



OAS HUB



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...



Friday, August 14, 2026



TABLE OF CONTENT

- **Zaskar Glaciers Are Slowing and Thinning, Raising Long-Term Water Security Risks Across the Upper Indus Basin:** *Climate Change / Himalayan Glaciers / Water Security / Indus Basin / Cryosphere (GS-I, GS-III)*
- **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989: Proposed Reforms Seek Stronger Victim Protection, Tribal Livelihood Security and Institutional Implementation:** *Social Justice / Scheduled Castes and Tribes / Atrocities Prevention / Tribal Livelihoods / Institutional Mechanisms (GS-II)*
- **India Expands Cultural Diplomacy Through 98 Cultural Exchange Programmes to Strengthen Soft Power and Global Engagement:** *Cultural Diplomacy / Soft Power / International Relations / Cultural Exchange / India's Global Engagement (GS-II)*
- **India Emerges as World's Leading Ship Recycling Nation in 2025, Advancing Circular Economy and Sustainable Maritime Development:** *Ship Recycling / Circular Economy / Blue Economy / Sustainable Development / Maritime Sector (GS-III)*
- **India's LPG Supply Chain Shifts Toward the United States Amid Strait of Hormuz Disruptions and Energy Security Concerns:** *Energy Security / LPG Supply Chain / Strait of Hormuz / Energy Geopolitics / Import Diversification (GS-II, GS-III)*

IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Zaskar Glaciers Are Slowing and Thinning, Raising Long-Term Water Security Risks Across the Upper Indus Basin:

Recent Developments:

New Study on Zaskar Glaciers:

- A 2026 study published in *The Cryosphere* analysed the long-term changes in **surface velocity and elevation** of 12 glaciers in the **Zaskar Basin of Ladakh** during **1992–2023**.
- The study found a statistically significant **region-wide decline in glacier flow velocity**, with an average deceleration of **2.43 m per year per decade**, indicating sustained dynamical changes in the Zaskar glaciers.
- The mean central-flowline velocity of the studied glaciers declined from approximately **31.1 m/year in 1992 to 26.2 m/year in 2023**, representing an overall reduction of about **16%**.
- Glacier thinning accelerated substantially, increasing from approximately **0.22 m/year during 2000–2005 to 0.57 m/year during 2015–2020**, with the strongest thinning and velocity reductions occurring at lower elevations.
- The study links the slowdown primarily to **ice mass loss and thinning**, because thinner glaciers experience reduced **driving stress**, thereby weakening their ability to transport ice downslope from accumulation areas.

Significance for India:

- The findings are important because the **Zaskar Basin forms part of the Upper Indus system**, where changes in glacier mass and seasonal melt can influence downstream water availability.
- The study highlights that glacier change is not limited to visible **retreat of the terminus**; changes in **ice thickness and flow dynamics** can provide an important indicator of long-term glacier health.
- India's broader monitoring efforts have also identified **accelerated and heterogeneous mass loss** across Himalayan glaciers, with the mean retreat rate of Hindu Kush Himalayan glaciers estimated at **14.9 ± 15.1 m/year** in government-reported assessments.

Understanding the Zaskar Glacier System:

Zaskar Basin:

- The **Zaskar Basin** lies in the **Western Himalaya of Ladakh** and has a **cold-arid to high-altitude desert climate**, with relatively weak penetration of the Indian Summer Monsoon and substantial winter precipitation associated with western disturbances.
- Its glaciers are therefore influenced by a combination of **temperature change, snowfall variability, winter precipitation, debris cover, topography, glacier geometry and terminus conditions**.
- Zaskar is hydrologically important because glacier and snowmelt contribute to river systems that ultimately connect with the **Indus drainage system**.

Important Geographical Features:

- **Pensi La Pass:** Located at roughly **4,400 m**, Pensi La is an important high-altitude pass connecting the Zaskar region with the Suru Valley and Kargil.

- **Drang-Drung Glacier:** It is one of the major glaciers of the Zaskar region and is associated with the headwaters of the **Stod/Doda River**; the 2026 study identifies Drang-Drung as the fastest-flowing glacier among its selected glaciers, with a mean flow velocity of about **57.9 m/year** over the study period.
- **Doda/Stod River:** The river originates in the **Drang-Drung glacier region** and flows through the Zaskar Valley before joining the broader Zaskar river system.
- **Zaskar River:** The **Doda/Stod and Lungnak rivers** converge near Padum to form the Zaskar River, which subsequently joins the **Indus River near Nimmu**.
- **Chadar Trek:** The winter freezing of portions of the **Zaskar River** historically enabled seasonal movement through the valley, demonstrating the close relationship between the region's cryosphere and human mobility.

Key Findings of the Zaskar Glacier Study:

Glacier Flow Is Decelerating:

- The 12 studied glaciers experienced a statistically significant average velocity decline of **2.43 m/year per decade** between **1992 and 2023**.
- The decline was stronger at lower elevations, where glaciers below **5,000 m** showed an estimated velocity reduction of **4.6 m/year per decade**, compared with **1.7 m/year per decade** above 5,000 m.
- The **5,000 m threshold** used in the study is an analytical elevation division and should not be interpreted as the **Equilibrium Line Altitude (ELA)**.

Glacier Thinning Is Accelerating:

- Surface thinning increased from approximately **0.22 m/year** during **2000–2005** to **0.57 m/year** during **2015–2020**, indicating a substantial acceleration in ice loss.
- The spatial correspondence between **thinning and velocity decline** supports the conclusion that glacier mass loss is a major control on the observed reduction in ice flow.
- Thinning reduces the **gravitational driving stress** that enables glacier ice to flow downslope, thereby weakening the glacier's capacity to replenish lower-elevation ice through internal movement.

Glacier Response Is Spatially Heterogeneous:

- Individual glaciers do not respond identically to climate forcing because their behaviour depends on **geometry, topography, debris cover and terminus type**.
- **Lake-terminating glaciers** can display locally different velocity behaviour near their termini because interaction with proglacial lakes can modify ice dynamics.
- Therefore, regional glacier assessments should avoid treating all Himalayan glaciers as a single uniform system.

Why Glacier Velocity Matters:

Glacier Flow as an Indicator:

- Glacier velocity represents the movement of ice from **accumulation zones** towards **ablation zones** and therefore provides information about the internal dynamics of a glacier.
- A reduction in velocity can indicate changes in **ice thickness, mass balance, surface slope or basal conditions**, although velocity alone cannot establish the exact cause.
- The Zaskar study is significant because it combines long-term **satellite-derived velocity observations** with glacier elevation-change data to identify the relationship between thinning and deceleration.

Climate Change–Glacier Feedback:

- **Global warming** increases glacier mass loss when melting and other forms of ablation exceed accumulation.
- Persistent mass loss reduces **ice thickness**, which can reduce gravitational driving stress and subsequently slow glacier flow.
- Reduced flow can alter the redistribution of ice within the glacier, potentially accelerating the long-term depletion of stored ice in vulnerable lower-elevation sections.

Implications for the Upper Indus Basin:

Glacier Melt and Water Availability:

- Himalayan glaciers function as **natural water-storage systems**, releasing water seasonally and contributing to river discharge during periods when precipitation is relatively limited.
- The Department of Science and Technology notes that Himalayan glacier changes can affect **long-term lean-season river flows, water availability and hydropower generation**.
- Persistent glacier mass loss therefore represents not merely a cryospheric issue but a **water-security, agricultural, energy and ecological concern**.

The Peak Water Concept:

- **Peak water** refers to the stage at which glacier meltwater contribution to river runoff reaches a maximum before declining as the glacier loses a substantial portion of its stored ice.
- Initially, accelerated melting can increase runoff from a shrinking glacier, but continued ice loss eventually reduces the amount of ice available for future meltwater generation.
- The concept is particularly relevant to glacier-dependent basins because the short-term increase in runoff can mask a developing **long-term decline in natural water storage**.
- The exact timing of peak water varies by **glacier, basin, climate scenario and hydrological conditions**; therefore, a specific year such as 2028 should not be treated as a universal prediction for the entire Upper Indus Basin.

Impacts on Key Sectors:

- **Agriculture:** Reduced long-term meltwater availability can increase irrigation stress in downstream regions, particularly during dry periods.
- **Hydropower:** Changes in the timing and magnitude of glacier and snowmelt can affect seasonal inflows and hydropower planning.
- **Ecosystems:** Altered river regimes can affect aquatic ecosystems, wetlands and downstream biodiversity.
- **Communities:** Mountain communities face simultaneous risks from **water scarcity, changing seasonality and cryosphere-related hazards**.
- **Transboundary water management:** Because the Indus system crosses national boundaries, cryospheric changes can acquire wider **geopolitical and water-governance significance**.

Emerging Hazard of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods:

GLOF Risk:

- Glacier retreat and thinning can contribute to the expansion or formation of **glacial lakes**, particularly where meltwater accumulates behind unstable moraine or ice dams.

- Failure of such natural dams can produce a **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)**, generating sudden and potentially destructive downstream flooding.
- GLOF risk is therefore different from long-term water scarcity: **glacier loss can simultaneously increase short-term flood hazards and reduce long-term water-storage capacity.**

Indian Preparedness:

- The **National Glacial Lake Outburst Flood Risk Mitigation Programme (NGRMP)** was initiated under the National Disaster Management Authority for selected Himalayan States and Union Territories, including **Ladakh**, to strengthen GLOF-risk reduction.
- The **Central Water Commission (CWC)** is the nodal agency for monitoring glacial lakes and water bodies in India and monitors **902 glacial lakes and water bodies larger than 10 hectares** in the Himalayan region using remote-sensing techniques during the relevant monitoring season.

Drivers of Himalayan Glacier Change:

Climatic Drivers:

- **Rising temperatures** increase surface melting and can lengthen the ablation season.
- Changes in **winter snowfall** can reduce the accumulation required to replenish glacier mass.
- Alterations in **western disturbances and precipitation patterns** can affect the snow accumulation regime of the Western Himalaya.
- Changes in the balance between **snow accumulation and ice ablation** determine whether a glacier gains or loses mass over the long term.

Non-Climatic and Local Controls:

- **Debris cover** can have contrasting effects: thick debris can insulate underlying ice, while thin debris can enhance absorption of solar radiation and promote melting.
- **Glacier geometry and topography** influence ice thickness, slope and gravitational driving stress.
- **Terminus characteristics**, including contact with proglacial lakes, can modify local glacier dynamics.
- Consequently, regional climate change produces **heterogeneous glacier responses** rather than identical behaviour across all glaciers.

Best Institute for OAS/IAS

Black Carbon and Cryosphere:

Role of Black Carbon:

- **Black carbon** is a light-absorbing aerosol produced primarily by incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and biomass.
- When deposited on **snow and ice**, black carbon reduces surface albedo and increases absorption of solar radiation, potentially accelerating melting.
- Reducing emissions from **diesel transport, inefficient combustion, biomass burning and other high-emission sources** can therefore provide a regional climate-adaptation co-benefit for the Himalayan cryosphere.
- Recent research also highlights the importance of **absorbing aerosols and their transport towards Himalayan glacier systems**, strengthening the case for improved aerosol monitoring.

India's Institutional Response:

National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem:

- The **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)** is one of the eight missions under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.
- The mission focuses on developing scientific and institutional capacity to continuously assess the **health of the Himalayan ecosystem**, including glaciers, and to support climate adaptation and policy formulation.
- Its thematic work includes **glacier and snow monitoring, water resources, climate trends, ecosystem vulnerability, biodiversity and adaptation planning**.

Scientific Monitoring Network:

- Government-supported institutions including the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Geological Survey of India, National Institute of Hydrology, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology and other research organisations** contribute to Himalayan cryosphere research.
- NCPOR monitors representative Himalayan glaciers under the **Cryosphere and Climate programme** to understand differential glacier responses and their implications for downstream hydrology.
- DST-supported programmes have also strengthened **glaciology capacity-building**, including field-based training in Ladakh and the establishment of institutional networks for Himalayan ecosystem research.

Integrated Glacier-to-Basin Approach:

- Glacier monitoring should be integrated with **snow cover, precipitation, groundwater, river discharge, agriculture, hydropower and downstream water demand**.
- A basin-level approach is more useful than monitoring individual glaciers in isolation because changes in glacier melt interact with **seasonal snowmelt, rainfall and other components of the hydrological cycle**.
- Long-term datasets are essential because glacier dynamics involve substantial **interannual variability** and cannot be reliably assessed through short-duration observations.

Measures to Strengthen Himalayan Cryosphere Resilience:

Improve Cryosphere Monitoring:

- Expand **high-altitude automatic weather stations, glacier mass-balance measurements, ice-thickness surveys and river-discharge monitoring**.
- Combine **satellite remote sensing, digital elevation models, field observations and geospatial modelling** to improve glacier-scale and basin-scale assessments.
- Maintain long-term datasets capable of distinguishing **climate-driven trends from short-term natural variability**.

Reduce Black Carbon:

- Target major sources of **black carbon emissions**, including inefficient combustion, diesel transport and biomass burning.
- Strengthen regional monitoring because atmospheric pollutants can cross administrative and national boundaries before reaching high-altitude cryospheric environments.

Strengthen GLOF Preparedness:

- Develop comprehensive inventories of **potentially hazardous glacial lakes** and regularly update them using satellite imagery.
- Install **early warning systems** at high-risk locations and combine remote sensing with ground-based observations.
- Integrate structural interventions, controlled drainage where scientifically feasible, hazard mapping and community preparedness into GLOF management.

Promote Climate-Resilient Mountain Development:

- Promote **water-efficient agriculture, improved irrigation management, rainwater harvesting and local water-storage systems** in vulnerable mountain communities.
- Encourage locally appropriate adaptation measures such as **Ice Stupas**, which artificially store winter water as ice for gradual use during the spring agricultural season.
- Ensure that roads, hydropower projects and tourism infrastructure incorporate **glacier, landslide, avalanche and GLOF risk assessments** before construction.

Strengthen Regional Cooperation:

- Cryosphere changes in the **Hindu Kush Himalaya** have implications beyond national borders because major river systems are transboundary.
- Greater **data sharing, scientific collaboration, disaster-warning cooperation and basin-level hydrological assessment** can improve climate resilience across the wider Indus system.

UPSC Relevance:***GS Paper I – Geography:***

- **Himalayan geomorphology, glaciers, snowmelt, drainage systems, Western Disturbances, rain-shadow effect and climate-induced changes in physical geography.**
- Relationship between **glacier dynamics and river systems** in the Upper Indus Basin.

GS Paper II – Governance and International Relations:

- **Transboundary river-basin management, regional cooperation and water security in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.**
- Institutional mechanisms such as **NMSHE, NGRMP and CWC-led glacial-lake monitoring.**

GS Paper III – Environment and Disaster Management:

- **Climate change, cryosphere degradation, GLOFs, black carbon, water security, hydropower and climate-resilient infrastructure.**
- Use of **remote sensing, satellite imagery, geospatial technology and early warning systems** for environmental monitoring and disaster-risk reduction.

Essay and Ethics:

- The Zaskar case illustrates the principle that **climate change converts ecological degradation into economic, social and intergenerational risks.**

- It also demonstrates the need to balance **development, ecological security, scientific evidence and the interests of vulnerable mountain communities.**

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Conceptual Linkages:

- Climate warming → glacier mass loss → ice thinning → reduced driving stress → glacier deceleration → declining long-term ice storage → altered future water availability.
- Glacier retreat/thinning → glacial-lake expansion → GLOF risk → downstream disaster vulnerability.
- Accelerated melt → temporary increase in runoff → peak water → long-term decline in glacier-derived runoff after substantial ice depletion.
- Black carbon deposition → lower snow/ice albedo → greater solar absorption → enhanced melting.

Important Data Points:

- **12 glaciers:** Number of Zaskar glaciers analysed.
- **1992–2023:** Study period.
- **2.43 m/year per decade:** Average glacier-flow deceleration.
- **31.1 to 26.2 m/year:** Approximate decline in mean central-flowline velocity between 1992 and 2023.
- **0.22 to 0.57 m/year:** Increase in the observed thinning rate between the early and later study periods.
- **902:** Glacial lakes and water bodies currently monitored by CWC in the Himalayan region under the cited government monitoring framework.
- **NMSHE:** India's principal national mission specifically focused on sustaining the Himalayan ecosystem under the NAPCC.

Mains-Ready Conclusion:

- The Zaskar glacier study demonstrates that **cryosphere change is not merely a consequence of climate change but a direct determinant of future water, disaster and development security.** India's response therefore needs to move from isolated glacier monitoring towards **integrated glacier-to-basin management**, combining scientific observation, climate mitigation, GLOF preparedness, community adaptation and transboundary cooperation.

SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989: Proposed Reforms Seek Stronger Victim Protection, Tribal Livelihood Security and Institutional Implementation:

Recent Developments:

Central Task Force Recommendations:

- A **Central task force** headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has recommended changes to the **Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules** to strengthen implementation of the Act.

- The recommendations reportedly include **higher relief and rehabilitation amounts, counselling mechanisms, special relief and rehabilitation cells, and faster administrative processing** of atrocity cases.
- The task force submitted its recommendations to the Centre in **July 2026**, with the proposed changes focusing primarily on the **Rules framed under the Act**, rather than directly amending the parent legislation.

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes Recommendations:

- Separately, the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** has proposed amendments to the **Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**.
- The proposals emphasise protection of **tribal land, livelihoods and access to justice**, particularly where land alienation results in prolonged legal disputes.
- The Commission has also proposed safeguards against **retaliatory or counter First Information Reports** that may discourage victims or complainants from reporting atrocity cases.

Parliamentary Concerns on Implementation:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment has highlighted continuing implementation gaps involving **scholarship delays, special police stations and welfare delivery** for disadvantaged communities.
- The developments collectively indicate that the effectiveness of social-justice legislation depends not only on statutory safeguards but also on **institutional capacity, timely relief, policing, investigation, prosecution and welfare delivery**.

SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:

Constitutional and Legislative Context:

- The **Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** is a special legislation enacted to prevent atrocities against members of **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, provide relief and rehabilitation to victims, and establish specialised mechanisms for trial of such offences.
- The Act was enacted in **1989** and came into force on **30 January 1990**.
- The legislation recognises that caste- and tribe-based violence can involve not only physical harm but also **humiliation, social exclusion, dispossession, exploitation and interference with dignity and rights**.
- It therefore provides safeguards that supplement the protection available under the **general criminal justice framework**.
- The Act has subsequently been strengthened through major amendments in **2015 and 2018**.

Constitutional Foundations:

- **Article 17** abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form.
- **Article 15(4)** enables the State to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes and for **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**.
- **Article 15(5)** enables special provisions relating to admission to educational institutions for specified disadvantaged groups, including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4)** enables reservation in public employment for backward classes that are not adequately represented in State services.
- **Article 46** directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** and protect them from social injustice and exploitation.
- **Article 338** establishes the **National Commission for Scheduled Castes**, while **Article 338A** establishes the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes**.

- **Article 244** provides for administration of Scheduled Areas and tribal areas through the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules**, creating an important constitutional framework for tribal protection.

Key Features of the Act:

Atrocities Covered:

- The Act identifies specific acts as **atrocities** when committed against members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes under the circumstances prescribed by the legislation.
- These offences include forms of **physical violence, humiliation, social discrimination, dispossession, exploitation and interference with dignity and rights**.
- The legislation also addresses certain forms of **land-related dispossession and interference with property rights**, which are particularly significant for vulnerable tribal communities.

Special Courts and Prosecution:

- The Act provides for **Special Courts and Exclusive Special Courts** for speedy trial of offences under the legislation.
- It provides for **Special Public Prosecutors and Exclusive Special Public Prosecutors** to conduct cases before the designated courts.
- The Act therefore creates a specialised institutional structure intended to reduce delays in the criminal justice process.

Rights of Victims and Witnesses:

- **Section 15A** provides statutory recognition of the **rights of victims and witnesses**.
- The framework seeks to protect victims from intimidation and facilitate their participation in the criminal justice process.
- Victim protection is therefore treated as an integral component of justice rather than merely an outcome after conviction.

Relief and Rehabilitation:

- The framework provides for **relief and rehabilitation** of victims and their dependants.
- Relief may be provided in **cash or kind**, depending upon the nature of the offence and the applicable rules.
- The 2016 Rules revised the relief framework and prescribed amounts ranging from **Rs. 85,000 to Rs. 8.25 lakh**, depending upon the nature and severity of the offence.
- The framework also provides enhanced relief for specified serious offences, including **rape, gang rape and acid attacks**.

Preventive Administration:

- The Act places duties on governments and public authorities to ensure **effective implementation and prevention of atrocities**.
- **Section 4** provides punishment for specified forms of **wilful neglect of duties by public servants**.
- The law therefore combines **criminal justice, victim protection, compensation, rehabilitation and preventive administration**.

Major Amendments:

2015 Amendment:

- The **Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015** expanded and modified the statutory framework for dealing with atrocities and strengthened the rights of victims and witnesses.
- The amendment expanded the scope of specified offences and introduced additional safeguards relating to **victim rights, witness protection and institutional accountability**.
- It strengthened the framework for **Special Courts and Exclusive Special Courts** for speedy trial.
- It also strengthened provisions dealing with **wilful neglect of duties by public servants**.
- The amendment introduced additional statutory provisions relating to **presumptions in specified circumstances**, subject to the conditions prescribed by law.

2016 Rules:

- The **Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Rules, 2016** operationalised several changes associated with the amended statutory framework.
- The Rules revised the **relief and rehabilitation framework**, including the range of monetary assistance available to victims.
- The revised framework prescribed relief between **Rs. 85,000 and Rs. 8.25 lakh**, depending upon the offence and circumstances.
- The framework also sought to ensure **time-bound disbursement of relief**, with government material specifying payment within seven days in applicable circumstances.

2018 Amendment:

- The **2018 amendment** was enacted in the context of widespread concern following the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment concerning safeguards against possible misuse of the Act.
- The amendment inserted provisions clarifying that **no preliminary enquiry is required for registration of an FIR** under the Act.
- It also provided that **no prior approval is required for arrest** of a person accused under the Act, subject to the statutory framework.
- The amendment sought to prevent procedural requirements from weakening the protection intended for victims of caste- and tribe-based atrocities.
- The Supreme Court subsequently considered the constitutional validity of the amended framework in **Prathvi Raj Chauhan v. Union of India (2020)** and upheld the statutory position while recognising limited judicial safeguards in exceptional cases.

2026 Reform Proposals:

Higher Relief and Rehabilitation:

- The Central task force has proposed increasing the prescribed **relief and rehabilitation amounts** to account for inflation and rising costs.
- The existing central framework has retained the **Rs. 85,000–Rs. 8.25 lakh range** prescribed under the 2016 Rules, although actual assistance may vary where States provide additional support under their own schemes.
- The proposed revision reflects the need to ensure that statutory compensation retains meaningful purchasing power over time.

Special Relief and Rehabilitation Cells:

- The task force has proposed establishing **special relief and rehabilitation cells** in States and Union Territories.
- Such cells could improve coordination between **police, district administration, welfare departments, legal services authorities and victim-support institutions**.
- Institutional coordination is particularly important because effective rehabilitation requires more than the payment of monetary compensation.

Counselling Mechanisms:

- The proposed amendments reportedly include counselling mechanisms for **victims, their dependants and accused persons**.
- A structured counselling mechanism could support victims while also addressing the wider social and psychological consequences of atrocity-related violence.
- Such mechanisms should operate with appropriate safeguards to ensure that counselling does not become a substitute for **criminal investigation or legal accountability**.

Faster Administrative Monitoring:

- The task force has proposed that **First Information Reports and charge sheets should be forwarded to the concerned government authorities within 24 hours**.
- The objective is to strengthen **administrative monitoring, inter-departmental coordination and timely implementation of relief measures**.
- Faster transmission of case information can also improve monitoring of investigation and prosecution without replacing the statutory role of the police and courts.

NCST Proposals for Tribal Land and Livelihoods:

Protection Against Land Alienation:

- The **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** has highlighted the need to protect tribal communities whose **land has been alienated** and whose disputes remain unresolved for prolonged periods.
- Land alienation can simultaneously affect **livelihood security, cultural identity, food security and community autonomy** among tribal populations.
- Effective implementation of the Act therefore requires coordination with broader constitutional and statutory safeguards concerning **tribal land and Scheduled Areas**.

Counter FIRs:

- The Commission has proposed measures to prevent the misuse of **counter First Information Reports** against persons who report atrocity cases.
- Retaliatory complaints can create additional pressure on victims and potentially discourage the reporting of offences.
- Any such reform must maintain a balance between **protecting genuine complainants and preserving due process for accused persons**.

Livelihood-Centred Social Justice:

- The proposals underline that protection under the Act should extend beyond **criminal prosecution** to the preservation of the victim's **economic and social security**.
- For tribal communities, protection of **land, livelihood and community resources** can be as important for rehabilitation as monetary compensation.

Parliamentary Committee Concerns:

Scholarship Delays:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment examined the Ministry's action taken on recommendations concerning the **Demands for Grants for 2026–27**.
- Of the **25 recommendations**, the government accepted **14**, while the Committee did not accept the government's response on four issues and reiterated its earlier recommendations.
- A major concern involved delays in the **disbursement of scholarships** for disadvantaged students.
- The Committee observed that scholarship funds could sometimes reach beneficiaries only in the **subsequent academic year** because of delays in application verification and related procedures.
- The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment attributed the delays primarily to the time required by some States and Union Territories to **complete verification procedures**.
- The Committee remained dissatisfied because similar concerns had persisted despite repeated observations.
- The issue illustrates how administrative bottlenecks can undermine the effectiveness of **rights-based welfare schemes** even when budgetary provisions exist.

Free Coaching Income Ceiling:

- The Committee also reiterated that the Ministry should **examine the Rs. 8 lakh annual family income ceiling** applicable to its free coaching scheme for eligible **Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class students**.
- Revising the income ceiling could potentially widen access to competitive-examination preparation for economically disadvantaged students who fall outside the existing eligibility threshold.

Special Police Stations:

Implementation Gap:

- The Parliamentary Committee highlighted inadequate establishment of **special police stations** for implementing the **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955** and the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**.
- The Committee noted that only **seven States and Union Territories** had established such special police stations despite the long period since enactment of the Atrocities Act.
- This gap demonstrates the difference between **legislative intent and institutional implementation**.

Budgetary Support:

- The government informed the Committee that a proposal had been submitted to the **Expenditure Finance Committee** for enhanced budgetary support to strengthen implementation.
- The Committee recommended early consideration of the proposal so that provisions for special police stations could be incorporated into the **2026–27 to 2030–31 expenditure cycle**.

- Adequate institutional funding is essential because specialised legislation cannot achieve its objectives without sufficient **police infrastructure, trained personnel and investigative capacity**.

Key Legal and Institutional Issues:

Balancing Protection and Due Process:

- The Act is designed to provide strong protection to historically vulnerable communities against identity-based atrocities.
- At the same time, implementation must comply with **constitutional guarantees of equality, personal liberty and fair procedure**.
- The legal framework therefore requires a balance between preventing intimidation or procedural dilution of genuine complaints and protecting accused persons against arbitrary State action.

Role of the Judiciary:

- Judicial interpretation has played a significant role in determining the relationship between **victim protection and procedural safeguards** under the Act.
- The 2018 amendment responded legislatively to concerns arising from the earlier judicial approach to arrest and preliminary enquiry.
- The Supreme Court's subsequent constitutional review demonstrates the importance of maintaining **institutional balance between Parliament, executive authorities and the judiciary**.

Role of National Commissions:

- The **National Commission for Scheduled Castes** and the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** are constitutional bodies with monitoring and advisory functions relating to safeguards for their respective communities.
- Their recommendations can identify **implementation gaps, administrative failures and emerging forms of vulnerability**.
- The NCST's focus on tribal land and livelihood demonstrates that social justice must address both **criminal victimisation and structural economic vulnerability**.

Significance of the 2026 Developments:

From Law to Implementation:

- The proposed reforms demonstrate that the major challenge is increasingly shifting from **creating statutory protection to ensuring effective implementation**.
- Higher compensation can improve immediate relief, but sustainable rehabilitation also requires **livelihood restoration, legal assistance, psychological support and social reintegration**.
- Faster forwarding of FIRs and charge sheets can improve monitoring, while specialised institutional structures can strengthen accountability.

Rights-Based Social Justice:

- The developments support a **rights-based approach** in which victims are treated as rights-holders rather than merely beneficiaries of welfare schemes.
- Timely compensation, protection from retaliation, access to justice and livelihood restoration are interconnected components of meaningful social justice.

- Scholarship delays and inadequate police infrastructure demonstrate that **social justice requires delivery capacity in addition to legislative safeguards.**

Tribal Development and Inclusive Governance:

- Protection of tribal land and livelihood is closely connected with **inclusive development, constitutional safeguards and participatory governance.**
- Development projects and administrative actions affecting tribal communities should therefore incorporate appropriate **land rights, rehabilitation, consultation and livelihood considerations.**

Challenges in Effective Implementation:

Institutional Capacity:

- Many States face challenges involving **specialised police infrastructure, trained investigators, dedicated prosecutors and judicial capacity.**
- Insufficient institutional capacity can result in delays even when statutory provisions prescribe speedy procedures.

Delayed Relief:

- Delays in compensation can undermine the immediate rehabilitative purpose of the legislation.
- Administrative verification, inter-departmental coordination and procedural requirements can delay assistance to victims.

Under-Reporting and Retaliation:

- Fear of **social retaliation, economic consequences, intimidation and counter-complaints** can discourage victims from approaching law-enforcement agencies.
- Strengthening witness protection and legal assistance is therefore essential for improving access to justice.

Land and Livelihood Vulnerability:

- Tribal communities can face vulnerabilities arising from **land alienation, displacement, resource conflicts and prolonged litigation.**
- Criminal-law protection alone cannot fully address these structural causes of vulnerability.

Coordination Across Government:

- Effective implementation requires coordination between **police, district administration, prosecution, courts, social-justice departments, tribal-welfare departments and legal-services institutions.**
- Fragmented institutional responsibility can reduce the effectiveness of otherwise strong statutory provisions.

Way Forward:

Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms:

- Establish and adequately fund **special police stations, Exclusive Special Courts and dedicated prosecution mechanisms** in accordance with statutory requirements.

- Provide specialised training to police officers, prosecutors and district officials on **caste- and tribe-based crimes, victim rights and statutory procedures**.

Ensure Time-Bound Relief:

- Update relief amounts periodically to account for **inflation and changing rehabilitation costs**.
- Develop digital monitoring systems that track relief from **FIR registration to final disbursement and rehabilitation**.

Protect Victims and Witnesses:

- Strengthen **witness protection, legal aid, counselling and protection against intimidation or retaliation**.
- Ensure that mechanisms against counter-complaints do not compromise the legitimate right of an accused person to due process.

Protect Tribal Livelihoods:

- Integrate implementation of the Atrocities Act with **tribal land-protection mechanisms, forest-rights frameworks and livelihood-restoration measures** wherever relevant.
- Prioritise restoration of land and livelihood wherever dispossession forms part of the harm suffered by the victim.

Improve Welfare Delivery:

- Establish **time-bound scholarship verification and disbursement systems** to prevent benefits from being delayed into subsequent academic years.
- Strengthen digital interoperability between States, Union Territories and Central welfare platforms while maintaining appropriate safeguards for beneficiary data.

Strengthen Accountability:

- Regularly review implementation through **State and district-level monitoring committees**.
- Publish disaggregated data on **FIRs, investigation, charge sheets, trials, convictions, compensation and rehabilitation** to identify implementation gaps.
- Use outcome-based monitoring rather than relying only on the number of cases registered or funds allocated.

UPSC Relevance:***GS Paper I – Indian Society:***

- **Caste discrimination, social exclusion, tribal marginalisation, social justice and vulnerable sections of society**.
- Relationship between **identity-based discrimination and access to land, livelihood, education and public institutions**.

GS Paper II – Polity and Governance:

- **Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, constitutional commissions, social justice legislation and institutional accountability**.

- Role of **National Commission for Scheduled Castes** and **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** in monitoring constitutional safeguards.
- Relationship between **Parliamentary legislation**, executive implementation and judicial review.

GS Paper III – Internal Security and Social Stability:

- **Caste-based violence, land conflicts, tribal displacement, policing and institutional capacity.**
- Importance of effective criminal justice mechanisms for maintaining **social harmony and inclusive development.**

Essay:

- The topic can be linked with the broader theme that **constitutional equality requires both formal legal rights and effective institutional access to justice.**
- The distinction between **legislation and implementation** provides a useful framework for essays on social justice and inclusive governance.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination on specified grounds and enables special provisions for disadvantaged groups.
- **Article 17:** Abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form.
- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty and provides the broader constitutional foundation for dignity.
- **Article 46:** Directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and protect them from social injustice and exploitation.
- **Article 338:** Provides for the **National Commission for Scheduled Castes.**
- **Article 338A:** Provides for the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.**
- **Article 244:** Provides the constitutional framework for administration of Scheduled Areas and tribal areas under the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules.**

Key Legal Timeline:

- **1989:** Enactment of the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.**
- **1990:** The Act came into force on **30 January 1990.**
- **2015:** Major statutory amendment expanded offences and strengthened victim and witness protections.
- **2016:** Amendment Rules strengthened the relief and rehabilitation framework, including the **Rs. 85,000–Rs. 8.25 lakh** relief range.
- **2018:** Parliament amended the Act to restore stringent procedural provisions concerning **FIR registration and arrest.**
- **2020:** The Supreme Court in **Prathvi Raj Chauhan v. Union of India** upheld the constitutional validity of the 2018 amendments while recognising limited judicial safeguards in exceptional circumstances.
- **2026:** Proposed reforms focus on **higher relief, institutional implementation, counselling, faster administrative monitoring and tribal livelihood protection.**

Core Conceptual Framework:

- **Atrocity → FIR → Investigation → Charge Sheet → Special Court → Trial → Relief and Rehabilitation → Long-Term Livelihood Restoration**

- Effective implementation requires simultaneous attention to **prevention, policing, prosecution, victim protection, compensation, rehabilitation and social reintegration.**

Mains-Ready Conclusion:

- The **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** represents India's constitutional commitment to protecting vulnerable communities from identity-based violence and exploitation. The 2026 reform proposals indicate that the next stage of social justice requires moving beyond statutory protection towards **effective implementation, timely compensation, institutional accountability, victim-centred justice and livelihood security.** A rights-based approach must therefore combine strong legal safeguards with capable institutions, responsive administration and meaningful socio-economic rehabilitation.

India Expands Cultural Diplomacy Through 98 Cultural Exchange Programmes to Strengthen Soft Power and Global Engagement

Recent Developments:

Cultural Exchange Programmes with 98 Countries:

- The Union Minister for Culture and Tourism informed Parliament that India maintains **valid Cultural Exchange Programmes (CEPs) with 98 countries** under its broader framework of international cultural engagement.
- A **Cultural Exchange Programme** is a bilateral instrument designed to promote and strengthen cultural relations through reciprocal exchanges and institutional cooperation.
- The Ministry of Culture implements the **Global Engagement Scheme (GES)** to promote India's cultural heritage internationally, strengthen cultural ties, project India's cultural identity and encourage **inbound tourism.**

Revised Global Engagement Scheme:

- The **Global Engagement Scheme** has been revised and continued for **FY 2026–27 to 2030–31** with a total outlay of **₹299.94 crore.**
- Its four sub-schemes are **International Cultural Exchange Programme, Project Mausam, Brihattar Bharat, and Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India.**
- The revised scheme demonstrates a shift from isolated cultural events towards a more structured framework for **international cultural relations and India's soft power.**

Current Institutional Outreach:

- The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**, an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of External Affairs, supports India's cultural diplomacy through Indian Missions, Posts and Cultural Centres abroad.
- ICCR promotes **Yoga, Indian classical and folk dance, music, Indian languages, academic exchanges, scholarships and Indian Studies Chairs** abroad.
- In **2024–25**, ICCR provided **3,960 scholarship slots** to foreign nationals under 20 scholarship schemes, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

Cultural Diplomacy:

Meaning:

- **Cultural diplomacy** refers to the use of cultural exchange, arts, education, heritage, language, knowledge and people-to-people contacts to develop **mutual understanding, trust and goodwill** between countries.
- It forms an important component of **soft power**, through which a country seeks influence and attraction without relying primarily on coercion or material inducements.
- India's civilisational heritage, plural cultural traditions, **Yoga, Ayurveda, classical arts, literature, cuisine, cinema and contemporary creative industries** provide multiple instruments for cultural diplomacy.

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power:

- **Soft power**, a concept associated with Joseph Nye, refers to the ability of a country to influence others through **attraction and persuasion** rather than coercion or payment.
- Cultural diplomacy contributes to soft power by making India's society, traditions, values and creative achievements more familiar and attractive to foreign audiences.
- Cultural diplomacy complements **hard power and economic diplomacy** by creating a favourable environment for broader bilateral engagement.

India's Major Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy:

Cultural Exchange Programmes:

- **Cultural Exchange Programmes** provide an institutional framework for bilateral cultural cooperation between India and partner countries.
- They facilitate activities such as **artistic exchanges, exhibitions, academic interaction, heritage cooperation, cultural delegations and institutional partnerships**.
- CEPs are implemented through cooperation between Indian institutions and their foreign counterparts, often using diplomatic channels.

Festivals of India Abroad:

- **Festivals of India** showcase Indian culture abroad through **classical and folk dance, music, theatre, films, food, literature, exhibitions, workshops and other cultural activities**.
- These festivals aim to strengthen bilateral cultural contacts, project India's cultural image, promote Indian artists and encourage **inbound tourism**.
- They also create opportunities for people-to-people interaction beyond formal diplomatic channels.

Project Mausam:

- **Project Mausam** seeks to explore and document historical maritime connections across the **Indian Ocean region**.
- It uses shared histories of maritime routes, cultural interactions and communities to strengthen contemporary cultural linkages.
- The initiative can complement India's broader **Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean diplomacy** by highlighting long-standing civilisational connectivity.

Brihattar Bharat:

- **Brihattar Bharat** seeks to strengthen cultural and civilisational connections between India and regions historically influenced by Indian cultural interactions.
- It provides a framework for studying and promoting India's historical links with **South Asia, Southeast Asia and other connected regions**.
- Such initiatives can help convert shared historical memories into contemporary **cultural and diplomatic partnerships**.

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage:

- The GES includes a component for **Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India**.
- The component recognises that India's cultural diplomacy should include not only monuments and tangible heritage but also **living traditions, performing arts, crafts, languages and cultural practices**.

Role of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations:***Institutional Role:***

- The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations** is an important institutional instrument of India's **cultural and soft-power diplomacy** under the Ministry of External Affairs.
- ICCR operates through Indian Missions and its network of **Indian Cultural Centres abroad** to promote Indian culture and facilitate international cultural interaction.

Academic and Educational Diplomacy:

- ICCR establishes **Chairs of Indian Studies** at foreign universities to promote research and teaching on Indian civilisation, culture, languages, society, politics, economy and contemporary developments.
- ICCR scholarships bring foreign students to India for higher education and exposure to Indian society and culture.
- ICCR currently offers scholarships to foreign students through multiple schemes covering **academic disciplines, performing arts and traditional Indian knowledge systems**.
- Such educational networks create long-term **people-to-people and alumni linkages**, which can continue to influence bilateral relations after students return to their countries.

Contemporary Youth Engagement:

- ICCR has introduced initiatives such as the **ICCR Yuva Mitra Prize** to recognise foreign scholars who promote Indian culture through social media.
- Such initiatives expand cultural diplomacy from traditional institutions towards **digital platforms and younger global audiences**.

Role of Yoga and Traditional Knowledge:***Yoga Diplomacy:***

- **Yoga** has become one of India's most visible contemporary instruments of cultural diplomacy.
- The **International Day of Yoga**, observed annually on **21 June**, provides a global platform for India's traditional knowledge and wellness traditions.

- ICCR promotes Yoga internationally through Indian Missions and Cultural Centres, alongside Indian dance, music and languages.

Ayurveda and AYUSH:

- **Ayurveda and other AYUSH systems** contribute to India's cultural and knowledge diplomacy by presenting traditional Indian approaches to health and wellness.
- ICCR scholarship programmes also facilitate study in traditional Indian systems such as **Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy** for foreign students.

Role of Culture in India's Foreign Policy:

Strengthening Soft Power:

- Cultural diplomacy enhances India's **attractiveness, credibility and goodwill**, thereby strengthening the broader foundation of its foreign policy.
- A positive cultural image can facilitate dialogue in areas such as **trade, tourism, education, technology and strategic cooperation**.

Promoting People-to-People Relations:

- Cultural exchanges connect **artists, students, academics, civil society groups and ordinary citizens** across national boundaries.
- These relationships can create durable societal linkages that remain valuable even when government-to-government relations experience temporary difficulties.

Supporting Strategic Partnerships:

- Cultural cooperation can reinforce India's relations with regions such as **Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean region**.
- Shared cultural and historical connections can provide an additional layer of engagement alongside economic, strategic and diplomatic cooperation.

Supporting Tourism and Creative Economy:

- Cultural diplomacy can increase international interest in India's **heritage sites, festivals, cuisine, cinema, crafts, spiritual traditions and wellness systems**.
- Greater international cultural visibility can support **heritage tourism, medical and wellness tourism, creative industries and local livelihoods**.

Multilateral Cultural Diplomacy:

BRICS, SCO and G20:

- India has used its presidencies and participation in **BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and G20** to promote cultural cooperation alongside broader diplomatic objectives.
- During India's G20 Presidency, the Ministry of Culture organised **Culture Working Group meetings and Culture Ministers' Meeting** and associated cultural projects.
- The **Kashi Culture Pathway** advocated culture as a standalone goal in the post-2030 development agenda and was endorsed in the **New Delhi Leaders' Declaration**.

- During India's SCO Presidency, India hosted initiatives such as the **Conference on Shared Buddhist Heritage** and the SCO Culture Ministers' Meeting.

BIMSTEC and ASEAN:

- Cultural engagement with **BIMSTEC and ASEAN** can strengthen India's Act East policy by complementing connectivity, economic and strategic cooperation with civilisational linkages.
- Shared traditions of **Buddhism, Hindu traditions, maritime commerce, literature, performing arts and food cultures** provide substantial scope for people-to-people engagement.

Significance for India:

Diplomatic Significance:

- Cultural diplomacy allows India to project itself as a **civilisational state with contemporary cultural capabilities**, rather than only as an emerging economic and strategic power.
- It strengthens India's diplomatic outreach by adding **societal and cultural dimensions** to conventional state-to-state relations.

Strategic Significance:

- Cultural connections can create strategic depth in regions where India has historical and civilisational linkages.
- Shared cultural heritage can provide an additional basis for engagement in the **Indian Ocean, South Asia and Southeast Asia**.

Economic Significance:

- Cultural diplomacy can generate demand for Indian **tourism, handicrafts, cuisine, films, creative products and wellness services**.
- International exposure for Indian artists and cultural institutions can expand the country's **creative economy and cultural industries**.

Developmental Significance:

- International cultural engagement can create opportunities for **artists, craftspeople, researchers, educational institutions and cultural entrepreneurs**.
- Cultural tourism can generate local employment while creating incentives for the preservation of heritage.

Challenges:

Fragmented Institutional Coordination:

- Cultural diplomacy involves the **Ministry of Culture, Ministry of External Affairs, ICCR, Indian Missions, tourism institutions and State Governments**, creating a need for stronger coordination.
- Overlapping mandates or weak coordination can result in duplication, delays and inefficient utilisation of resources.

Resource Constraints:

- Sustained global cultural engagement requires adequate funding for **artists, exhibitions, cultural centres, digital platforms, heritage projects and international events.**
- The revised GES allocation of **₹299.94 crore for FY 2026–27 to 2030–31** provides a structured funding framework, but effective utilisation remains important.

Uneven Global Reach:

- India's cultural presence remains stronger in some regions than others, creating scope for greater engagement with **Africa, Latin America, Central Asia and smaller island states.**
- Cultural diplomacy should therefore be geographically diversified rather than concentrated in traditionally familiar partners.

Excessive Reliance on Historical Heritage:

- Focusing predominantly on ancient civilisation and classical traditions may underrepresent India's **contemporary cultural dynamism.**
- Modern Indian cinema, digital content, literature, design, gaming, fashion, cuisine and creative entrepreneurship can broaden India's appeal among younger audiences.

Measuring Soft-Power Outcomes:

- Cultural diplomacy often produces **long-term and intangible outcomes**, making its impact more difficult to measure than conventional economic or diplomatic initiatives.
- Evaluation should therefore consider indicators such as **people-to-people networks, tourism flows, educational partnerships, cultural collaborations and international perceptions.**

Way Forward:***Develop a Coordinated Cultural Diplomacy Strategy:***

- India should establish stronger coordination among the **Ministry of Culture, Ministry of External Affairs, ICCR, Indian Missions and State Governments.**
- A coordinated strategy can align cultural diplomacy with **Act East, Neighbourhood First, Indo-Pacific and Global South** priorities.

Expand Digital Cultural Diplomacy:

- India should use **digital archives, virtual exhibitions, virtual reality, online performances and multilingual educational platforms** to expand access to Indian culture.
- Digital diplomacy can reach audiences beyond the geographical limits of physical Cultural Centres and festivals.

Promote Contemporary India:

- Cultural diplomacy should combine **classical heritage with contemporary cinema, literature, music, gaming, fashion, design, cuisine and digital creativity.**
- Greater participation of young creators can make India's cultural outreach more relevant to younger global audiences.

Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships:

- **Public-Private Partnerships, corporate social responsibility and philanthropic foundations** can supplement public funding for international cultural initiatives.
- Private participation can particularly support **artist residencies, exhibitions, cultural festivals, digital projects and creative-industry exchanges.**

Deepen Regional Cultural Networks:

- India should develop joint cultural initiatives with **South Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian, African and Indian Ocean countries.**
- Joint heritage conservation, maritime research, academic exchanges and cultural festivals can transform shared heritage into contemporary diplomatic capital.

UPSC Relevance:***GS Paper I – Indian Heritage and Culture:***

- **Indian cultural heritage, performing arts, intangible cultural heritage, civilisational linkages and cultural exchanges.**
- Role of cultural institutions in preserving and projecting India's heritage globally.

GS Paper II – International Relations:

- **Soft power, cultural diplomacy, people-to-people relations, India's foreign policy and multilateral diplomacy.**
- Role of **ICCR, Cultural Exchange Programmes and Indian Missions** in India's external cultural relations.
- Cultural diplomacy as an instrument supporting **Neighbourhood First, Act East, Indo-Pacific and Global South engagement.**

GS Paper III – Indian Economy:

- Contribution of **tourism, creative industries, handicrafts, cultural enterprises and wellness sectors** to employment and economic growth.
- Potential of cultural diplomacy to expand India's **creative economy and cultural tourism.**

Essay:

- **Culture as an instrument of diplomacy** can convert civilisational heritage into contemporary international influence.
- **Soft power complements military and economic capabilities** by creating attraction, trust and long-term societal partnerships.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Key Concept – Soft Power:***

- **Soft power = Attraction + Culture + Values + Foreign Policy + People-to-People Linkages**
- India's cultural diplomacy converts its **civilisational capital** into diplomatic goodwill and international influence.

Key Institutional Distinction:

- **Ministry of Culture:** Leads major government initiatives for international cultural relations, including the **Global Engagement Scheme and Festivals of India**.
- **Ministry of External Affairs:** Provides the broader diplomatic framework through India's foreign missions and oversees ICCR.
- **ICCR:** Functions as a major institutional instrument for **cultural and educational diplomacy**, including scholarships, Indian Studies Chairs and cultural programmes abroad.

Prelims Facts:

- **Global Engagement Scheme:** Revised for FY 2026–27 to 2030–31.
- **GES Outlay:** ₹299.94 crore.
- **GES Components:** International Cultural Exchange Programme, Project Mausam, Brihattar Bharat, and Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India.
- **International Day of Yoga:** 21 June.
- **ICCR:** Autonomous organisation under the **Ministry of External Affairs**.
- **Cultural Exchange Programme:** Primarily a bilateral instrument for strengthening **cultural relations** between India and partner countries.

Mains-Ready Conclusion:

- India's cultural diplomacy represents a shift from viewing culture merely as **heritage preservation** towards using culture as a strategic instrument of **international engagement, soft power and economic opportunity**. The effectiveness of this approach will depend on sustained funding, institutional coordination, digital innovation and the ability to combine India's civilisational heritage with its contemporary creative strengths.

India Emerges as World's Leading Ship Recycling Nation in 2025, Advancing Circular Economy and Sustainable Maritime Development

Recent Developments:***India Becomes Global Leader in Ship Recycling:***

- According to the latest UNCTAD estimates, India became the **world's leading ship recycling nation in 2025**, with its global share increasing from **30.1% in 2024 to 35.4% in 2025**.
- India recycled **2.99 million gross tons (GT)** of ships in 2025, compared with **1.86 million GT in 2024**, representing an increase of nearly **60%**.
- India achieved the **Maritime India Vision 2030** target of becoming the world's leading ship recycling nation **five years ahead of schedule**.
- The growth reflects improvements in **regulatory compliance, yard infrastructure, environmental management, worker safety and international market access**.

Alang-Sosiya Strengthens India's Position:

- The **Alang-Sosiya Ship Recycling Yard in Gujarat** accounts for about **98% of India's ship recycling activity** and remains the backbone of the national ship recycling industry.
- Alang-Sosiya currently has **128 operational plots** with a recycling capacity of approximately **4.5 million LDT per annum**.
- Since its establishment in **1982-83**, Alang has recycled more than **8,900 ships**, aggregating over **71 million LDT**.
- The yard supports approximately **15,000 direct workers** and more than **1.5 lakh people indirectly** through ancillary industries and related services.

International Compliance Gains Momentum:

- The **Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships** entered into force on **26 June 2025**, establishing mandatory international requirements for safe and environmentally sound ship recycling.
- India's domestic regulatory framework has been aligned with the Convention through the **Recycling of Ships Act, 2019**, the **Recycling of Ships Rules, 2021**, and the **Recycling of Ships Regulations, 2026**.
- The **Recycling of Ships Regulations, 2026** were notified on **2 January 2026** under the Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 and apply to ship recycling facilities operating in India and Indian-registered ships within the scope specified by the Regulations.
- India and the **European Union** are also working towards greater regulatory cooperation and the inclusion of eligible Indian yards under the **EU Ship Recycling Regulation** framework.

Ship Recycling: Concept and Significance:

What Is Ship Recycling?

- **Ship recycling** is the systematic dismantling of an end-of-life vessel to recover reusable materials such as **steel, machinery, equipment and other components**.
- Ship recycling converts obsolete vessels into secondary raw materials and therefore contributes to the **circular economy**.
- Responsible recycling also requires the safe identification, removal, treatment and disposal of **hazardous materials** present on ships.
- Hazardous substances may include **asbestos, heavy metals, hydrocarbons and ozone-depleting substances**, creating occupational and environmental risks if they are poorly managed.

Why Is Ship Recycling Important for India?

- Ship recycling supports **resource security** by recovering large quantities of steel and other materials without requiring equivalent quantities of virgin resource extraction.
- The industry generates **employment, industrial activity and ancillary economic opportunities** in coastal regions.
- Recycling ships reduces the environmental burden associated with extracting and processing new raw materials and therefore supports **resource efficiency and circularity**.
- A globally competitive recycling industry can strengthen India's position in the **maritime value chain**.

India's Ship Recycling Ecosystem:

Alang-Sosiya Ship Recycling Cluster:

- The **Alang-Sosiya cluster in Gujarat** is India's principal ship recycling hub and accounts for approximately **98% of national ship recycling activity**.
- The cluster combines **ship recycling yards, steel re-rolling mills, waste-management facilities, transport networks and other ancillary services**.
- Alang has therefore developed from a ship-breaking location into an increasingly integrated **ship recycling ecosystem**.
- The cluster promotes the recovery and reuse of steel and other materials, supporting **circular economy objectives** and reducing resource consumption.

Steel Recovery and Resource Efficiency:

- Ship recycling enables substantial recovery of **steel and other reusable materials**, reducing dependence on fresh extraction of natural resources.
- Recovered steel can enter downstream manufacturing through **steel re-rolling and allied industrial activities**.
- This creates a link between **maritime infrastructure, secondary raw materials and manufacturing**, strengthening industrial resource efficiency.

Worker Safety and Welfare:

- Modernisation of recycling yards has increasingly incorporated **engineered plots, impermeable surfaces, drainage systems, mechanised handling, hazardous-waste storage and structured safety systems**.
- Worker welfare measures include **occupational safety training, healthcare facilities, emergency preparedness and improved working conditions**.
- Such measures are particularly important because ship recycling can expose workers to **toxic substances, heavy machinery, fire hazards and structural risks**.

Regulatory and Institutional Framework:

Recycling of Ships Act, 2019:

Best Institute for OAS/IAS

- The **Recycling of Ships Act, 2019** provides the principal statutory framework for regulating ship recycling in India.
- The Act establishes requirements relating to **authorisation, certification, inspection, hazardous-material management and enforcement**.
- The **Directorate General of Shipping** functions as the National Authority for implementing the regulatory framework.

Recycling of Ships Rules, 2021:

- The **Recycling of Ships Rules, 2021** operationalise the statutory framework by prescribing requirements for **ship recycling facilities, ship recycling plans, hazardous materials, worker safety, training and reporting**.
- The Rules provide an implementation framework for translating the objectives of the 2019 Act into operational requirements.

Recycling of Ships Regulations, 2026:

- The **Recycling of Ships Regulations, 2026** provide more detailed requirements for the operation of ship recycling facilities and strengthen **environmental, occupational-safety and compliance standards**.
- The Regulations strengthen India's domestic implementation of internationally recognised standards under the **Hong Kong Convention**.

Hong Kong Convention:

About the Convention:

- The **Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009** was adopted under the framework of the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**.
- The Convention was adopted on **15 May 2009** and entered into force on **26 June 2025**.
- Its principal objective is to ensure that ships are recycled without creating unnecessary risks to **human health, worker safety or the environment**.
- The Convention addresses the entire recycling chain through requirements concerning **ship design, construction, operation, preparation, recycling facilities, authorisation, certification, inspection and reporting**.

Conditions for Entry into Force:

- The Convention required at least **15 States**, representing at least **40% of world merchant shipping by gross tonnage**, along with sufficient ship recycling capacity before entering into force.
- These conditions were fulfilled in **June 2023**, allowing the Convention to enter into force 24 months later on **26 June 2025**.

Importance for India:

- The Convention creates a more uniform global regulatory environment for ship recycling and can improve the competitiveness of compliant Indian yards.
- Compliance helps Indian facilities gain access to international markets and improves their prospects for recognition under regulatory regimes such as that of the **European Union**.
- India's compliance is particularly significant because India is one of the world's major ship recycling countries.

Inventory of Hazardous Materials:

Purpose of IHM:

- The **Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM)** identifies hazardous substances present on a ship before the vessel reaches the recycling stage.
- It improves **traceability, transparency and risk management** throughout the ship's operational and recycling lifecycle.
- IHM is particularly important for substances such as **asbestos, heavy metals, hydrocarbons and ozone-depleting substances**, which can harm workers and ecosystems if improperly handled.
- Proper identification enables recycling facilities to prepare vessel-specific procedures for **safe removal, storage, treatment and disposal**.

Ship Recycling and Circular Economy:

Contribution to Circular Economy:

- Ship recycling converts an end-of-life vessel into a source of **secondary raw materials**, thereby reducing waste and improving resource productivity.
- Recovery of steel and other materials reduces the requirement for **virgin raw materials** and can lower the environmental footprint of industrial production.
- The industry demonstrates how **waste management, manufacturing and maritime infrastructure** can be integrated within a circular economic model.

Resource Security:

- India's large-scale ship recycling capacity provides a domestic source of **recovered steel and other materials**.
- Greater use of secondary materials can reduce pressure on natural resources and strengthen **industrial resilience**.
- Ship recycling can therefore contribute simultaneously to **resource security, employment, industrial development and environmental sustainability**.

Policy Measures Supporting the Sector:

Maritime India Vision 2030:

- **Maritime India Vision 2030** identified ship recycling as an important component of India's maritime development strategy.
- India has already achieved the target of becoming the **world's leading ship recycling nation**, five years ahead of the original 2030 timeline.
- Future priorities include increasing capacity, improving global compliance and strengthening India's position as a **safe and environmentally sustainable ship recycling hub**.

Ship-Breaking Credit Note Scheme:

- The **Ship-Breaking Credit Note Scheme** under the **Ship Building Financial Assistance Scheme 2.0** seeks to connect ship recycling with domestic shipbuilding.
- The scheme provides a **credit note equivalent to 40% of the recycled vessel's scrap value**, subject to the applicable conditions.
- The credit note can be used towards the purchase of a new vessel built in India, with its utilisation capped at **5% of the value of the new Indian-built vessel**.
- The policy creates a linkage between **ship recycling and shipbuilding**, encouraging a more integrated domestic maritime industrial ecosystem.

Yard Modernisation:

- Government support has encouraged Indian recycling yards to upgrade **infrastructure, environmental management systems and occupational-safety arrangements**.
- Modernisation has supported compliance with the **Hong Kong Convention** and improved the prospects of Indian yards in international markets.
- Periodic and unannounced inspections are also used to strengthen **environmental compliance, worker safety and operational transparency**.

India–European Union Cooperation:

EU Recognition:

- India is working with the **European Union** to facilitate the recognition of eligible Indian ship recycling facilities under the **EU Ship Recycling Regulation**.
- More than **30 Indian ship recycling yards** had applied for EU recognition by July 2026, while several facilities were undergoing compliance and approval processes.
- EU recognition is strategically important because it can improve access to vessels subject to European regulatory requirements and strengthen India's position in the global recycling market.

Significance:

- EU recognition can create incentives for Indian yards to maintain higher **environmental, labour and safety standards**.
- Greater regulatory interoperability can improve India's integration with global maritime supply chains.
- International recognition can also help shift India's ship recycling industry from a traditional **ship-breaking model towards responsible ship recycling**.

Ex-INS Viraat: Case Study:

Background:

- **INS Viraat** was one of the world's longest-serving aircraft carriers and served the **Royal Navy for 27 years** and the **Indian Navy for 30 years**.
- The vessel was decommissioned in **March 2017** and subsequently reached **Alang, Gujarat, in September 2020** for dismantling and recycling.
- Its recycling demonstrated India's capacity to handle the dismantling of a large and technically complex vessel.

Significance:

- The recycling of Ex-INS Viraat demonstrated the potential for **material recovery, employment generation and industrial activity** through responsible ship recycling.
- The case also highlighted the importance of applying improved **occupational-safety and environmental-management practices** to large-scale vessel dismantling.

Challenges:

Occupational Safety:

- Ship recycling involves risks from **hazardous materials, heavy machinery, confined spaces, fires, explosions and unstable structures**.
- Sustaining international leadership therefore requires continuous investment in **worker training, personal protective equipment, emergency preparedness and healthcare**.

Hazardous Waste Management:

- End-of-life ships may contain **asbestos, heavy metals, hydrocarbons and other hazardous substances**.

- Improper handling can contaminate **soil, groundwater and coastal ecosystems** and expose workers to serious health risks.
- Effective recycling therefore requires scientific **segregation, storage, treatment and disposal** of hazardous waste.

Environmental Concerns:

- Poorly managed ship recycling can cause **marine pollution, air pollution, soil contamination and hazardous-waste accumulation**.
- Environmental compliance must therefore extend beyond individual yards to include the entire **waste-management and downstream recycling chain**.

Global Competition:

- India competes with major ship recycling countries such as **Bangladesh, Pakistan and Türkiye**.
- Maintaining leadership will require continued investment in **technology, infrastructure, safety, environmental performance and international certification**.

Regional Concentration:

- The overwhelming concentration of ship recycling activity at **Alang-Sosiya** creates both an industrial advantage and a regional concentration risk.
- Developing additional compliant recycling capacity can improve **geographical diversification, resilience and national capacity**.

Significance for India:

Economic Significance:

- Ship recycling generates **employment, industrial output, recovered raw materials and ancillary economic activity**.
- The industry strengthens coastal economies and supports businesses involved in **steel processing, logistics, waste management, machinery and services**.

Environmental Significance:

- Responsible recycling supports the **circular economy** by recovering materials from obsolete ships.
- It can reduce demand for virgin resources and contribute to **resource efficiency and lower industrial environmental pressures**.

Maritime Significance:

- A strong ship recycling sector complements India's ambitions to develop a comprehensive **maritime industrial ecosystem**.
- Linking ship recycling with shipbuilding can create a more integrated domestic **ship lifecycle economy**.

Strategic Significance:

- Internationally compliant recycling facilities can enhance India's position in the global maritime economy.

- Leadership in sustainable ship recycling strengthens India's broader image as a proponent of **responsible and environmentally sustainable maritime development**.

Way Forward:

Strengthen Green Ship Recycling:

- India should promote **mechanised dismantling, cleaner technologies, scientific waste treatment and resource-efficient processes** to reduce environmental and occupational risks.
- Greater adoption of digital monitoring can improve **traceability, compliance and transparency**.

Improve Worker Protection:

- Continuous investment in **occupational safety training, protective equipment, emergency response, healthcare and social-security measures** is essential.
- Worker safety should remain a core performance indicator alongside recycling volume and economic output.

Expand International Recognition:

- India should accelerate efforts to obtain **EU recognition** for eligible recycling facilities while maintaining compliance with the Hong Kong Convention.
- International certification can increase access to higher-value recycling markets and reinforce India's reputation for responsible recycling.

Diversify Recycling Capacity:

- Additional compliant recycling clusters can be developed beyond Alang-Sosiya while ensuring adequate **environmental infrastructure, skilled labour and regulatory capacity**.
- Diversification can reduce regional concentration and expand employment opportunities across India's coastline.

Integrate Shipbuilding and Ship Recycling:

- Policy should create a stronger **ship lifecycle ecosystem**, connecting ship design, construction, operation, maintenance, decommissioning and recycling.
- The Ship-Breaking Credit Note mechanism can help create demand for **Indian-built vessels** while encouraging compliant recycling.

UPSC Relevance:

GS Paper I – Indian Geography and Industry:

- **Alang-Sosiya**, Gujarat, as a major maritime industrial cluster.
- Coastal industrialisation, resource recovery and the spatial concentration of maritime activities.
- Relationship between **ship recycling, steel production, employment and coastal economic development**.

GS Paper II – International Relations:

- **Hong Kong Convention**, IMO and international environmental governance.
- India–EU cooperation on sustainable ship recycling.

- India's role in shaping global norms for **environmentally responsible maritime activity**.

GS Paper III – Economy and Environment:

- **Circular economy, resource efficiency, secondary raw materials and sustainable industrialisation.**
- Maritime sector development under **Maritime India Vision 2030**.
- Occupational safety, hazardous-waste management and environmental regulation.

Essay:

- “A circular economy converts end-of-life products into new economic opportunities without compromising environmental sustainability.”
- “India’s maritime strength requires not only building ships but also managing their entire lifecycle responsibly.”

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Concept – Ship Recycling and Circular Economy:

- Ship Recycling → Material Recovery → Secondary Raw Materials → Reduced Virgin Extraction → Resource Efficiency → Circular Economy

Key Concept – Hong Kong Convention:

- The **Hong Kong Convention** follows a **cradle-to-grave approach**, covering relevant environmental and safety aspects throughout the ship lifecycle and establishing responsibilities for shipowners, shipyards, recycling facilities and authorities.

Important Facts for Prelims:

- India’s global ship recycling share in 2025: 35.4%.
- India’s ship recycling volume in 2025: 2.99 million GT.
- India’s ship recycling volume in 2024: 1.86 million GT.
- Alang-Sosiya share of India's ship recycling activity: approximately 98%.
- Operational plots at Alang-Sosiya: 128.
- Current Alang-Sosiya recycling capacity: approximately 4.5 million LDT per annum.
- Hong Kong Convention adopted: 2009.
- Hong Kong Convention entered into force: 26 June 2025.
- Indian statutory framework: Recycling of Ships Act, 2019.
- Operational rules: Recycling of Ships Rules, 2021.
- Latest regulations: Recycling of Ships Regulations, 2026.
- Main Indian recycling hub: Alang-Sosiya, Gujarat.
- International organisation responsible for the Hong Kong Convention: International Maritime Organization (IMO).
- Core environmental principle: Safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships.
- Major hazardous materials: Asbestos, heavy metals, hydrocarbons and ozone-depleting substances.

One-Line UPSC Takeaway:

- India's emergence as the world's leading ship recycling nation reflects the convergence of maritime industrial policy, circular economy, international environmental compliance, resource security and sustainable development.

India's LPG Supply Chain Shifts Toward the United States Amid Strait of Hormuz Disruptions and Energy Security Concerns

Recent Developments:***India's LPG Sourcing Has Shifted Rapidly:***

- Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas **Hardeep Singh Puri** recently stated that the **United States has emerged as the dominant source of India's LPG imports**, reflecting a major restructuring of India's LPG supply chain following disruptions in West Asia.
- The latest reported figure of **67%** should be understood in the context of **India's LPG import sourcing**, rather than implying that 67% of total LPG consumed in India is produced in the United States.
- In **June 2026**, the United States accounted for about **65% of India's LPG imports**, supplying approximately **0.77 million tonnes**, according to Kpler data.
- India had earlier concluded its **first structured US LPG import contract**, covering approximately **2.2 million tonnes per annum for 2026**, equivalent to nearly **10% of India's annual LPG imports**.
- The shift accelerated after disruptions around the **Strait of Hormuz** sharply affected traditional Gulf supplies, compelling India to diversify procurement towards the United States and other suppliers.

India's LPG Import Dependence:***Structural Dependence on Imports:***

- India is the **world's second-largest LPG importer**, with approximately **60–65% of domestic LPG requirements met through imports**.
- India's LPG demand has expanded rapidly because of **household electrification, rising incomes, urbanisation and wider access to clean cooking fuel**.
- Domestic LPG production has not increased at the same pace as consumption, creating a persistent **domestic supply-demand gap**.
- Before the 2026 disruption, around **90% of India's LPG imports originated from the Middle East**, creating significant geographical concentration in the supply chain.

Why the Strait of Hormuz Matters:

- The **Strait of Hormuz** is a strategically vital maritime chokepoint connecting the **Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea**.
- A large proportion of India's traditional LPG imports from the Gulf passes through routes associated with this chokepoint.
- Disruption in the Strait can therefore simultaneously affect **availability, freight rates, insurance costs and international LPG prices**.

- The 2026 disruption demonstrated that excessive dependence on a single geographical corridor can create a **systemic energy-security vulnerability**.

Causes of India's Shift Towards US LPG:

Geopolitical Disruption:

- The conflict and instability in **West Asia** disrupted conventional LPG flows from major Gulf suppliers.
- India's LPG imports from West Asia fell sharply during the disruption, forcing Indian oil companies to seek alternative suppliers.
- The United States emerged as an important alternative because of its large-scale **LPG production capacity and export infrastructure**.

Pre-existing US-India Energy Cooperation:

- India's shift towards US LPG was facilitated by the **2.2 million-tonne annual structured contract** signed for 2026.
- The agreement represented India's first major structured procurement arrangement for US LPG and provided a foundation for rapidly increasing US supplies when Gulf shipments were disrupted.
- The diversification therefore reflected both **crisis management and a longer-term attempt to broaden India's energy supplier base**.

Emerging Diversification Beyond the Gulf:

- India has simultaneously explored supplies from **Australia, Argentina, Nigeria, Angola and other non-traditional sources**.
- Such diversification reduces the possibility that disruption in one geographical region will completely interrupt domestic LPG availability.
- However, alternative suppliers cannot immediately replace the **scale, proximity and established infrastructure of Gulf suppliers**.

Economics of US Versus Gulf LPG:

Freight and Distance:

- Gulf LPG shipments generally reach India faster because of their geographical proximity.
- US LPG shipments require substantially longer maritime journeys, increasing exposure to **freight rates, insurance costs, weather disruptions and shipping bottlenecks**.
- Longer voyages also increase the amount of capital tied up in cargo during transportation.

Landed-Cost Advantage of Gulf Supplies:

- US LPG can have a competitive production price because of the country's large **shale-gas and natural-gas liquids industry**.
- However, Gulf LPG can remain cheaper on arrival in India because of its **shorter transportation distance and established shipping routes**.
- The 2026 geopolitical disruption temporarily altered this cost calculation because securing physical availability became more important than achieving the lowest landed cost.

International Price Volatility:

- The disruption caused a sharp increase in **Saudi Aramco Contract Price**, the major benchmark used for Gulf LPG.
- Higher Gulf benchmark prices reduced the relative disadvantage of US cargoes and encouraged Indian buyers to secure supplies from alternative markets.
- This demonstrates that **energy security decisions involve both price and reliability**, rather than price alone.

Why LPG Is Strategically Important for India:

LPG as a Household Energy Source:

- LPG is a major **clean cooking fuel** for Indian households and therefore has direct implications for public welfare.
- Any prolonged shortage can affect **household consumption, food preparation, public health and women's time-use patterns**.
- LPG availability is consequently more politically sensitive than many other imported commodities.

LPG and Energy Transition:

- LPG has played an important role in India's transition away from **traditional biomass-based cooking fuels**.
- Programmes such as the **प्रधानमंत्री उज्ज्वला योजना** have expanded access to LPG among economically vulnerable households.
- Maintaining reliable LPG availability is therefore connected with India's objectives relating to **clean cooking, health, gender welfare and energy access**.

LPG as a Politically Sensitive Fuel:

- Governments may prioritise **uninterrupted availability and affordable retail prices** over short-term commercial optimisation during supply disruptions.
- This creates a policy trade-off between **consumer affordability, OMC financial sustainability and fiscal expenditure**.

Domestic Production and the Supply-Demand Gap:

Rising Domestic LPG Demand:

- India's LPG consumption has increased substantially over the past decade, while domestic production has not expanded sufficiently to eliminate import dependence.
- As a result, India remains structurally exposed to **international prices and maritime supply disruptions**.

Refinery Response During the Crisis:

- Indian refineries were directed to **maximise LPG production** during the disruption.
- Domestic production was increased sharply to compensate partially for reduced imports, with production reaching approximately **50,000–52,000 tonnes per day** during the crisis period.
- Such measures demonstrate the importance of maintaining **strategic operational flexibility within domestic refineries**.

Limits of Domestic Production:

- Increasing refinery LPG output can provide short-term relief, but it cannot by itself eliminate India's structural import dependence.
- Long-term resilience requires greater **domestic hydrocarbon production, refinery optimisation, alternative fuels and demand-side management.**

Financial and Fiscal Risks:***Oil Marketing Company Under-Recoveries:***

- Public-sector **Oil Marketing Companies** can face under-recoveries when domestic LPG prices remain below the economic cost of imported LPG.
- The government has faced substantial financial obligations associated with maintaining affordable domestic LPG prices.
- Government dues associated with subsidised LPG sales had crossed **₹59,000 crore** by August 2026, highlighting the fiscal pressure created by subsidised cooking fuel.

Exchange-Rate Risk:

- US LPG procurement increases India's exposure to **US dollar movements.**
- A depreciation of the Indian rupee raises the domestic-currency cost of imported LPG even when the international dollar-denominated price remains unchanged.
- Higher import costs can therefore simultaneously increase **OMC losses, subsidy requirements and pressure on consumer prices.**

Freight and Insurance Risk:

- Longer US-to-India voyages increase exposure to **freight-price volatility, marine insurance premiums and geopolitical risks along alternative maritime routes.**
- Diversification away from Hormuz therefore does not eliminate maritime risk; it **redistributes the nature of that risk.**

Strategic Risks of Excessive Dependence on the United States:***Supplier Concentration Risk:***

- Replacing excessive dependence on Gulf suppliers with excessive dependence on the United States would not constitute complete **energy security diversification.**
- A resilient energy system should avoid excessive dependence on **any single country, region, route or political bloc.**

Geopolitical and Trade Policy Risk:

- US energy trade can be affected by broader **trade policy, sanctions regimes, export controls and geopolitical considerations.**
- Changes in US foreign-policy priorities could influence the commercial environment for energy trade.
- India's energy security strategy should therefore preserve **strategic autonomy and supplier flexibility.**

Contractual and Market Exposure:

- Long-term contracts can provide greater supply certainty, but they cannot completely eliminate **price, freight, currency and geopolitical risks**.
- India needs a balanced procurement portfolio combining **long-term contracts, spot purchases and geographically diversified suppliers**.

Implications for India's Energy Security:***Positive Implications:***

- Diversification towards US LPG reduces India's immediate dependence on **West Asian suppliers and the Strait of Hormuz**.
- Greater supplier diversity improves India's bargaining position and reduces the probability of a complete supply interruption.
- Expanded energy trade with the United States can also contribute to broader **India-US strategic and economic relations**.

Negative Implications:

- Longer transportation distances can increase **landed costs and freight exposure**.
- Greater dependence on dollar-denominated US supplies increases **foreign-exchange exposure**.
- Excessive reliance on one alternative supplier could create a new form of **supplier concentration risk**.
- Higher import costs can increase pressure on **OMCs, subsidies and government finances**.

Broader Energy-Security Framework:***Energy Security Should Have Multiple Dimensions:***

- **Availability:** Adequate fuel must remain physically available even during geopolitical disruptions.
- **Affordability:** Energy must remain economically accessible to households and vulnerable consumers.
- **Reliability:** Supply chains must withstand disruptions to individual suppliers and transport corridors.
- **Sustainability:** Long-term energy policy must progressively reduce environmental externalities.
- **Resilience:** Infrastructure, inventories and alternative supply routes must allow rapid recovery from shocks.

Diversification of Suppliers:

- India should maintain a broad LPG supplier portfolio covering the **United States, Gulf countries, Australia, Africa and Latin America**.
- Supplier diversification should be accompanied by diversification of **shipping routes, storage infrastructure and procurement contracts**.

Strategic Storage:

- India should examine the feasibility of expanding **strategic LPG storage capacity** at locations capable of supporting major consumption centres.
- Larger inventories can provide a buffer during temporary disruptions and reduce dependence on emergency spot purchases.
- Strategic storage is particularly important for LPG because it is difficult to rapidly substitute large quantities of household cooking fuel during a crisis.

Way Forward:

Strengthen Domestic Production:

- India should continue improving refinery efficiency and expanding domestic LPG availability while exploring economically viable increases in **domestic hydrocarbon production**.
- Refinery upgrades should maximise recovery of LPG from domestic crude-processing operations where technically and economically feasible.

Diversify International Suppliers:

- India should avoid replacing **West Asia dependence with US dependence** and instead develop a broader supplier portfolio.
- **Australia** offers strategic potential because of its Indo-Pacific location and relative accessibility compared with the United States.
- **Argentina, Nigeria and Angola** can provide additional diversification, although their current export capacities cannot fully replace Gulf supplies.

Improve Maritime Resilience:

- India should develop diversified maritime routes and strengthen **port, storage, shipping and emergency logistics infrastructure**.
- Greater use of alternative routes can reduce dependence on individual maritime chokepoints.

Strengthen OMC Financial Resilience:

- OMCs should be provided with better **foreign-exchange hedging mechanisms and risk-management tools**.
- Transparent and predictable compensation mechanisms can reduce financial stress arising from politically sensitive LPG pricing.
- Pricing policy should balance **consumer protection, fiscal sustainability and OMC financial viability**.

Promote Alternative Cooking Fuels:

- India should accelerate access to **piped natural gas, electricity-based cooking and other cleaner alternatives** where infrastructure and economics permit.
- Diversification of household energy sources can reduce excessive dependence on LPG and improve overall **energy-system resilience**.
- Such diversification should complement rather than abruptly replace LPG, particularly in areas where alternative infrastructure remains inadequate.

Strengthen Demand Management:

- Improved energy efficiency and awareness can reduce unnecessary LPG consumption.
- Digital monitoring of LPG distribution can help improve **supply-chain efficiency, targeting and inventory management**.
- Continued strengthening of **PAHAL and Aadhaar-based authentication** can reduce diversion and improve the effectiveness of LPG subsidy delivery.

UPSC Relevance:***GS Paper I – Geography:***

- **Strait of Hormuz** as a major maritime chokepoint and its significance for India's energy flows.
- Spatial relationship between **West Asian energy production centres and Indian consumption markets**.
- Importance of maritime geography in determining **freight costs, supply reliability and energy security**.

GS Paper II – International Relations:

- **India-US energy cooperation** and its implications for bilateral strategic relations.
- India's engagement with **West Asia, Indo-Pacific and other energy-producing regions**.
- **Strategic autonomy** and diversification of external economic dependencies.

GS Paper III – Economy:

- **Energy security, import dependence, exchange-rate risk and inflation**.
- Financial sustainability of **Oil Marketing Companies**.
- Relationship between energy prices, subsidies and government finances.
- Importance of **strategic reserves, supply-chain resilience and infrastructure diversification**.

GS Paper III – Environment:

- LPG as a relatively cleaner household cooking fuel compared with traditional biomass.
- Transition towards **clean cooking energy** and reduction of household air pollution.
- Role of **natural gas, electrification and renewable energy** in diversifying the household energy mix.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Energy Security Framework:***

Energy Security = Availability + Affordability + Accessibility + Reliability + Resilience + Sustainability

- India's LPG experience demonstrates that **supplier diversification alone is insufficient**; true energy security requires diversification of **suppliers, routes, contracts, storage, currencies and technologies**.

Strategic Concept:

“Do not replace one dependency with another; build a diversified and resilient energy portfolio.”

- The LPG crisis illustrates the broader principle of **strategic resilience**, under which India should minimise exposure to any single supplier or chokepoint while retaining flexibility to respond to geopolitical shocks.

Key Facts for Prelims:

- **India:** World's **second-largest LPG importer**.
- **Import dependence:** Approximately **60–65%** of LPG requirements.
- **Traditional Middle Eastern share:** Around **90% of India's LPG imports** before the 2026 disruption.
- **US structured contract for 2026:** Approximately **2.2 million tonnes**.
- **US share of Indian LPG imports in June 2026:** Approximately **65%**, according to Kpler data.

- **US LPG imports in June 2026:** Approximately **0.77 million tonnes**.
- **Major traditional suppliers:** Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait.
- **Major maritime chokepoint:** Strait of Hormuz.
- **Major Indian oil marketing companies:** Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation.
- **Key policy objective:** Diversification without creating a new single-source dependency.



Best Institute for OAS/IAS

QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following pairs of Gompas (Monasteries) in Zaskar and their historical/architectural features:

- (1) Sani Gonpa — Built on level ground; associated with Kushan ruler Kanishka
- (2) Phugtal Gonpa — Perched on a hillock; founded by Tibetan Yogi Marpa
- (3) Stongde Monastery — Cave monastery built directly into a cliffside in Lungnak valley
- (4) Zangkul Gonpa — Meditation retreat associated with Indian Yogi Naropa

How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?

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

2. With reference to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and its legislative updates, consider the following statements:

- (1) The Act came into force in the year 1990 and was subsequently amended in 2015 and 2018.
- (2) The 2015 amendments expanded the list of offences and introduced statutory provisions regarding presumption in certain circumstances.
- (3) The 2018 amendment mandated that prior approval from a Senior Superintendent of Police is mandatory before making any arrest under the Act.
- (4) Under the 2018 statutory framework, anticipatory bail is ordinarily not available, subject to constitutional interpretation by the Supreme Court.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

3. With reference to India's Cultural Diplomacy and institutional architecture, consider the following statements:

- (1) India currently maintains active bilateral Cultural Exchange Programmes (CEPs) with 98 countries under the Global Engagement Scheme.

- (2) The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) operates directly as an attached office under the Ministry of Culture.
- (3) Transnational heritage initiatives like Project Mausam aim to reconnect historical trade and maritime routes across the Indian Ocean rim.
- (4) Festivals of India (FoI) abroad are organized by the Ministry of External Affairs to project classical arts to international audiences.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

4. With reference to the Indian naval history and recycling ecosystem, the terms 'Royal Navy', 'Hermes' (former name), 'Alang', and '22,622 flying hours' are associated with which historic vessel?

- (A) Ex-INS Vikrant (R11)
- (B) INS Arihant
- (C) Ex-INS Viraat
- (D) INS Rajput

5. In the context of global energy trade, the loss of "proximity pricing" advantage for an importing nation like India implies which of the following?

- (1) An increase in landed costs driven primarily by extended maritime transit days and freight insurance.
- (2) A structural shift from Saudi Aramco CP benchmarks to Mont Belvieu pricing hubs.
- (3) Complete insulation of oil marketing companies from domestic price under-recoveries.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) Only one
- (B) Only two
- (C) All three
- (D) None

ANSWER KEY

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



OAS HUB

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