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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Crude Language, Obscenity and Freedom of Speech: Judicial Interpretation of Criminal Liability under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

Recent Developments:

- Noida Police registered a **Zero FIR** against **Ruchika Singh** over allegedly objectionable remarks made against the Prime Minister during a protest at **Jantar Mantar, Delhi**.
- The complaint invoked **Sections 352, 353(1) and 356(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**, relating to **intentional insult, public mischief and defamation**.
- As the alleged incident occurred in **Delhi**, the **Zero FIR** was transferred to the **Delhi Police** for investigation in accordance with jurisdictional procedure.
- The case has revived debate on the constitutional limits of **free speech**, the distinction between **obscurity and profanity**, and the threshold for criminal liability in India.

Constitutional and Legal Framework:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 19(1)(a)** guarantees the **Fundamental Right to freedom of speech and expression**.
- **Article 19(2)** permits the State to impose **reasonable restrictions** in the interests of **public order, decency, morality, defamation, contempt of court, sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, incitement to an offence, and friendly relations with foreign States**.
- **Freedom of expression** is therefore **not absolute**, and criminal liability arises only when statutory conditions are satisfied.

Relevant Provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):

- **Section 296**, corresponding to **Section 294 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, penalises **obscene acts or words in or near a public place causing annoyance to others**.
- **Section 352** requires proof that the accused **intentionally insulted another person with knowledge that such insult was likely to provoke a breach of public peace**.
- **Section 353(1)** addresses **public mischief**, requiring conduct capable of **inciting offences, disturbing public order or creating public disorder**.
- **Section 356(1)** deals with **criminal defamation**, while preserving recognised exceptions such as **good-faith comments on the public conduct of public servants and public figures**.
- **Section 296** was **not invoked** in the present case, indicating that the investigation is centred on allegations beyond obscenity.

Evolution of the Judicial Test for Obscenity:

Hicklin Test, 1868 (English Law):

- The **Hicklin Test** assessed whether isolated portions of a publication had the tendency to **deprave or corrupt vulnerable minds**.
- The approach focused on **selected passages** rather than evaluating the work in its entirety.

Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra (1965):

- The **Supreme Court** adopted the **Hicklin Test** while upholding restrictions on the publication of **Lady Chatterley's Lover**.
- The judgment reflected a conservative approach to obscenity based on the prevailing standards of the period.

Director General, Doordarshan v. Anand Patwardhan (2006):

- The Court ruled that a work must be **evaluated as a whole** rather than through isolated extracts.
- The judgment shifted judicial emphasis towards the perspective of an **ordinary, reasonable viewer** rather than exceptionally sensitive individuals.

Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal (2014):

- The **Supreme Court** abandoned the **Hicklin Test** and adopted the **Community Standards Test**.
- The Court held that material becomes obscene only when, judged by **contemporary community standards**, it is **lascivious**, appeals to **prurient interests**, or tends to **deprave and corrupt** persons exposed to it.
- The judgment strengthened constitutional protection for **artistic, journalistic and expressive freedom**.

Judicial Distinction Between Obscenity and Profanity:***Principle Established by the Supreme Court:***

- **Profanity, abusive language or vulgar expressions** do not automatically amount to **legal obscenity**.
- Criminal obscenity requires a **clear sexual element**, including **lasciviousness**, **prurient appeal**, or a tendency to **corrupt moral standards**.
- Language that merely causes **anger, disgust or offence** does not satisfy the statutory test of obscenity.

Important Judicial Decisions:

- **College Romance Case (2024):** The Court quashed criminal proceedings by holding that **swear words reflecting frustration or anger are not inherently obscene**.
- **Sivakumar v. State (2026):** The Court held that insulting language used during a quarrel did not constitute obscenity because it lacked any **sexual or lascivious character**.
- **Mani v. State (2026):** The Supreme Court reaffirmed that **obscenity is distinct from vulgarity, abuse or profanity**, and emphasised that criminal liability arises only where statutory ingredients are fully established.

Legal Significance of the Present Case:***Threshold under Section 352, BNS:***

- Mere hurt sentiments are insufficient for conviction.
- The prosecution must establish **intent or knowledge** that the insult was likely to provoke a breach of **public peace**.

Threshold under Section 353(1), BNS:

- Liability depends upon evidence that the speech **incited public disorder, offences against the State or communal hostility**.
- Mere criticism of political leaders, without incitement, ordinarily falls below this threshold.

Threshold under Section 356(1), BNS:

- Criminal defamation requires satisfaction of statutory ingredients and remains subject to recognised legal exceptions.
- **Good-faith comments concerning the public conduct of public officials** continue to receive statutory protection.

Importance of Zero FIR:

- A **Zero FIR** enables immediate registration of a cognisable offence **without regard to territorial jurisdiction**.
- The case is subsequently transferred to the police station having **territorial jurisdiction** for investigation.

Constitutional Issues for Governance:***Balancing Competing Constitutional Values:***

- **Freedom of speech** must coexist with **public order, dignity and reputation**.
- Criminal law should be invoked only where statutory thresholds are demonstrably met.
- Excessive criminalisation of political speech may produce a **chilling effect** on democratic participation.
- Judicial interpretation seeks to maintain equilibrium between **individual liberty** and **legitimate State interests**.

Challenges:***Legal and Institutional Concerns:***

- **Community standards** remain dynamic and may vary across regions and social groups.
- Broad or subjective interpretation of penal provisions may increase the scope for misuse.
- Distinguishing **political dissent, offensive expression and criminal conduct** often requires careful judicial scrutiny.
- Investigating agencies must avoid treating **mere offensive language** as automatically constituting a criminal offence.

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Way Forward:***Strengthening Constitutional Governance:***

- Police authorities should apply statutory provisions strictly in accordance with judicial precedents.
- Investigations should focus on **intent, actual consequences and statutory ingredients**, rather than public outrage alone.
- Greater public awareness regarding **constitutional free speech and reasonable restrictions** should be promoted.
- Periodic legislative review can improve clarity in defining offences involving speech and expression.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Constitutional Articles:

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression.
- **Article 19(2):** Reasonable restrictions on free speech.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty, including the right to reputation as recognised through judicial interpretation.

Key Supreme Court Cases:

- **Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra (1965)** — Adoption of the **Hicklin Test**.
- **Director General, Doordarshan v. Anand Patwardhan (2006)** — Work must be judged as a whole.
- **Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal (2014)** — Adoption of the **Community Standards Test**.
- **Apoorva Arora v. State (2024) (College Romance)** — **Profanity is not per se obscenity**.
- **Sivakumar v. State (2026)** — Vulgar abuse without sexual content is not obscenity.
- **Mani v. State (2026)** — **Obscenity is not synonymous with vulgarity or profanity**, and obscenity requires a lascivious or prurient element.

Samudra Manthan Scheme: National Offshore Exploration Mission to Strengthen India's Energy Security and Deepwater Hydrocarbon Potential

Recent Developments:

- The **Union Cabinet** has approved the **National Offshore Exploration Scheme (NOES)**, titled **Samudra Manthan**, with a total outlay of **₹84,084 crore** for implementation up to **FY 2030-31**.
- The scheme aims to accelerate **offshore oil and natural gas exploration**, particularly in **deepwater** and **ultra-deepwater** basins, while reducing import dependence and strengthening India's long-term **energy security**.

Need for the National Offshore Exploration Scheme:

India's Energy Import Dependence:

- **India** is the **third-largest consumer of crude oil** globally and one of the largest consumers of **natural gas**.
- More than **88%** of India's **crude oil** requirement is met through imports, while nearly **50%** of **natural gas** demand depends on imported supplies.
- Domestic **oil and gas production** has remained largely stagnant, whereas mature producing fields experience an annual natural production decline of nearly **6–7%**.
- Geopolitical disruptions, particularly in **West Asia**, expose India to supply interruptions and international price volatility.
- The scheme seeks to reduce these vulnerabilities by expanding domestic **offshore hydrocarbon exploration** and increasing indigenous production.

Key Components of Samudra Manthan:

Deepwater, Ultra-Deepwater Exploratory Drilling:

- A financial allocation of **₹43,200 crore** has been provided for drilling **60 exploratory wells** in deepwater and ultra-deepwater offshore areas.
- Government assistance will cover up to **50%** of the eligible drilling expenditure or **₹675 crore per well**, whichever is lower.
- The component is designed to reduce financial risks associated with capital-intensive and uncertain offshore exploration.

Offshore Data Acquisition:

- An allocation of **₹28,534 crore** has been earmarked for large-scale acquisition, processing and interpretation of high-quality **seismic data**.
- The programme includes **scientific drilling** in frontier sedimentary basins to minimise geological uncertainty and improve exploration success rates.
- The initiative also supports a **data-driven exploration ecosystem**, enabling multiple operators to interpret geological information and accelerate discoveries.

Common Offshore Infrastructure:

- An investment of **₹10,000 crore** has been approved for developing common offshore production, processing and evacuation infrastructure.
- Shared infrastructure is expected to improve commercial viability by reducing development costs for discovered hydrocarbon fields.

Oil and Gas Manufacturing, Services Zones:

- An allocation of **₹2,000 crore** has been approved for establishing integrated manufacturing and service hubs.
- The component seeks to promote domestic manufacturing, localisation of critical offshore equipment and development of indigenous technological capabilities.

Major Objectives:

Resource Augmentation, Production Enhancement:

- The scheme aims to add more than **600 Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent (MMTOE)** to India's hydrocarbon reserves.
- Domestic hydrocarbon production is targeted to increase from nearly **62 MTOE** to around **80 MTOE annually**, subject to successful exploration outcomes.
- India's estimated hydrocarbon resource base is expected to expand from nearly **1,600 MTOE** to around **2,200 MTOE**.

Energy Security, Economic Growth:

- Annual crude oil imports may decline by nearly **₹1 lakh crore**, resulting in substantial foreign exchange savings.
- The scheme seeks to attract significant investments across the **Exploration and Production (E&P)** value chain.

- It also aims to stimulate technological innovation, employment generation and industrial growth in the upstream petroleum sector.

Priority Exploration Areas and Need for Government Support:

Priority Offshore Basins:

- The scheme prioritises exploration in frontier offshore sedimentary basins, including:
 - **Krishna-Godavari Basin.**
 - **Cauvery Basin.**
 - **Mahanadi Basin.**
 - **Andaman Offshore Region.**
- These basins possess significant untapped hydrocarbon potential but require advanced exploration technologies and large capital investments.

Need for Government Support:

- Deepwater drilling generally costs between **US\$100–250 million** per exploration well.
- Commercial production usually requires a long gestation period of nearly **5–10 years**.
- Exploration involves substantial geological uncertainty, and commercially viable discoveries cannot be guaranteed.
- Government-backed **risk-sharing** is expected to encourage greater participation by both public and private upstream companies.

Expected Benefits:

Energy Security, Strategic Gains:

- Reduced dependence on imported crude oil and natural gas.
- Greater resilience against global energy supply disruptions and international price shocks.
- Improved long-term strategic energy security.

Economic Benefits:

- Potential annual foreign exchange savings of nearly **₹1 lakh crore** through lower crude oil imports.
- Increased domestic and foreign investment across the hydrocarbon exploration value chain.
- Large-scale employment generation in exploration, offshore engineering, manufacturing and specialised petroleum services.

Industrial Development:

- Development of a domestic manufacturing ecosystem for offshore equipment and specialised services.
- Enhanced localisation of critical technologies under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** initiative.
- Reduced dependence on imported offshore exploration equipment.

Technology, Capacity Building:

- Adoption of advanced **seismic imaging, digital programme management, deepwater drilling** and reservoir evaluation technologies.

- Strengthening India's scientific, engineering and technological capabilities in offshore hydrocarbon exploration.

Challenges and Associated Reforms:

Major Challenges:

- High geological uncertainty and significant exploration failure risks.
- Extremely capital-intensive nature of offshore exploration and drilling.
- Requirement of sophisticated technology, specialised manpower and advanced offshore infrastructure.
- Environmental concerns relating to offshore drilling operations and marine ecosystems.
- Commercial viability of discovered hydrocarbon reserves remains uncertain even after successful exploration.

Expert Assessment:

- Extensive **seismic surveys** and scientific exploratory drilling can substantially reduce geological uncertainty.
- Improved geological information is expected to enhance investor confidence and encourage greater private participation.
- Incremental domestic production may reduce India's oil and gas import dependence by approximately **3–5%** over time.

Recent Government Reforms Supporting the Scheme:

- Opening nearly the entire offshore exploration acreage for hydrocarbon exploration.
- Modernisation of the legislative, regulatory and contractual framework governing upstream petroleum activities.
- Strengthening the **National Data Repository (NDR)** to improve accessibility and quality of exploration data.
- Promotion of advanced exploration technologies, digital programme management and data-driven decision-making.
- The concept of **Samudra Manthan** was first articulated by the **Prime Minister** during the **2025 Independence Day Address**, highlighting the need to unlock India's offshore energy potential through modern exploration initiatives.

Conclusion:

Strategic Significance:

- **Samudra Manthan** represents a major strategic shift towards unlocking India's offshore hydrocarbon resources through public investment, risk-sharing mechanisms, advanced technology and common infrastructure development.
- Although offshore exploration involves significant geological and commercial uncertainty, successful implementation can substantially strengthen **energy security**, reduce import dependence, promote **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, enhance domestic manufacturing capabilities and improve India's long-term energy resilience.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Organisations:

- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).
- Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH).
- Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC).
- Oil India Limited (OIL).
- National Data Repository (NDR).

Key Concepts:

- **Offshore Exploration:** Exploration of hydrocarbon resources beneath the seabed.
- **Deepwater Exploration:** Exploration in water depths generally exceeding **500 metres**.
- **Ultra-Deepwater Exploration:** Exploration conducted in water depths generally exceeding **1,500 metres**.
- **MMTOE (Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent):** Standard unit used to compare different energy resources on a common energy-equivalent basis.
- **Seismic Survey:** A geophysical technique using reflected seismic waves to identify underground hydrocarbon-bearing geological structures.

Minimum Support Price Regime: Balancing Farmer Welfare, Food Security and Long-Term Sustainability of India's Agricultural Support System

Recent Developments:

- Farmers' protests in **Madhya Pradesh** over procurement of **summer moong** at **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** ended after the State Government assured procurement of **60%** of the estimated produce, compared to the earlier **25%** procurement limit.
- The episode has revived the national debate on the long-term sustainability of the **MSP** regime, fiscal implications of large-scale procurement and the need for structural reforms in agricultural support.
- The Government continues to strengthen procurement of pulses under **PM-AASHA**, while committing to procure **Tur, Urad and Masoor** offered by registered farmers under the **Mission for Atmanirbharta in Pulses** till 2030-31.

Minimum Support Price Framework:

Meaning, Objectives:

- **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** is a pre-announced assured price at which the Government procures specified agricultural commodities from farmers to protect them against distress sales.
- The mechanism provides a price safety net during periods of bumper production, stabilises farm income and supports national **food security**.
- The **MSP** framework has gradually evolved from an instrument of price protection to a strategic tool for enhancing **self-reliance** in food and pulses.

Institutional Mechanism:

- **MSPs** are announced before every sowing season on the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- **CACP**, an attached office under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**, analyses production costs, demand-supply conditions, domestic and global prices, inter-crop price parity and likely consumer impact before recommending MSP.
- The recommendations of **CACP** are advisory, while the final decision is taken by the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**.

Coverage, Procurement Agencies:

- The Government presently announces **MSP** for **22 notified crops** and a **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)** for **sugarcane**.
- Physical procurement is undertaken through nodal agencies such as the **Food Corporation of India (FCI)**, **National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED)** and **Cotton Corporation of India (CCI)**.
- Procurement of pulses and oilseeds is implemented mainly under the **Price Support Scheme (PSS)** of **PM-AASHA** whenever market prices fall below the notified MSP.

MSP Calculation Methodology:***Cost Concepts:***

- **A2 Cost** includes all paid-out expenses incurred by farmers, including seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, irrigation, machinery, fuel and other operational inputs.
- **A2 + FL**, the present benchmark, includes **A2 Cost** along with the imputed value of unpaid **Family Labour (FL)** contributed by farm households.
- Since **2018-19**, the Government has fixed **MSP** at a minimum of **1.5 times** the all-India weighted average **A2 + FL** cost, ensuring at least **50%** return over production cost.
- **C2 Cost** includes **A2 + FL**, imputed rental value of owned land and interest on owned fixed capital, making it the most comprehensive measure of cultivation cost.

Swaminathan Commission Recommendation:

- The **National Commission on Farmers**, chaired by **Dr. M.S. Swaminathan**, recommended fixing **MSP** at least **50% above C2 Cost**.
- Farmer organisations continue to demand implementation of the **C2 + 50%** formula, whereas the Government has expressed concerns regarding fiscal sustainability, inflationary pressures and market distortions.

Why the MSP Regime is Becoming Increasingly Difficult to Sustain:***Fiscal Burden, Resource Allocation:***

- Universal procurement of all **23 MSP-supported crops** may impose an estimated fiscal burden of nearly **₹10-17 lakh crore**, limiting public investment in irrigation, agricultural research, rural infrastructure and storage facilities.

Market Distortion, Monopsony Risk:

- A legally enforceable price floor restricts transactions below **MSP**, distorts normal market price discovery and discourages private participation.
- Large-scale procurement gradually converts the Government into the dominant purchaser, creating a **monopsony** in agricultural markets.
- Repeal of the **Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020** reduced opportunities for contract farming and alternative price discovery mechanisms.

Cropping Pattern Distortion:

- Assured procurement of **rice** and **wheat** encourages monoculture while discouraging cultivation of pulses, oilseeds, millets and horticultural crops.
- Such distortions adversely affect nutritional security, import substitution and balanced agricultural development.

Ecological Concerns:

- Continued **MSP** support for water-intensive crops in semi-arid regions has accelerated groundwater depletion, soil degradation and crop residue burning.
- The prevailing procurement pattern often conflicts with climate-resilient and resource-efficient agriculture.

Limited Coverage, Regional Imbalance:

- According to the **Shanta Kumar Committee (2015)**, only about **6%** of Indian farmers benefit directly from effective **MSP** procurement.
- Benefits remain concentrated in a few surplus-producing States and relatively larger farmers, while many small and marginal farmers remain outside procurement networks.

Storage, Logistics Constraints:

- Large procurement operations create excess foodgrain stocks beyond **Public Distribution System (PDS)** and buffer stock requirements.
- Excess inventories increase storage expenditure, handling costs and post-harvest losses while imposing operational pressure on procurement agencies.

Outdated Cost Estimation:

- **MSP** calculations rely on historical production cost estimates and may not adequately capture sudden increases in fertiliser, diesel, labour and other input costs.

WTO Compliance Issues:

- Expansion of **MSP**-based procurement increases trade-distorting domestic support under the **Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)** of the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.
- Developing countries are generally subject to a **10% de minimis** ceiling for **Amber Box** support, making large procurement programmes vulnerable to international trade disputes.

Recent Digital and Institutional Reforms:

Digital Procurement Platforms:

- **e-Samridhi** and **e-Samyukti**, developed by **NAFED** and **NCCF**, facilitate online registration, slot booking and direct benefit transfer for pulse and oilseed procurement.
- The **Kapas Kisan App**, developed by **CCI**, enables cotton farmers to complete self-registration, monitor quality assessment and track payments digitally.

Strategic Shift Towards Pulse Self-Reliance:

- The Government has committed to procuring **100%** of the production offered by registered farmers for **Tur, Urad and Masoor** till **2030-31** under the **Mission for Atmanirbharta in Pulses**.
- The policy aims to reduce import dependence, strengthen domestic pulse production and improve long-term nutritional security.

Measures Required Beyond MSP:

Minimum Income Support, Market-Based Support:

- Introduce **Minimum Income Support (MIP)** through direct income transfers linked to cultivated area, supplemented by strengthened **PM-KISAN** assistance.
- Expand the **Price Deficiency Payment System (PDPS)** under **PM-AASHA** by compensating farmers for the difference between **MSP** and market price without large-scale physical procurement.

Market Infrastructure, Agricultural Reforms:

- Expand the **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)**, warehouses, cold chains and rural logistics to reduce post-harvest losses.
- Strengthen **e-NAM** to improve transparent price discovery and create competitive agricultural markets.

Farmer Producer Organisations, Diversification:

- Promote **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** to improve bargaining power, reduce transaction costs and strengthen market access for small farmers.
- Encourage cultivation of pulses, oilseeds and **Shree Anna (Millets)** through agro-climatic planning, targeted incentives and value-chain development.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture:

- Integrate crop diversification, micro-irrigation, precision farming, crop insurance and sustainable resource management into agricultural support policies to improve resilience against climate risks.

Conclusion:

Way Forward:

- India's agricultural support framework should gradually evolve from predominantly **price support** towards a comprehensive **farmer income support** architecture combining **MSP, Minimum Income Support, PM-AASHA**, crop insurance, efficient markets, modern infrastructure and climate-resilient agriculture.
- Such a balanced approach can simultaneously strengthen farmer welfare, food security, fiscal sustainability and long-term agricultural competitiveness.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Committees:

- National Commission on Farmers (M.S. Swaminathan Commission).
- Shanta Kumar Committee (2015).

Important Schemes:

- PM-AASHA.
- PM-KISAN.
- Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF).
- e-NAM.
- Mission for Atmanirbharta in Pulses.

Important Organisations:

- Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- Food Corporation of India (FCI).
- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED).
- National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF).
- Cotton Corporation of India (CCI).
- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).
- World Trade Organization (WTO).

Registration of Births and Deaths Amendment Bill, 2026: Strengthening India's Civil Registration System for Better Governance and Legal Identity

Recent Developments:

- The Lok Sabha has passed the **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026** to amend the **Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969**.
- The amendment seeks to strengthen provisions relating to **delayed registration** of births and deaths, improve verification mechanisms and ensure greater accuracy, transparency and reliability in civil registration.

- The legislation aims to encourage timely reporting of vital events while reducing fraudulent or unsupported delayed registrations through enhanced administrative and judicial oversight.

Registration of Births and Deaths Framework:

Meaning, Objectives:

- **Birth and death registration** is a mandatory legal process that provides official recognition of vital life events and establishes an individual's legal identity.
- The **Civil Registration System (CRS)** serves as India's continuous and compulsory mechanism for recording births, deaths and stillbirths across the country.
- The system supports demographic planning, evidence-based policymaking, public service delivery and preparation of reliable population statistics.
- Accurate registration strengthens governance by facilitating welfare delivery, legal documentation and demographic assessment.

Institutional Framework:

- The **Civil Registration System (CRS)** functions under the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India**, functioning under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The legal framework is governed by the **Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969**, which came into force in **1970** and was substantially amended in **2023**.
- Births and deaths are ordinarily required to be reported within **21 days** of occurrence.
- In healthcare institutions, reporting responsibility lies with the medical officer or authorised official, whereas for home events the responsibility generally rests with the head of the household or another prescribed informant.

Key Provisions of the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026:

Delayed Registration of Births and Deaths:

- Registration reported after **one year** but within **two years** may be permitted only with the approval of the **District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate** or an **Executive Magistrate** authorised by the District Magistrate.
- Registration sought after **two years** may be permitted only on the order of a **Judicial Magistrate First Class**, thereby introducing stronger judicial scrutiny for highly delayed cases.

Mandatory Verification Mechanism:

- The designated authority must verify the authenticity of the reported birth or death before granting permission for delayed registration.
- The provision seeks to minimise fraudulent claims, forged records and misuse of delayed registration for obtaining legal or financial benefits.

Administrative Significance:

- The amendment promotes timely registration while ensuring greater credibility, transparency and legal certainty in official records.
- Enhanced verification is expected to improve the overall quality of India's civil registration database.

Status of Civil Registration in India:

Progress in Registration Coverage:

- India has witnessed substantial improvement in registration coverage over the past two decades.
- Birth registration increased from nearly **56%** until **2000** to around **86.6%** in **2014**, ultimately reaching **99.1%** in **2024**.
- Death registration similarly increased from approximately **48%** until **2000** to around **72.5%** in **2014**, reaching **99.4%** in **2024**.
- In **2024**, **18 States and Union Territories** achieved **100% birth registration**, while **21 States and Union Territories** achieved **100% death registration**.

Reasons for Improved Registration:

- Greater institutional deliveries supported by government health programmes have significantly improved birth registration.
- Birth certificates have become essential for school admissions, identity documents, welfare schemes, passports and other public services.
- Expansion of health insurance coverage and improved healthcare access have increased institutional reporting of deaths.
- Death certificates are increasingly required for pensions, inheritance, insurance claims, property transfer, banking procedures and other legal transactions.
- Digital governance initiatives and reforms introduced through the **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023** have improved accessibility and efficiency of civil registration services.

Significance of an Efficient Civil Registration System:

Governance, Public Administration:

- Reliable registration data supports evidence-based policymaking by accurately measuring fertility, mortality, population growth and demographic transitions.
- High-quality civil registration enables governments to evaluate the effectiveness of health, nutrition and social welfare programmes.
- District-level demographic information strengthens decentralised planning and improves local governance.

Public Health, Disaster Management:

- Timely mortality data helps monitor disease outbreaks, seasonal mortality, environmental risks and public health emergencies.
- Reliable vital statistics strengthen epidemiological surveillance and improve disaster preparedness and health resource allocation.
- Expansion of **Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD)** can further improve disease surveillance and health planning.

Legal Identity, Citizen Services:

- Birth registration establishes legal identity and facilitates access to education, healthcare, banking, passports, voting rights and social protection schemes.
- Death registration provides legal certainty for inheritance, succession, insurance settlement and closure of financial liabilities.

International Commitments:

- Universal birth registration contributes directly to **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.9**, which seeks to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.
- Comprehensive civil registration also supports demographic monitoring required for achieving several health and development-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Challenges in the Civil Registration System:***Administrative, Regional Challenges:***

- Significant disparities continue in the completeness and quality of registration across States, districts and rural-urban regions.
- Delayed reporting reduces the accuracy, reliability and timeliness of demographic statistics.

Data Quality Issues:

- Many registered deaths are not supported by medically certified causes of death, limiting their usefulness for public health research and policymaking.
- Weak record management, incomplete verification and inconsistent reporting standards continue to affect data quality.

Governance Challenges:

- The absence of a comprehensive mechanism for recording internal migration limits evidence-based planning for urbanisation, welfare delivery and public infrastructure.
- Expansion of digital databases requires stronger safeguards relating to privacy, cybersecurity and responsible use of personal information.

Way Forward:***Strengthening Civil Registration:***

- Improve public awareness, simplify registration procedures and strengthen last-mile administrative outreach to ensure universal and timely registration.
- Expand **Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD)** coverage while improving medical reporting standards and regular data audits.
- Bridge regional disparities through capacity building, digital infrastructure development and stronger monitoring of underperforming districts.
- Integrate secure digital governance, inter-departmental data sharing and migration-related information to create a more comprehensive population database while ensuring adequate safeguards for data protection and privacy.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Important Organisations:***

- **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (ORGI).**
- **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).**
- **Civil Registration System (CRS).**

- Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD).

Important Acts:

- Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969.
- Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023.
- Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

Important Concepts:

- Civil Registration System (CRS).
- Vital Statistics.
- Legal Identity.
- Stillbirth Registration.
- Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD).

Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana: Expanding Floating Solar Energy to Strengthen India's Renewable Capacity and Energy Security

Recent Developments:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) as a Central Sector Scheme to accelerate the deployment of Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV) projects integrated with Energy Storage Systems (ESS).
- The scheme has a total financial outlay of ₹5,070 crore for implementation from FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31, with the objective of developing 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity across reservoirs and inland water bodies.
- The initiative seeks to strengthen India's renewable energy capacity, improve energy security, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support the country's long-term climate commitments.

Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY):

About, Objectives:

- PM-SSY is a Central Sector Scheme designed to promote large-scale deployment of Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV) projects integrated with Energy Storage Systems (ESS).
- The scheme aims to utilise reservoirs, lakes and other inland water bodies for clean energy generation without competing for agricultural land or human settlements.
- It seeks to diversify India's renewable energy portfolio, enhance grid reliability and promote sustainable utilisation of existing water resources.
- The programme also supports Atmanirbhar Bharat by encouraging domestic manufacturing of critical renewable energy components.

Financial Outlay, Implementation:

- The scheme provides a financial allocation of **₹5,070 crore** to establish **5,000 MW** of floating solar capacity during **FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31**.
- Implementation is based on the assessment of the **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)**, which estimates India's floating solar potential at nearly **102.18 GWp**, whereas the presently installed capacity is only around **700 MW**.
- The scheme focuses on rapid expansion of floating solar projects across suitable reservoirs and inland water bodies with high solar generation potential.

Financial Assistance:

- Developers will receive **Central Financial Assistance (CFA)** of **₹1 crore per MW** after successful commissioning of eligible floating solar projects.
- An additional **Central Financial Assistance** of up to **₹50 lakh per project** will be provided for feasibility studies, including **bathymetric surveys, hydrographic assessments** and environmental studies.
- Financial support is intended to reduce project risks and improve private sector participation in floating solar development.

Energy Storage Requirement:

- Every project must incorporate **co-located Energy Storage Systems (ESS)** with a minimum storage duration of **2 hours** to improve grid stability.
- The scheme targets the creation of nearly **10,000 MWh** of integrated energy storage capacity across all approved projects.
- Battery storage will facilitate renewable energy integration by balancing intermittent solar generation and meeting peak electricity demand.

Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV):***Meaning, Features:***

- **Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV)** refers to solar photovoltaic systems installed on floating platforms over reservoirs, lakes, dams, irrigation tanks and industrial water bodies instead of land.
- Solar panels are mounted on buoyant structures anchored securely to withstand water level variations and weather conditions.
- Floating solar technology enables large-scale renewable energy generation while conserving valuable agricultural and urban land resources.

Advantages:

- Floating solar minimises land acquisition challenges associated with conventional ground-mounted solar projects.
- Water beneath solar panels reduces module temperature through natural cooling, improving energy generation efficiency.
- Floating solar installations reduce water evaporation from reservoirs and may help limit excessive algal growth by partially shading the water surface.
- Existing transmission infrastructure associated with hydropower reservoirs can often be utilised, reducing evacuation costs.

Limitations:

- Floating solar projects generally involve nearly **25%** higher capital costs than conventional ground-mounted systems because of floating platforms, anchoring mechanisms and waterproof electrical infrastructure.
- Long-term maintenance requires specialised engineering solutions to address corrosion, water movement and extreme weather conditions.
- Environmental assessments are necessary to minimise potential impacts on aquatic ecosystems, fisheries and reservoir management.

Major Project:

- The **Omkareshwar Floating Solar Park** on the **Narmada River** in **Madhya Pradesh** is India's largest operational floating solar project with an installed capacity of **278 MW**, while future expansion is planned up to **600 MW**.

Significance of PM-SSY:***Renewable Energy, Energy Security:***

- The scheme is expected to increase India's floating solar capacity from nearly **700 MW** to around **5,700 MW**, significantly strengthening renewable energy generation.
- Increased domestic clean energy production will reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and enhance long-term energy security.
- Diversification of renewable energy sources will improve resilience against seasonal variations affecting conventional solar installations.

Climate Action, Environmental Benefits:

- The scheme is expected to reduce nearly **10 million tonnes** of **carbon dioxide (CO₂)** emissions annually.
- Greater reliance on renewable electricity supports India's commitments under the **Paris Agreement** and its objective of achieving **Net Zero emissions by 2070**.
- Expansion of clean energy contributes towards achieving the national target of **500 GW** non-fossil fuel electricity capacity by **2030**.

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Economic, Industrial Benefits:

- The programme is expected to generate nearly **16,000–17,000** full-time equivalent employment opportunities across manufacturing, construction, engineering and operations.
- Domestic manufacturing of floating structures, photovoltaic modules, batteries and associated equipment will strengthen the renewable energy supply chain.
- Increased private investment is expected to stimulate innovation and industrial development in India's clean energy sector.

Grid Stability, Technological Advancement:

- Integration of **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)** will improve grid reliability by managing fluctuations associated with renewable energy generation.
- Adoption of advanced digital monitoring, energy management systems and battery technologies will strengthen India's technological capabilities in renewable energy.

Status of Solar Energy in India:

Capacity Expansion:

- India's installed solar power capacity has increased from nearly **3 GW** in **2014** to around **129 GW** in **2025**, making it one of the world's fastest-growing solar energy markets.
- Solar energy forms a major component of India's strategy to achieve **500 GW** of non-fossil fuel electricity capacity by **2030**.

Major Initiatives:

- **PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana** promotes rooftop solar adoption by households and has facilitated nearly **24 lakh** rooftop installations up to **December 2025**.
- **PM-KUSUM** supports installation of solar pumps and decentralised solar power generation for the agricultural sector.
- The **Green Energy Corridor** programme strengthens transmission infrastructure for efficient evacuation of renewable energy.
- A **₹5,400 crore Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** scheme supports development of **30 GWh Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)** to improve renewable energy integration.
- The **Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM)** has strengthened domestic manufacturing capacity, enabling India to achieve nearly **100 GW** annual solar photovoltaic module manufacturing capability.

Global Leadership:

- India launched the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, headquartered in **Gurugram**, to promote solar energy deployment, technology cooperation and investment mobilisation among solar-rich countries located between the **Tropic of Cancer** and the **Tropic of Capricorn**.
- India continues to play a leading role in global renewable energy governance through initiatives such as **One Sun, One World, One Grid (OSOWOG)**.

Challenges:

Technical, Financial Challenges:

- Floating solar projects involve high initial capital investment and specialised engineering requirements.
- Long-term operational efficiency depends upon effective maintenance of floating platforms, anchoring systems and electrical infrastructure.
- Integration of large-scale renewable energy requires continued expansion of transmission networks and battery storage capacity.

Environmental, Regulatory Challenges:

- Improper project design may affect aquatic biodiversity, fisheries and reservoir ecology.
- Multiple regulatory approvals involving water resources, environment and electricity authorities may delay project implementation.
- Site selection must balance renewable energy generation with irrigation, drinking water supply and ecological conservation objectives.

Way Forward:

Strengthening Floating Solar Ecosystem:

- Expand floating solar deployment through improved policy support, faster environmental clearances and greater participation of State governments.
- Strengthen domestic manufacturing of floating platforms, photovoltaic modules, batteries and associated equipment under **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
- Promote research and innovation in advanced battery technologies, floating structures and digital energy management systems.
- Integrate floating solar projects with hydropower reservoirs, pumped storage facilities and smart grids to maximise renewable energy efficiency and grid stability.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Organisations:

- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE).
- Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).
- International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Important Schemes:

- Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY).
- PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana.
- PM-KUSUM.
- Green Energy Corridor.
- Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

Important Concepts:

- Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV).
- Energy Storage System (ESS).
- Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).
- Gigawatt Peak (GWp).
- Central Financial Assistance (CFA).

QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and their underlying legal thresholds as highlighted in recent free speech jurisprudence:

- (1) Section 296 BNS — Requires proof that speech or acts are lascivious and tend to arouse sexual/lustful desire.
- (2) Section 352 BNS — Demands proof of intent or knowledge that the insult will provoke an actual breach of public peace.
- (3) Section 353(1) BNS — Mandates evidence of incitement towards mutiny, enmity between communities, or offences against the State.
- (4) Section 356(1) BNS — Contains statutory exceptions safeguarding good-faith comments regarding a public figure's public conduct.

How many of the above provisions carry a legal threshold that requires proving an intent to cause public unrest or breach of peace, rather than mere annoyance or insult?

- (A) Only one
- (B) Only two
- (C) Only three
- (D) All four

2. Consider the following offshore sedimentary basins prioritised for deepwater exploration under the 'Samudra Manthan' scheme:

- (1) Mahanadi Basin
- (2) Krishna-Godavari Basin
- (3) Cauvery Basin
- (4) Andaman Offshore Region

What is the correct spatial sequence of these basins when arranged from North to South along India's eastern littoral and offshore territory?

- (A) 1 — 2 — 3 — 4
- (B) 1 — 2 — 4 — 3
- (C) 2 — 1 — 3 — 4
- (D) 4 — 1 — 2 — 3

3. Consider the following developments in India's agricultural price support policy and reforms:

- (1) Release of the Shanta Kumar Committee report highlighting that only a small fraction of farmers benefit from MSP.
- (2) Government commitment to set MSPs at a minimum of 1.5 times the A2+FL cost of production.
- (3) Recommendation by the National Commission on Farmers (M.S. Swaminathan) to fix MSP at C2 + 50%.
- (4) Setting a target to eliminate pulse imports by procuring 100% of Tur, Urad, and Masoor state production.

Which of the following represents the correct chronological sequence of these developments?

- (A) 3 — 1 — 2 — 4

- (B) 1 — 3 — 2 — 4
(C) 3 — 2 — 1 — 4
(D) 2 — 3 — 1 — 4

4. In demographic and public health administration in India, what is the primary structural function of the Civil Registration System (CRS)?

- (A) A periodic sample survey conducted every ten years to estimate inter-state migration figures.
(B) An voluntary digital registry managed by NITI Aayog for distributing social welfare subsidies.
(C) A dedicated epidemiology database reserved for tracking medically certified causes of hospital deaths.
(D) A continuous, permanent, and compulsory recording of vital events including births, deaths, and stillbirths under statutory provision.

5. With reference to Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV) technology and projects in India, consider the following statements:

- (1) Floating solar projects cost around 25% more than ground-mounted solar plants due to specialized platforms, anchoring systems, and waterproof infrastructure.
(2) FSPV systems offer a land-neutral technology solution, mitigating land acquisition constraints associated with ground-mounted projects.
(3) The Omkareshwar Floating Solar Park on the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh is currently India's largest operational ground-mounted solar park.
(4) Globally, Europe accounts for nearly 90% of total floating solar installations.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 2 and 3
(B) 1, 3, and 4
(C) 1 and 2
(D) 2, 3, and 4

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ANSWER KEY

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



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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.

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