.
- Modernisation of examination governance through technology-enabled monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Significance for Governance and Education:

Administrative Significance:

- Strengthens **Good Governance** through greater transparency and institutional accountability.
- Promotes **Digital Governance** by integrating technology into public service delivery.
- Improves coordination among examination authorities, educational institutions and law enforcement agencies.
- Reinforces citizens' trust in public institutions and competitive examinations.

Educational Significance:

- Enhances fairness and credibility of admissions and recruitment examinations.
- Protects deserving candidates from examination fraud and organised malpractice.
- Strengthens cybersecurity and data protection in education administration.
- Encourages adoption of modern assessment technologies while maintaining examination integrity.

Challenges Ahead:

Implementation Challenges:

- Balancing technological innovation with **privacy, cybersecurity and data protection** requirements.
- Ensuring equitable digital access for candidates across **urban and rural regions**.
- Coordinating reforms among multiple examination agencies operating under different administrative frameworks.
- Implementing reforms without disrupting ongoing examination schedules.
- Building institutional capacity for continuous monitoring, compliance and technological upgradation.

Way Forward:

Future Reform Priorities:

- Establish an integrated **National Examination Security Framework** with periodic third-party cybersecurity audits.
- Develop **AI-enabled fraud detection systems** and continuous digital monitoring mechanisms.

- Strengthen inter-agency coordination among educational institutions, cybersecurity agencies and law enforcement authorities.
- Promote capacity building of examination personnel through specialised training in digital examination management.
- Adopt a phased implementation strategy supported by regular performance evaluation and stakeholder feedback.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Constitutional and Governance Linkages:

- **Article 14:** Equality before law and equal opportunity in competitive examinations.
- **Article 21:** Fair, transparent and credible examinations contribute to procedural fairness affecting educational opportunities.
- **Article 41:** Promotion of educational opportunities and public welfare through efficient institutions.
- **GS Paper II:** Governance, Education, Digital Governance, E-Governance, Transparency and Accountability.
- **GS Paper III:** Cyber Security, Science & Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance, Internal Security and Institutional Reforms.
- **Keywords: NTA, Public Examination Reforms, Computer-Based Testing (CBT), Digital Governance, Cyber Security, Artificial Intelligence, Examination Integrity, Good Governance, Accountability, Transparency, Aadhaar-based Authentication, Data Protection.**

Government Launches Comprehensive Examination Reforms to Restore Integrity, Transparency and Credibility of India's Public Examination System

Recent Developments:

- The **Union Government** has launched a comprehensive reform package to strengthen the integrity of India's public examination system following controversies related to **NEET**, **UGC-NET** and other high-stakes examinations.
- The reform package includes the **termination of 47 officials of the National Testing Agency (NTA)**, the proposed **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026**, and the constitution of a **High-Powered Task Force** under **Nandan Nilekani** to recommend next-generation examination reforms.
- The Government has also accelerated the implementation of recommendations made by the **Dr. K. Radhakrishnan Committee (2024)** to improve examination security, institutional governance and technology adoption.

Major Examination Reform Initiatives:

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026:

- The proposed legislation substantially strengthens the legal framework against **paper leaks, impersonation, organised examination fraud and digital manipulation** through stricter punishments and faster judicial processes.
- **Punishment:** The minimum imprisonment for general examination offences has been increased from **3 years to 5 years**, while the maximum punishment remains **10 years**; organised examination fraud now attracts a minimum imprisonment of **7 years**.
- **Financial penalties:** The maximum fine for general offences has been increased from **₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh**, whereas organised examination fraud may attract a minimum penalty of **₹10 crore**.
- **Private service providers:** Private information technology vendors, printing agencies and examination partners found complicit may face penalties up to **₹5 crore** and debarment from public examinations for **8 years**.
- **Time-bound justice:** Investigation of examination offences must be completed within **60 days**, trials are to conclude within **3 months** after filing of the charge sheet, while appeals should ordinarily be decided within **3 months** by a **Division Bench** of the High Court.
- **Fast-Track Courts:** States and Union Territories are required to designate **Special Fast-Track Courts** for exclusive and day-to-day hearing of examination-related offences.

High-Powered Task Force on Examination Reforms:

Composition and Mandate:

- The Government has constituted a multidisciplinary **High-Powered Task Force** under **Nandan Nilekani**, former Chairman of **UIDAI** and Co-founder of **Infosys**, with experts from education, technology, national security and public administration.
- The Task Force will recommend **technology-driven, secure, transparent, leak-proof and tamper-resistant** examination systems supported by robust institutional reforms.
- It has been tasked with improving **digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, governance, operational efficiency and institutional accountability** of the **National Testing Agency (NTA)**.

Dr. K. Radhakrishnan Committee (2024):

Major Recommendations:

- The **Ministry of Education** constituted the **High-Level Committee of Experts** under **Dr. K. Radhakrishnan** after the **UGC-NET paper leak** and **NEET-UG 2024** controversy to recommend structural reforms in the **National Testing Agency**.
- The Committee submitted **101 recommendations** covering examination reforms, institutional restructuring, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure and data protection.
- Major recommendations include appointment of permanent domain experts, establishment of specialised verticals, greater reliance on **government examination centres**, **Aadhaar-based biometric authentication**, encrypted transmission of question papers, expanded **CCTV surveillance**, **Artificial Intelligence-based monitoring**, and phased transition towards **Computer-Based Testing (CBT)** and adaptive testing.
- Several recommendations, including biometric verification, mobile jammers, enhanced surveillance and wider use of government institutions as examination centres, are already under implementation.

Need for Overhauling India's Testing Ecosystem:

Institutional and Structural Challenges:

- The present examination model relies heavily on **centralised paper preparation, printing, storage and transportation**, creating multiple points vulnerable to security breaches.
- Excessive dependence on **private information technology vendors** and outsourced examination infrastructure increases cybersecurity risks and operational vulnerabilities.
- A single breach in the examination chain can compromise the integrity of examinations involving **millions of candidates** simultaneously.

Constitutional and Governance Concerns:

- Public examinations represent one of the most important instruments of **merit-based social mobility** in India.
- Examination malpractices undermine **Article 14 (Equality before Law)** and **Article 16 (Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment)** by providing unfair advantages to organised criminal networks.
- Repeated examination failures weaken public trust in educational institutions and recruitment agencies while adversely affecting administrative legitimacy.

Economic and Social Implications:

- Examination cancellations, prolonged litigation and recruitment delays slow public sector hiring and reduce economic productivity.
- According to the **ILO India Employment Report 2024**, youth constitute nearly **83%** of India's unemployed population, making timely recruitment an important economic priority.
- Uncertain examination schedules encourage excessive dependence on expensive coaching institutions, imposing significant financial burdens on middle-class and rural households.
- According to **NCRB** data, student suicides have increased significantly over the past decade, highlighting the severe psychological consequences of examination uncertainty and academic stress.

Measures Required to Strengthen Examination Integrity:

Technology and Cybersecurity Reforms:

- Replace physical transportation of question papers with **Just-in-Time encrypted digital delivery**, followed by controlled printing shortly before commencement of examinations.
- Introduce **algorithm-based randomised question generation** using **Item Response Theory (IRT)** to minimise risks associated with leaked question papers.
- Conduct **Computer-Based Tests** through secure **air-gapped local intranet systems** isolated from the public internet to prevent remote cyber intrusions.
- Ensure complete compliance with the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** while protecting candidates' biometric and personal information.

Administrative and Institutional Reforms:

- Strengthen the **National Testing Agency** through permanent professional staffing, dedicated digital infrastructure and greater operational autonomy.
- Establish an independent **National Examination Audit Commission** to conduct surprise inspections, investigate complaints and strengthen institutional accountability.

- Mandate **STQC certification** for all private vendors participating in public examinations to ensure compliance with internationally recognised cybersecurity standards.

Operational and Educational Reforms:

- Shift from single-day national examinations towards **multiple examination sessions** with the option of considering the **best score**, thereby reducing infrastructure pressure and candidate stress.
- Expand **Aadhaar-linked biometric authentication**, including facial recognition and iris verification, throughout the examination process to eliminate impersonation.
- Strengthen **PARAKH** to standardise school-level assessments across boards and gradually reduce excessive dependence on a single entrance examination.
- Regulate the coaching sector through effective implementation of the **2024 Coaching Centre Guidelines** and strict action against institutions associated with organised examination fraud.

Significance of the Reforms:

Governance and Educational Impact:

- The reforms will strengthen **Good Governance** by enhancing transparency, accountability and institutional integrity in public examinations.
- Greater integration of **Artificial Intelligence, Digital Governance, Cybersecurity and Secure Digital Infrastructure** will modernise India's examination ecosystem.
- A credible examination system will protect constitutional values of **equality, fairness and meritocracy**, while restoring public confidence in recruitment and admission processes.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Constitutional and Institutional Linkages:

- **Article 14:** Equality before Law.
- **Article 16:** Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment.
- **Article 21:** Fair procedure and protection of educational opportunities.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** Governs secure processing of candidates' personal and biometric data.
- **PARAKH:** National regulator for standardised school assessment under **NCERT**.
- **STQC Directorate:** Quality certification body under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** for cybersecurity and digital systems.
- **GS Paper II:** Governance, Education, Transparency, Accountability, E-Governance and Institutional Reforms.
- **GS Paper III:** Science & Technology, Cyber Security, Artificial Intelligence, Data Protection, Internal Security and Digital Public Infrastructure.

----------********----------

Soil Conservation and Sustainable Soil Health Management Strengthen Agricultural Productivity, Climate Resilience and Food Security in India

Recent Developments:

- The **nationwide Khet Bachao Abhiyan (1–30 June 2026)** was launched by the **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare**, **ICAR** and partner institutions to promote **soil-test-based nutrient management, balanced fertiliser application, natural farming and climate-resilient agriculture** through awareness campaigns and farmer outreach programmes.
- The **Soil Health Card Portal** has been further strengthened with digital soil maps, multilingual access, automated nutrient recommendations and integration with land records to improve scientific soil management.

About Soil:

Meaning and Characteristics:

- **Soil** is a dynamic natural body consisting of **minerals, organic matter, water, air and living organisms**, formed through long-term physical, chemical and biological processes.
- Soil develops distinct **soil horizons** due to additions, removals, transfers and transformations of materials over time, forming a complete **soil profile**.
- The major soil horizons are **O (Organic), A (Topsoil), E (Eluviation), B (Subsoil), C (Parent Material)** and **R (Bedrock)**.
- Healthy soil performs essential ecosystem functions by supporting plant growth, regulating water movement, recycling nutrients, storing carbon and filtering pollutants.

Soil Diversity in India:

Major Soil Types and Distribution:

- India's diverse **climate, geology, topography and vegetation** have produced a wide variety of soils that support region-specific agricultural systems.
- The major soil groups include **Alluvial, Black (Regur), Red, Laterite, Desert, Forest & Mountain, Saline & Alkaline and Peaty & Marshy soils**.
- Soil diversity enables **crop diversification, higher agricultural resilience and efficient utilisation of regional agro-climatic conditions**, thereby strengthening national food security.

Importance of Soil:

Agricultural and Economic Importance:

- Soil forms the foundation of Indian agriculture, with nearly **59% of India's geographical area under cultivation**, while agriculture supports the livelihoods of a large share of the rural population.
- Healthy soils improve **crop productivity, nutrient-use efficiency, farm profitability and long-term agricultural sustainability**.
- Sustainable soil management directly contributes to **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-2 (Zero Hunger)** and **SDG-13 (Climate Action)**.

Ecological and Environmental Importance:

- Healthy soils function as natural reservoirs by **recharging groundwater, retaining moisture during dry periods and reducing surface runoff**, thereby strengthening water security.
- Soil serves as an important **carbon sink** by storing atmospheric carbon in the form of **Soil Organic Carbon (SOC)**, thereby mitigating climate change.
- Higher soil carbon improves **soil structure, fertility, moisture retention, nutrient availability and resilience against drought and climate variability**.
- Soil supports rich biodiversity, including **microorganisms, fungi, earthworms and beneficial insects**, which regulate nutrient cycling involving **nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur**.

Major Challenges Affecting Soil Health:

Land Degradation and Soil Erosion:

- **Water erosion** and **wind erosion** remove fertile topsoil every year, significantly reducing agricultural productivity.
- Severe water erosion is observed in the **Himalayan Region, Western Ghats and Chambal Ravines**, resulting in large-scale land degradation.

Nutrient Imbalance and Soil Degradation:

- Excessive and imbalanced use of chemical fertilisers has caused widespread deficiencies of important micronutrients such as **Zinc, Boron and Iron**.
- Faulty irrigation practices, particularly excessive canal irrigation in **Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh**, have accelerated **soil salinisation and alkalinisation** through capillary action.

Urbanisation and Pollution:

- Rapid urbanisation has exposed soils to **industrial effluents, mining wastes, excessive agrochemicals, heavy metals and plastic pollution**.
- Declining **Soil Organic Carbon** due to continuous cultivation and residue burning has reduced soil fertility and weakened climate resilience.

Major Government Initiatives:

National Missions and Soil Conservation Programmes:

- The **National Mission for Green India**, under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**, promotes afforestation and enhances natural carbon sinks, supporting India's **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**.
- The **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture** promotes climate-resilient farming through improved **soil health, water-use efficiency and resource conservation**.
- The **National Mission on Natural Farming (2024)** encourages nature-based agriculture by increasing **Soil Organic Carbon**, reducing input costs and improving climate resilience.

Soil Health and Nutrient Management:

- The **Soil Health and Fertility Scheme (2015)** promotes scientific nutrient management through **Soil Health Cards**, balanced fertiliser application and farmer capacity building.

- The **Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme** links subsidies for **Phosphatic and Potassic fertilisers** to nutrient content, encouraging balanced fertiliser use.
- **Neem-Coated Urea** improves nitrogen-use efficiency while reducing diversion of urea for non-agricultural purposes.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** in fertilisers uses **Aadhaar-enabled Point of Sale (PoS)** devices for beneficiary authentication and real-time fertiliser tracking.
- The **Integrated Fertiliser Management System (iFMS)** strengthens fertiliser logistics, monitoring and supply-chain efficiency.

Recent Digital and Technological Initiatives:

- The **Khet Bachao Abhiyan (2026)** promoted soil testing, balanced nutrient management, natural farming and climate-resilient agricultural practices through nationwide farmer awareness programmes.
- The **Nationwide Soil Resource Mapping Project** of **Soil and Land Use Survey of India (SLUSI)** prepares village-level soil maps using satellite imagery and field surveys for scientific land-use planning.
- **Agri Stack**, under the **Digital Agriculture Mission**, integrates farmer, land, crop and soil databases to provide location-specific agricultural advisories.

Role of Emerging Technologies:

Artificial Intelligence and Precision Agriculture:

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** integrates soil, weather and crop data to support scientific crop planning, nutrient management and precision farming.
- **Satellite imagery, remote sensing and geospatial technologies** enable early identification of nutrient deficiencies, moisture stress and soil degradation.
- **AI-based Krishi Decision Support System (KDSS)** improves decision-making through data-driven recommendations for irrigation, fertiliser application and crop management.
- **Agricultural robotics**, including autonomous tractors, robotic soil sampling systems and precision planting technologies developed by **ICAR-IARI** and other institutions, enhance resource-use efficiency and reduce production costs.

Way Forward:

Priority Areas for Sustainable Soil Management:

- Promote **Integrated Nutrient Management (INM)** by combining chemical fertilisers with organic manures, biofertilisers and crop residue recycling.
- Expand **soil-test-based fertiliser application**, precision agriculture and digital advisory systems across all agro-climatic regions.
- Strengthen watershed development, afforestation and conservation agriculture to minimise soil erosion and restore degraded lands.
- Enhance carbon farming, regenerative agriculture and payment mechanisms through **Carbon Credit Trading** to improve farmer income and climate resilience.
- Increase investment in soil research, geospatial monitoring and farmer awareness for long-term conservation of India's soil resources.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Concepts and Institutional Linkages:

- **Soil Organic Carbon (SOC):** A key indicator of soil health, fertility and carbon sequestration.
- **Integrated Nutrient Management (INM):** Balanced use of chemical fertilisers, organic manures and biofertilisers to sustain soil productivity.
- **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN):** India aims to restore degraded land while achieving sustainable land management under the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.
- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Includes the **National Mission for Green India** and the **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture**, both contributing to soil conservation.
- **GS Paper III Linkages:** Agriculture, Land Resources, Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management, Science & Technology and Sustainable Development.
- **Keywords: Soil Health, Soil Organic Carbon, Carbon Sequestration, Soil Health Card, Integrated Nutrient Management, Precision Agriculture, Agri Stack, Natural Farming, Land Degradation Neutrality, Climate-Smart Agriculture, Regenerative Agriculture, Soil Conservation.**

----------********----------

BitChat Takedown Rekindles Debate over Digital Privacy, National Security, Due Process and Free Speech in India

Recent Developments:

- The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)**, under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, directed **GitHub** to disable repositories hosting **BitChat**, a decentralised Bluetooth mesh messaging application developed by **Jack Dorsey**, citing concerns relating to national security, lawful interception and public order.
- The notice was issued under **Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000**, read with **Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, directing removal of three repositories within three hours.
- The action has triggered a nationwide debate on the balance between **digital privacy, freedom of speech, cybersecurity, national security and procedural safeguards** governing online content regulation.

About BitChat:

Features and Working Mechanism:

- **BitChat** is a **decentralised peer-to-peer messaging application** that operates through **Bluetooth mesh networking** without requiring internet connectivity, mobile networks or centralised servers.
- Every connected device simultaneously functions as both a **client** and a **relay node**, forwarding encrypted messages across multiple nearby devices to expand communication range.
- The application does not require **phone numbers, user registration or centralised data storage**, making communication resistant to network disruptions and server failures.
- The platform remains operational during **internet shutdowns, natural disasters, emergency situations and low-connectivity environments**, thereby improving communication resilience.

Government's Concerns Regarding BitChat:

Security and Law Enforcement Challenges:

- The Government argues that anonymous and decentralised communication significantly limits **lawful interception, attribution and criminal investigation** capabilities.
- Authorities have expressed concern that such platforms may facilitate **organised crime, terrorism, violent protests, misinformation campaigns, radicalisation and activities affecting national sovereignty and public order**.
- The Government also considers decentralised mesh communication capable of bypassing conventional internet restrictions and surveillance mechanisms during emergency situations.

Legal Framework Governing the Takedown:

Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000:

- **Section 79** provides **safe harbour protection** to intermediaries for third-party content, subject to compliance with statutory obligations.
- Under **Section 79(3)(b)**, an intermediary loses safe harbour protection if it fails to remove unlawful content after receiving actual knowledge through a court order or lawful government notification.
- The present order invoked this provision together with **Rule 3(1)(d)** of the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**.

Section 69A and Blocking Rules, 2009:

- **Section 69A** specifically empowers the Government to block public access to online information in the interests of **sovereignty, integrity, defence, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order**.
- The **Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009** require **recorded reasons, opportunity of hearing and periodic review**, providing greater procedural safeguards than Section 79-based takedown notices.
- The distinction between intermediary liability and statutory blocking powers has emerged as a central issue in the present controversy.

Important Judicial Pronouncements:

Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):

- The Supreme Court declared **Section 66A** of the Information Technology Act unconstitutional for violating **freedom of speech and expression**.
- The Court clarified that intermediaries are required to remove online content only upon receiving **court orders or lawful government directions issued through due process**.
- The judgment recognised that online expression enjoys the same constitutional protection as offline speech and warned against arbitrary restrictions producing a **chilling effect**.

Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020):

- The Supreme Court held that restrictions on internet access must satisfy the doctrine of **proportionality** and remain **necessary, reasonable and temporary**.

- The Court emphasised that restrictions should be proportionate with respect to **territorial scope, duration, urgency and legitimate public purpose**, while remaining subject to periodic review.

Criticism of the Takedown Order:

Procedural and Constitutional Concerns:

- Critics argue that the order relies primarily on the **potential misuse of the technology** rather than identifying any specific unlawful content contained in the repositories.
- Digital rights organisations contend that restricting an entire communication platform merely because it could potentially be misused raises concerns regarding **due process, proportionality and freedom of expression**.
- Questions have also been raised regarding the use of **Section 79(3)(b)** instead of the more procedurally robust **Section 69A** mechanism.

Significance of the Issue:

Governance and Cybersecurity Dimensions:

- The controversy highlights the growing governance challenge of regulating **decentralised digital technologies** that operate beyond conventional communication infrastructure.
- It reflects the increasing tension between **individual privacy, encrypted communications and legitimate national security requirements**.
- The issue also demonstrates the need for clear legal standards governing **digital platforms, intermediary liability, open-source software and emerging communication technologies**.

Constitutional and Technological Significance:

- The matter directly involves balancing **Article 19(1)(a)** guaranteeing freedom of speech with the **reasonable restrictions** permitted under **Article 19(2)**.
- It also raises broader concerns regarding **digital rights, technological innovation, internet governance, cyber resilience and democratic accountability**.
- The emergence of decentralised communication platforms indicates that future cybersecurity regulation must increasingly address **distributed digital ecosystems** rather than conventional server-based services.

Way Forward:

Strengthening Digital Governance:

- Develop a comprehensive legal framework specifically addressing **decentralised communication technologies**, balancing innovation with national security requirements.
- Ensure greater transparency, procedural fairness and judicial oversight in content-blocking and intermediary liability decisions.
- Strengthen institutional capacity for **cyber forensics, lawful digital investigations and privacy-preserving surveillance technologies**.
- Promote international cooperation for regulating emerging digital platforms while protecting constitutional rights and technological innovation.
- Encourage periodic review of cyber laws to keep pace with developments in **distributed networks, encryption technologies and open-source software ecosystems**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Constitutional, Legal and Institutional Linkages:

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- **Article 19(2):** Reasonable Restrictions relating to sovereignty, security of the State and public order.
- **Article 21:** Protection of Life and Personal Liberty, including informational privacy as recognised in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Sections **69A**, **79** and intermediary liability framework.
- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** Due diligence obligations of intermediaries.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** National cybercrime coordination platform under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- **GS Paper II:** Fundamental Rights, Governance, Digital Governance, Judiciary and Government Policies.
- **GS Paper III:** Cyber Security, Internal Security, Science & Technology, Data Governance and Emerging Technologies.
- **Keywords: Decentralisation, Bluetooth Mesh Network, End-to-End Encryption, Intermediary Liability, Safe Harbour, Due Process, Proportionality, Digital Privacy, Internet Governance, Cyber Security, Open-Source Software, Lawful Interception.**

----------********----------

Sarnath Inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List, Reinforcing India's Global Leadership in Buddhist Heritage Conservation

Recent Developments:

- The **Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath**, located in **Uttar Pradesh**, has been inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** during the **48th Session of the World Heritage Committee**.
- With the inscription of **Sarnath**, **India now has 45 UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, placing it **6th globally** and **2nd in the Asia-Pacific region** in terms of the total number of World Heritage properties.
- The inscription recognises **Sarnath's Outstanding Universal Value** as one of the most sacred centres of **Buddhism**, highlighting its enduring spiritual, historical and archaeological significance.

Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath:

Historical and Spiritual Significance:

- **Sarnath** is regarded as one of the holiest places in **Buddhism**, where **Gautama Buddha** delivered his **First Sermon** after attaining enlightenment at **Bodhgaya**, an event known as **Dharmachakra Pravartana (Turning of the Wheel of Law)**.
- The site marks the beginning of the public dissemination of **Buddha's teachings**, laying the philosophical foundation of the Buddhist tradition and introducing the **Noble Eightfold Path** for attaining liberation from suffering.
- **Sarnath** is also recognised as the birthplace of the **Sangha**, where **Buddha** accepted his first five disciples and formally established the **Buddhist monastic order**, ensuring the organised propagation of the **Dhamma**.
- According to Buddhist tradition, **Buddha** identified **Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar** as the four principal pilgrimage centres associated with the major events of his life.

Historical Identity and Cultural Heritage:

- Ancient Buddhist literature refers to **Sarnath** by several names, including **Rishipatana**, **Ishipatana** and **Mrigadava (Deer Park)**, reflecting its long-standing religious and cultural importance.
- Archaeological excavations have yielded the celebrated **Mauryan Lion Capital**, which later became the **National Emblem of India**, along with the renowned **Dharmachakra Pravartana Buddha** image representing the classical excellence of **Gupta art**.
- These invaluable antiquities are preserved in the **Sarnath Site Museum**, established in **1904**, making it one of India's earliest site museums dedicated to archaeological conservation.

UNESCO Inscription of Sarnath:

Selection Criteria and Outstanding Universal Value:

- **Sarnath** was included in India's **Tentative List** in **1998** before being nominated for inscription on the **UNESCO World Heritage List**.
- The property was inscribed under **Criterion (iii)** for representing an exceptional testimony to a living religious tradition and under **Criterion (vi)** for its direct association with the life, teachings and spiritual legacy of **Gautama Buddha**.
- The inscription also recognises **Sarnath** as the birthplace of the **Triratna (Three Jewels)** comprising **Buddha, Dharma and Sangha**, which together form the core foundation of Buddhist philosophy and practice.
- The recognition strengthens the global acknowledgement of **Sarnath** as one of the most significant centres of Buddhist pilgrimage, learning and monastic culture.

Components of the UNESCO Property:

- The inscribed serial property includes the **Chaukhandi Stupa**, traditionally believed to mark the place where **Buddha** met his first five disciples before delivering his first sermon.
- The **Archaeological Remains of Sarnath** include the **Dhamekh Stupa**, **Dharmarajika Stupa**, **Mulagandhakuti Vihara**, **Ashokan Pillar**, ancient monasteries, shrines, temples and associated archaeological remains.
- The **Dhamekh Stupa** commemorates the exact location where **Buddha** delivered the **First Sermon**, making it the most revered monument within the complex.
- The **Dharmarajika Stupa** is regarded as one of the earliest Buddhist stupas and is traditionally believed to have been commissioned by **Emperor Ashoka** for enshrining sacred relics of **Buddha**.
- **Mulagandhakuti Vihara** is associated with **Buddha's** residence during his first **Varshavasa (Rain Retreat)** after enlightenment.
- The **Ashokan Pillar**, erected during the **3rd century BCE**, bears the famous **Lion Capital**, which was later adopted as the **National Emblem of India**, symbolising authority, peace and righteousness.
- The surviving remains collectively demonstrate **Sarnath's** continuous evolution as a major centre of **religious instruction, pilgrimage, artistic development and monastic life** for more than two thousand years.

UNESCO World Heritage Site:

Meaning and Objectives:

- A **UNESCO World Heritage Site** is a cultural or natural property recognised for possessing **Outstanding Universal Value**, requiring protection for the benefit of present and future generations under an international legal framework.

- Such recognition promotes international cooperation for conservation while preserving humanity's shared cultural and natural heritage.

World Heritage Convention, 1972:

- The **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage**, adopted in **1972**, provides the international framework for identifying, conserving and protecting World Heritage properties.
- The **World Heritage Committee** administers the inscription process through the **World Heritage Programme**, evaluates nominations and monitors the conservation status of listed properties.
- **India** ratified the Convention in **1977**, enabling its cultural and natural heritage to be nominated under the Convention's provisions.
- The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** functions as the nodal agency for preparing nominations, coordinating conservation efforts and managing UNESCO World Heritage matters within India.
- A property must first be included in the country's **Tentative List**, and each State Party may ordinarily nominate **one property annually** for consideration by the **World Heritage Committee**.

Categories of UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

Classification of Properties:

- **Cultural Heritage Sites** include archaeological remains, monuments, historic cities, architectural masterpieces and other cultural landscapes possessing exceptional historical significance.
- **Natural Heritage Sites** comprise outstanding geological formations, ecosystems, biodiversity-rich habitats and natural landscapes of exceptional scientific or ecological importance.
- **Mixed Heritage Sites** possess both exceptional cultural and natural values, reflecting the close relationship between human civilisation and the natural environment.

World Heritage in Danger:

- The **List of World Heritage in Danger** identifies properties facing serious threats such as **armed conflict, uncontrolled urbanisation, natural disasters, environmental degradation or inadequate conservation**, encouraging international cooperation for corrective measures.
- The **Emergency Nomination Procedure** enables rapid inscription of sites facing immediate threats requiring urgent international recognition and protection.

Significance of Sarnath's Inscription:

For India and Global Buddhist Heritage:

- The inscription enhances **India's cultural diplomacy** by reinforcing its position as the birthplace of **Buddhism** and a leading custodian of global Buddhist heritage.
- It strengthens the conservation of monuments associated with **Buddha's life**, preserving invaluable archaeological, artistic and spiritual traditions for future generations.
- International recognition is expected to promote **heritage conservation, academic research, responsible tourism and greater global awareness** of India's civilisational legacy.
- The inscription also contributes to preserving India's rich tradition of **religious pluralism, philosophical thought and cultural continuity**.

Challenges and Conservation Priorities:

- Increased international recognition may lead to **over-tourism**, placing additional pressure on fragile archaeological remains and surrounding heritage landscapes.
- Sustainable visitor management, scientific conservation, community participation and balanced tourism policies remain essential for maintaining the site's authenticity and integrity.
- Continuous archaeological research, documentation and preventive conservation are necessary to safeguard the site's Outstanding Universal Value over the long term.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts and Exam Linkages:

- **Four Principal Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites: Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar.**
- **First Sermon: Dharmachakra Pravartana** at **Sarnath**.
- **Birthplace of Sangha: Sarnath**.
- **National Emblem:** Derived from the **Lion Capital of Ashoka** discovered at **Sarnath**.
- **UNESCO Selection Criteria Applied: Criterion (iii)** and **Criterion (vi)**.
- **Nodal Agency in India: Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**.
- **Convention: Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972**.
- **Major Monuments at Sarnath: Dhamekh Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa, Chaukhandi Stupa, Mulagandhakuti Vihara and Ashokan Pillar.**
- **GS Paper I: Indian Heritage and Culture, Buddhism, Art and Architecture.**
- **GS Paper II: UNESCO, International Organisations and India's Cultural Diplomacy.**
- **Keywords: Dharmachakra Pravartana, Sangha, Triratna, Ashokan Pillar, Lion Capital, Gupta Art, World Heritage Convention, Outstanding Universal Value, Tentative List, Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Conservation, Buddhist Pilgrimage.**

----------********----------

QUESTIONS

1. Regarding the National Testing Agency (NTA) and recent examination reform measures, consider the following statements:

(1) The National Testing Agency (NTA) is a statutory body created through a specific Act of Parliament in 2017 replacing AIPMT.

(2) The proposed Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 aims to enhance monetary penalties and increase punishment for paper leaks and organized malpractice.

(3) The Union Government has established fast-track courts specifically to ensure speedy prosecution of examination-related offences.

(4) The K. Radhakrishnan Committee was constituted following controversies surrounding national entrance examinations to suggest systemic testing reforms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1, 2, and 3 only

(B) 2, 3, and 4 only

(C) 1, 3, and 4 only

(D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

2. Regarding the judicial and procedural provisions in the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, consider the following statements:

(1) State and UT governments are mandated to designate Courts of Session as Special Fast-Track Courts to hear exam fraud cases on a day-to-day basis.

(2) Ongoing cases under the 2024 Act will remain in standard magistrate courts until judgment before being transferred to Fast-Track Courts.

(3) Trials in the designated Fast-Track Courts must be concluded within three months of the chargesheet being filed.

(4) Any appeal against judgments or bail orders must be filed within 30 days and heard by a single-judge bench of the High Court.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 1, 2, and 3 only

(C) 2 and 4 only

(D) 1, 3, and 4 only

3. Consider the following essential plant nutrients:

(1) Zinc

(2) Boron

(3) Iron

(4) Titanium

(5) Platinum

How many of the above elements are classified as critical soil micro-nutrients that suffer widespread depletion due to unbalanced NPK chemical fertiliser overuse in India?

(A) Only two

(B) Only three

(C) Only four

(D) All five

4. Consider the following statements regarding the legal architecture of intermediary "Safe Harbour" in India:

Statement-I: An internet intermediary is legally immune from third-party liability for user-generated content hosted on its platform under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000.

Statement-II: Safe harbour protection is conditional and can be withdrawn if the intermediary fails to expeditiously remove or disable access to unlawful content upon receiving actual knowledge via court or government order.

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

(A) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct, and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I.

(B) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct, but Statement-II is NOT the correct explanation for Statement-I.

(C) Statement-I is correct, but Statement-II is incorrect.

(D) Statement-I is incorrect, but Statement-II is correct.

5. Consider the following statements regarding the Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath:

(1) Sarnath was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List during the 48th Session of the World Heritage Committee held in Busan, Republic of Korea.

(2) With the inscription of Sarnath, India now ranks 4th globally in terms of the total number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

(3) The UNESCO-inscribed serial property of Sarnath includes both Chaukhandi Stupa and the Archaeological Remains of Sarnath.

(4) Sarnath was nominated and accepted exclusively under UNESCO Criterion (i) and Criterion (iv).

(5) Sarnath was placed on India's UNESCO Tentative List in the year 1998.

(6) The National Archives of India (NAI) serves as the nodal agency for all UNESCO World Heritage matters in India.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(A) Only three

(B) Only four

(C) Only five

(D) All six

ANSWER KEY

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

OAS HUB

Best Institute for OAS/IAS

DAILY CHRONICLE CURRENT AFFAIRS

In today's fast-changing world, staying updated with current affairs is essential for both academic success and professional growth. Awareness of national and international events not only broadens general knowledge but also sharpens critical and analytical thinking skills. It enables individuals to form well-informed opinions, which are crucial for competitive examinations, group discussions, interviews, and impactful essay writing.

Being well-informed reflects adaptability, awareness, and intellectual curiosity—qualities that are highly valued in a competitive environment. A strong grasp of contemporary issues enhances confidence, widens perspective, and prepares individuals to tackle real-world challenges effectively, ultimately opening the door to better opportunities and long-term personal and career advancement.

oashub19

oashub19

OASHUB22

oashub19@gmail.com

M5/17, Acharya Vihar Bhubaneswar 751022