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Tuesday, July 14, 2026



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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

India Launches ASI-Led Restoration of Indonesia's Prambanan Temple, Reinforcing Cultural Diplomacy and Shared Civilisational Heritage

Recent Developments:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his three-day visit to Indonesia, announced India's assistance for the restoration and conservation of the UNESCO-listed Prambanan Temple Compounds at Yogyakarta.
- PM Modi and President Prabowo Subianto jointly inaugurated the ASI-led conservation project, describing Prambanan as a symbol of the enduring civilisational and cultural ties between India and Indonesia.
- The restoration project follows the understanding reached during President Prabowo's State Visit to India (2025) and forms part of a broader strategic partnership under which more than 20 agreements were signed covering defence, maritime cooperation, critical minerals, digital payments, technology, education, and cultural cooperation.

Historical Background:

Origins and Foundation:

- Prambanan was constructed during the 9th century CE in Central Java under the Mataram Kingdom.
- The temple symbolised the political resurgence of the Sanjaya Dynasty, which revived Shaivite Hinduism after a prolonged phase of Buddhist predominance under the Sailendra Dynasty.
- Rakai Pikatan, after marrying the daughter of Samaratungga, commissioned the temple to demonstrate the restoration of Hindu royal authority.
- The consecration inscription of 856 CE records the formal dedication of the temple complex.

Political and Religious Context:

- The Sanjaya Dynasty primarily patronised Hinduism, whereas the Sailendra Dynasty promoted Mahayana Buddhism.

The matrimonial alliance between Rakai Pikatan and a Buddhist princess reflected political reconciliation and encouraged peaceful religious coexistence in ancient Java.

Architectural Features:

Temple Layout:

- Prambanan is the largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia and is dedicated to the Trimurti—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
- The original complex consisted of 240 temples, developed mainly under Rakai Pikatan and Rakai Balitung.
- The complex follows a three concentric square layout, with the innermost enclosure containing 16 principal temples.

Main Temples:

- The **47-metre Shiva Temple** occupies the central position and represents the most important shrine.
- The **Brahma Temple** stands to the **north**, while the **Vishnu Temple** stands to the **south** of the Shiva Temple.
- The **Shiva Temple** contains four chambers housing the images of **Shiva, Durga, Agastya, and Ganesha**.

Artistic Significance:

- The temple walls contain elaborate **bas-relief carvings** depicting episodes from the **Ramayana**.

The site continues to host the internationally recognised **Ramayana Ballet**, performed in an open-air theatre during **May–October**.

Religious Harmony and Cultural Significance:***Coexistence of Faiths:***

- **Prambanan** represents the harmonious coexistence of **Hinduism** and **Buddhism** in medieval Java.
- The royal marriage between a **Hindu king** and a **Buddhist princess** symbolised interfaith accommodation rather than religious conflict.
- A **stupa-like architectural element** incorporated into the temple superstructure reflects Buddhist artistic influence.

Associated Buddhist Monuments:

- Several Buddhist temples, including **Candi Sewu, Candi Bura, and Candi Lumbung**, were constructed around the same period.

In modern **Indonesia**, the term "**Candi**" refers collectively to ancient **Hindu and Buddhist religious monuments**.

Decline, Rediscovery and Restoration:***Decline:***

- Around **929–930 CE**, the political centre of the **Mataram Kingdom** shifted to **East Java**.
- The relocation was influenced by a combination of **Mount Merapi's volcanic activity**, political developments, and changing economic conditions.
- The abandoned temple gradually became buried beneath **vegetation** and **volcanic deposits**.

Rediscovery:

- References to the ruins appeared in **Javanese literary works** before European documentation.
- **C.A. Lons**, an official of the **Dutch East India Company**, documented the ruins in **1733**.
- **Thomas Stamford Raffles**, during the **British administration of Java (1811–1816)**, promoted systematic documentation of Central Java's archaeological heritage.

Modern Restoration:

- Scientific restoration commenced in **1918**.
- Restoration activities were delayed by the **Second World War** and **Indonesia's independence movement**.

Reconstruction of the principal temple concluded in **1953** and was inaugurated by **President Soekarno**.

UNESCO and Heritage Status:

International Recognition:

- **Prambanan Temple Compounds** were inscribed on the **UNESCO World Heritage List** in **1991** for their outstanding universal cultural value.
- The site was declared a **National Cultural Property** in **1998**.

Indonesia strengthened legal protection through a dedicated **Cultural Heritage Law (2010)** supporting long-term conservation.

India's Restoration Initiative:

Role of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI):

- The conservation work is being executed by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** in collaboration with the **Indonesian Heritage Agency**.
- An **ASI technical team** surveyed the monument during **March 2026** before preparing the restoration strategy.

Anastylosis Technique:

- Restoration will employ the **Anastylosis Technique**, under which damaged structures are reconstructed primarily using their **original architectural components** recovered from the site.

New materials are introduced only where structurally essential, thereby preserving the monument's historical authenticity.

India's Heritage Diplomacy in Asia:

Major Conservation Projects:

- **Vietnam (2014):** Restoration of the **Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary**, the religious centre of the ancient **Champa Kingdom**.
- **Myanmar (2017):** Conservation of monuments in the **Bagan Archaeological Zone** damaged by the **2016 earthquake**.
- **Cambodia:** Long-term conservation of important monuments within the **Angkor** complex.
- **Laos (2024):** Completion of restoration work at the **Vat Phou Temple**, an ancient **Shaivite temple complex**.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh: Implementation of multiple heritage conservation projects reflecting India's cultural engagement in the region.

Strategic Importance for India:

Soft Power Diplomacy:

- **Heritage conservation** has emerged as an important instrument of India's **soft power diplomacy**.
- Restoration of shared civilisational sites strengthens **people-to-people contacts**, **cultural trust**, and **regional goodwill**.

- Cultural diplomacy complements India's broader engagement under the **Act East Policy** and strengthens partnerships across the **Indo-Pacific**.

India–Indonesia Relations:

- Cultural cooperation reinforces the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** between the two countries.

Heritage projects deepen collaboration beyond traditional sectors such as **trade**, **defence**, and **maritime security**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Terms:

- **Anastylosis:** Scientific conservation method involving reconstruction using **original architectural elements** with minimal replacement material.
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Use of **heritage**, **culture**, and **civilisational links** to strengthen international relations.
- **Soft Power:** Ability of a country to influence others through **culture**, **values**, **heritage**, and **diplomacy** rather than coercion.
- **Trimurti:** The three principal Hindu deities—**Brahma (Creator)**, **Vishnu (Preserver)**, and **Shiva (Destroyer)**.
- **Act East Policy:** India's strategic framework for enhancing **economic**, **cultural**, and **strategic engagement** with **Southeast Asia** and the **Indo-Pacific** region.

India's Deferred Future Highlights Governance Gaps Threatening Demographic Dividend, Employment Generation and Inclusive Economic Transformation

Recent Developments:

- A recent policy analysis has warned that **India's demographic dividend** is increasingly at risk because of **delayed public recruitments**, **limited formal employment creation**, **low vocational skilling**, and **incomplete welfare delivery**.
- The analysis argues that governance delays and institutional inefficiencies are preventing India's large working-age population from translating into sustained economic growth and productivity gains.
- The issue assumes greater significance as **India's demographic window** is expected to remain favourable only until the late **2030s**, after which population ageing will gradually increase the dependency ratio.

India's Deferred Future and Demographic Window:

Meaning and Concept:

- **India's Deferred Future** refers to the mismatch between a unique **demographic opportunity** and delayed institutional responses in employment generation, skill development and public service delivery.
- Nearly **65% of India's population** falls within the **15–64 years** working-age group, providing a historically favourable **dependency ratio** that is unlikely to recur after the early **2040s**.

- A demographic dividend generates economic gains only when the expanding workforce is supported by **quality education, productive employment, healthcare, skills, and efficient governance.**

Key Statistics on Employment and Welfare:

Labour Market Indicators:

- Nearly **65%** of India's population currently belongs to the **working-age group**, offering one of the world's largest labour pools.
- More than **30 crore workers** are registered on the **e-Shram Portal**, highlighting the predominance of the **unorganised sector**.
- Only around **3%** of India's workforce has received **formal vocational training**, indicating a substantial skills deficit.
- Adjusted estimates indicate that unemployment among **educated youth** is close to **18%**, significantly higher than headline survey estimates.
- Youth unemployment among **urban women** stands at around **20.1%**, while **female labour force participation** remains slightly above one-fifth.

Hidden Employment Challenges:

- The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** measures unemployment using established survey definitions but may not fully capture aspirants engaged in prolonged competitive examination preparation.
- Inclusion of discouraged job seekers substantially increases the estimated unemployment burden among educated youth.

Major Structural Challenges:

Delayed Public Recruitment:

- Recruitment processes in many public institutions often remain pending for **3–4 years** because of administrative delays, litigation and procedural bottlenecks.
- Prolonged recruitment cycles reduce productive workforce participation during the most employable years of candidates.

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Inadequate Formal Employment:

- Expansion of the workforce has not been matched by sufficient creation of **quality formal jobs** with social security and long-term career prospects.
- Increasing dependence on **contractual employment** reduces job security and discourages employer investment in workforce training.

Vocational Skill Deficit:

- Limited industry participation and short-duration certification programmes weaken the effectiveness of vocational education.
- Weak integration between **education, apprenticeships, and industry demand** contributes to skill mismatches.

Incomplete Welfare Delivery:

- Delays in implementation of welfare schemes such as **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** and **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)** prolong beneficiary dependence on government assistance.
- Lengthy verification procedures reduce the timely effectiveness of welfare interventions.

Rising Social Inequalities:

- Recruitment delays disproportionately affect **first-generation learners, economically weaker households, and socially disadvantaged communities** that cannot sustain prolonged periods without stable income.

Institutional Issues Affecting Demographic Dividend:***Political Economy of Incomplete Governance:***

- Electoral incentives sometimes encourage greater emphasis on **policy announcements and new project launches** than on timely completion of ongoing projects.
- Delayed completion reduces the developmental impact of public expenditure and weakens public confidence.

Casualisation of Labour:

- Increasing contractual employment limits access to **social protection, career progression, and continuous skill development**.
- Firms relying heavily on temporary workers often invest less in long-term human capital formation.

International and Domestic Best Practices:***South Korea:***

- Government support through **industrial licences, bank credit**, and incentives was linked directly with **employment generation and export performance**, ensuring greater accountability.

Brazil:

- The **Bolsa Família Programme** combined cash transfers with conditions relating to **school attendance and healthcare utilisation**, helping reduce intergenerational poverty.

Germany:

- Strong **apprenticeship systems and worker representation** encouraged firms to invest consistently in workforce skills and productivity.

Kerala:

- The **People's Plan Campaign** devolved nearly **35–40%** of development funds to local governments, strengthening community monitoring and timely project implementation.

Government Initiatives Supporting Human Capital:

Major Employment and Skill Programmes:

- **Skill India Mission** aims to enhance employability through market-oriented skill development.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)** focuses on short-term skill certification and Recognition of Prior Learning.
- **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)** promotes industry-based apprenticeship training.
- **e-Shram Portal** creates a national database of workers in the unorganised sector.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme** seeks to expand manufacturing capacity and employment opportunities.
- **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** provides regular labour market indicators for evidence-based policymaking.

Way Forward:

Strengthen Governance Efficiency:

- Introduce legally enforceable timelines for completion of public infrastructure projects and government recruitment processes.
- Fill sanctioned vacancies through **annual recruitment calendars**, preferably within **12 months**.

Reform Skill Development:

- Shift from short-duration certification towards **industry-linked, multi-year apprenticeship models** aligned with labour market requirements.
- Strengthen collaboration among industries, educational institutions and vocational training providers.

Promote Quality Employment:

- Expand formal employment through labour-intensive manufacturing, services and emerging technology sectors.
- Improve wages, social security and skill upgradation opportunities for contractual workers.

Improve Welfare Delivery:

- Digitise beneficiary verification and strengthen time-bound service delivery.
- Design welfare programmes that facilitate transition from welfare dependence to sustainable formal employment.

UPSC Value Addition:

Important Terms:

- **Demographic Dividend:** Economic growth potential arising from a relatively large **working-age population** compared to dependents.
- **Dependency Ratio:** Ratio of the **dependent population** to the **working-age population**, indicating the economic burden on productive workers.
- **Human Capital:** Knowledge, skills, health and productivity possessed by individuals that contribute to economic development.

- **Vocational Training:** Industry-oriented education designed to develop occupation-specific technical and practical skills.
- **Casualisation of Labour:** Increasing dependence on temporary or contractual employment with limited job security and social protection.

Relevant Constitutional Provisions and Reports:

- **Article 41:** Directs the State to make effective provisions for securing the **Right to Work**, education and public assistance within its economic capacity.
- **Article 39(a):** Directs the State to ensure adequate means of livelihood for all citizens.
- The **Economic Survey 2025–26** highlights that India's demographic dividend is expected to peak around **2030**, making rapid job creation, skilling and productivity enhancement essential for sustaining long-term economic growth.

India-Oman Strategic Partnership Strengthens Through Defence, Energy and Economic Cooperation

Recent Developments:

- Recently, the **External Affairs Minister of India** met his **Omani counterpart in Muscat** and discussed various dimensions of bilateral cooperation, including **strategic partnership, maritime security, energy cooperation and regional developments**.
- India and Oman have further expanded their economic engagement through the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, which aims to enhance trade, investment flows and market access between both countries.
- The relationship between both countries has completed decades of diplomatic engagement, with cooperation expanding from traditional areas like **energy and defence** to emerging sectors such as **green hydrogen, digital economy and technology cooperation**.

India-Oman Relations: Strategic Overview:

Geographical and Strategic Importance:

- The **Sultanate of Oman** is a strategically important partner of India and acts as an important interlocutor at the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** forums.
- Oman is located at the entrance of the **Persian Gulf** and overlooks the strategically significant **Strait of Hormuz**, making it crucial for India's **energy security, maritime trade and Indo-Pacific vision**.
- The geographical location of Oman provides India with a strategic gateway to **West Asia, Africa and the wider Indian Ocean region**.

Significance of Oman for India:

- **Energy Security:** Oman is an important partner for India due to its role as a reliable supplier of **crude oil, LNG and petrochemical resources**.
- **Maritime Security:** Oman's location supports India's objective of maintaining a secure maritime environment in the **Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean**.

- **Strategic Connectivity:** Oman strengthens India's connectivity with **West Asia, Africa and Europe** through maritime routes.
- **Indo-Pacific Vision:** Cooperation with Oman supports India's initiatives such as **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** and **MAHASAGAR** maritime vision.

Historical Evolution of India-Oman Relations:

Ancient and Colonial Linkages:

- India and Oman share centuries-old maritime connections through the **Arabian Sea trade network** involving commodities such as **spices, textiles, dates, copper and frankincense**.
- Traders from **Gujarat and Kerala** established commercial communities in Muscat during the colonial period, strengthening people-to-people relations.

Post-Independence Development:

- India and Oman established formal **diplomatic relations in 1955**, which were strengthened after **Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970**.
- The relationship was upgraded to a **Strategic Partnership in 2008**, covering defence, maritime security, energy, trade and investment cooperation.

Contemporary Phase:

- Bilateral relations have expanded beyond traditional sectors into areas such as: **Technology cooperation, renewable energy, food security, digital economy, connectivity and innovation**.

Key Dimensions of India-Oman Relations:

Political Relations:

- India and Oman maintain regular high-level political engagement through:
 - **Joint Commission Meeting (JCM),**
 - **Foreign Office Consultations,**
 - **Strategic Dialogue Mechanisms.**

Oman remains one of India's most dependable partners in the **Gulf region** due to mutual trust and stable diplomatic relations.

Defence and Security Cooperation:

Defence Partnership:

- Defence cooperation is one of the strongest pillars of the India-Oman strategic partnership.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all three branches of India's armed forces conduct joint military exercises.

Major Defence Exercises:

- **AL NAJAH Exercise:** Joint Army exercise between India and Oman.
- **Eastern Bridge Exercise:** Bilateral Air Force exercise.

- **Naseem Al Bahr Exercise:** Naval exercise focusing on maritime cooperation.

Security Cooperation Areas:

- Both countries cooperate in:
 - **Maritime security, naval cooperation, hydrography, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy operations, white shipping information sharing and defence capacity building.**

Strategic Importance of Duqm Port:

- Oman provides India operational access to the **Port of Duqm**, which enhances India's naval presence in the western **Indian Ocean Region**.
- **Duqm Port** provides facilities related to: **Logistics support, ship maintenance, repair facilities and strategic connectivity with Africa and West Asia.**

Economic and Trade Relations:

Bilateral Trade:

- India-Oman trade has witnessed steady growth:
 - **FY 2023-24:** Approximately **US\$ 8.947 billion.**
 - **FY 2024-25:** Approximately **US\$ 10.613 billion.**
- The recent **CEPA agreement** is expected to further expand trade and investment cooperation.

India's Major Exports to Oman:

- India exports:
 - **Engineering goods, food products, rice, pharmaceuticals, machinery, textiles and chemicals.**

India's Major Imports from Oman:

- India imports:
 - **Crude oil, LNG, fertilisers, petrochemicals and minerals.**

Investment Cooperation:

- Indian investments in Oman are spread across:
 - **Manufacturing, steel, cement, healthcare, education, hospitality, renewable energy and Information Technology.**
- Omani investments in India are increasing through: **Sovereign wealth funds, private enterprises and strategic investments.**

Energy Cooperation:

Traditional Energy Partnership:

- Energy cooperation remains a major component of bilateral relations due to Oman's importance in India's energy security framework.
- Key areas include:

- Long-term crude oil supplies, LNG imports, petrochemicals and strategic petroleum cooperation.

Future Energy Cooperation:

- India and Oman are exploring collaboration in:
 - Green hydrogen, green ammonia, renewable energy, clean fuels and energy transition technologies.

Oman's renewable energy potential provides opportunities for cooperation in India's clean energy transition goals.

Diaspora and Cultural Relations:

Indian Diaspora in Oman:

- Oman hosts more than **6 lakh Indians**, making Indians the largest expatriate community in the country.
- Indian professionals contribute significantly to:
 - Healthcare, education, engineering, banking, construction, services and Information Technology.

Cultural Cooperation:

- India and Oman share strong civilisational and cultural connections through:
 - Historical maritime links, festivals, education exchanges and traditional medicine cooperation.
 - Indian schools and cultural institutions operate across Oman, strengthening people-to-people relations.

Challenges in India-Oman Relations:

Economic Challenges:

- Bilateral trade remains below its full potential despite strong political relations.
- Economic diversification beyond **hydrocarbon-based trade** remains limited.

Geopolitical Challenges:

- Regional instability in **West Asia** creates challenges for economic and security cooperation.
- Issues such as:
 - Iran-Gulf tensions, maritime insecurity and regional conflicts affect strategic stability.

Increasing External Competition:

- Growing engagement of:
 - China, United States and European countries in Oman's infrastructure and strategic sectors requires India to enhance its engagement.

Labour Related Issues:

- The **Omanisation policy** may reduce employment opportunities for foreign workers.
- Continuous skill development of Indian workers is required to maintain competitiveness.

Connectivity and Investment Issues:

Limited logistics integration and regulatory barriers restrict greater private-sector participation.

Way Forward: Strengthening India-Oman Partnership:***Political and Diplomatic Cooperation:***

- Institutionalise regular **annual strategic dialogue mechanisms**.
- Expand cooperation through:
 - **Parliamentary exchanges, state-level partnerships and institutional interactions.**

Defence and Maritime Cooperation:

- Enhance:
 - **Naval interoperability, joint military exercises, Maritime Domain Awareness and utilisation of Duqm Port.**
- Strengthen cooperation for maintaining security in the **Indian Ocean Region.**

Trade and Investment Cooperation:

- Expand the trade basket beyond hydrocarbons by promoting:
 - **MSME cooperation, manufacturing partnerships, logistics connectivity and industrial corridors.**

Energy Transition Partnership:

- Develop cooperation in:
 - **Green hydrogen, green ammonia, renewable energy, critical minerals and carbon capture technologies.**

Technology Cooperation:

- Promote collaboration in:
 - **Artificial Intelligence, digital public infrastructure, cyber security, FinTech, semiconductors and start-up ecosystems.**

Blue Economy Cooperation:

- Increase cooperation in:
 - **Fisheries, marine biotechnology, port-led development and ocean governance.**

People-Centric Cooperation:

- Ensure welfare and skill development of the Indian diaspora.
- Promote:

Educational exchanges, tourism, cultural diplomacy and traditional knowledge sharing.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts:

- **Capital:** Muscat
- **Currency:** Omani Rial
- **Region:** West Asia / Arabian Peninsula
- **Strategic Water Body:** Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz
- **Key Port:** Duqm Port
- **Strategic Partnership:** Established in **2008**
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Established in **1955**
- **Regional Organisations:** GCC, Arab League, IORA

Indian Armed Forces Seek Higher Agniveer Retention to Strengthen Operational Readiness and Military Modernisation

Recent Developments:

- The **Indian Armed Forces** have proposed increasing the **retention percentage of Agniveers** beyond the existing **25% ceiling** under the **Agnipath Scheme**.
- As the first batch of **Agniveers recruited in early 2023** approaches the completion of its four-year tenure, the **Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** has received proposals from all three Services highlighting the need to retain experienced personnel.
- The proposal aims to preserve trained manpower, maximise returns on investments made in advanced military training and ensure continuity in operational capability.

Need for Higher Agniveer Retention:

Proposed Retention Requirements of the Three Services:

- At present, only **25% of Agniveers** from each batch are eligible for permanent enrolment in the Armed Forces.
- The proposed changes include:
 - The **Indian Navy** may seek retention of nearly **75%** of its Agniveers because naval operations require highly specialised technical expertise.
 - The **Indian Army** and the **Indian Air Force** may seek retention of around **50%** of their Agniveers.

Preventing Manpower Shortages:

- A fixed **25% retention ceiling**, combined with the annual retirement of regular personnel, could create temporary shortages in trained military manpower.
- A higher retention rate would help maintain force strength and ensure a smoother transition during the initial implementation years of the Agnipath Scheme.

Lessons from Operation Sindoor:

- Operational feedback from **Operation Sindoor** indicated that Agniveers performed effectively in active operational environments, while reaffirming that experienced soldiers remain indispensable.
- The following factors enable experienced personnel to respond more effectively during complex military situations:
 - **Multiple operational deployments, extensive field experience and institutional knowledge.**

Technological Transformation and Military Modernisation:

- The induction of modern military capabilities has introduced:
 - **Advanced weapon systems, high-end equipment and sophisticated technological platforms.**
- Operating these systems requires prolonged specialised training and practical experience.
- Releasing trained personnel after only four years could reduce operational efficiency and diminish the long-term value of training investments.

Technical Requirements of the Navy and Air Force:

- Longer service tenures are particularly important for the **Navy and Air Force** because: **Warships, submarines, combat aircraft and advanced aviation systems** require deep technical proficiency that develops over extended periods.

Agnipath Scheme:

About the Scheme:

- The **Agnipath Scheme** was launched in **June 2022**.
- It is a **nationwide merit-based military recruitment programme** for enrolling personnel below officer rank into the **Army, Navy and Air Force**.
- Recruits under the scheme are known as **Agniveers**.

Objectives of the Agnipath Scheme:

Building a Younger Military Force:

- The scheme aims to reduce the average age of the Armed Forces from approximately **32 years to 26 years**, thereby improving agility and combat effectiveness.

Fiscal Sustainability:

- The scheme seeks to reduce pension liabilities and redirect financial resources towards **defence modernisation and indigenous defence production**.

Addressing Emerging Security Challenges:

- The scheme is designed to strengthen military preparedness against:
 - **Hybrid warfare, cyber threats, terrorism, space warfare and electronic warfare.**

Nation Building:

- The scheme seeks to develop a disciplined, skilled and employment-ready youth population.
- Trained Agniveers can contribute to **employment generation, disaster management** and the vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047**.

Key Features of the Agnipath Scheme:***Tenure and Age Limit:***

- The service tenure of an Agniveer is **4 years**.
- The prescribed age limit is:
 - **17.5 to 21 years**.
 - The upper age limit was temporarily relaxed to **23 years** for the first recruitment cycle.

Financial Benefits:

- Agniveers receive a customised monthly financial package during their service.
- Upon completion of four years:
 - Around **75% of Agniveers** are discharged from service.
 - They receive a tax-free **Seva Nidhi Package** of approximately **₹11.71 lakh**.
- The **Seva Nidhi Package** consists of the Agniveer's contribution along with an equal matching contribution from the Government.

Other Benefits:

- Agniveers are provided with:
 - **Skill certificates, priority in recruitment to the Central Armed Police Forces and State Police, and a non-contributory life insurance cover of ₹48 lakh.**
- In case of service-related contingencies:
 - They are eligible for **₹44 lakh as disability compensation** and **up to ₹1 crore compensation in case of death during service.**

Permanent Enrolment:

- At present, a maximum of **25% of each batch** is selected for permanent enrolment based on organisational requirements and performance.
- Agniveers selected for permanent service are required to serve for a minimum additional period of **15 years** under the service conditions applicable to regular personnel.

Need for Reforms in the Agnipath Scheme:***Integration with Atmanirbhar Bharat and Defence Corridors:***

- The Agnipath exit framework should be aligned with the **Defence Industrial Corridors** in **Uttar Pradesh** and **Tamil Nadu**.
- Agniveers trained on advanced defence technologies should be provided opportunities in:
 - **Private defence manufacturing, research and development organisations, start-ups and aviation maintenance sectors.**
- Such integration would strengthen India's indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem.

Preserving Regimental Ethos and Military Cohesion:

- The effectiveness of the Indian Armed Forces depends not only on technology but also on:
 - **Regimental traditions, unit cohesion and institutional identity.**
- Service conditions should preserve military culture while ensuring operational effectiveness.
- The initial four-year tenure may be viewed as a rigorous assessment and training phase rather than merely a short-term contractual engagement.

Evidence-Based Policy Review:

- The scheme should be comprehensively reviewed after completion of the first recruitment cycle by considering:
 - **Operational feedback, manpower requirements, institutional assessments and force preparedness.**
- The **Army, Navy and Air Force** should be permitted to determine retention levels according to their distinct operational and technical requirements.
- Greater priority should be accorded to Agniveers trained in critical technologies and specialised operational roles.

Institutional Oversight and Course Correction:

- A defence reform of this scale requires periodic legislative oversight.
- A **biennial review** by the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence** can ensure transparent evaluation.
- Such reviews should assess: **Combat readiness, defence expenditure, human resource trends and overall policy outcomes.**

Conclusion:

- The Agnipath Scheme should evolve beyond a purely fiscal reform and adopt a **strategic human capital approach.**
- Flexible retention policies, stronger welfare measures and sustained technical training can help India maintain a young and agile military while preserving the experienced manpower required for technology-driven warfare.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts:

- **Launch of Agnipath Scheme:** June 2022.
- **Service Tenure:** 4 years.
- **Maximum Permanent Retention:** 25%.
- **Age Limit:** 17.5–21 years.
- **Seva Nidhi Package:** Approximately ₹11.71 lakh.
- **Life Insurance Cover:** ₹48 lakh.

India Moves Towards Comprehensive Landslide Early Warning System After Increasing Disaster Risks

Recent Developments:

- Recent **landslides in the Western Ghats**, including the incident affecting the **under-construction twin tunnel project in Wayanad, Kerala**, have highlighted the urgent need for effective **Landslide Early Warning Systems (LEWS)** in vulnerable regions.
- Experts emphasise that scientific forecasting combined with timely evacuation can significantly reduce casualties in landslide-prone areas such as the **Western Ghats and Himalayan region**.
- The increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events due to **climate change** has strengthened the need to shift from reactive disaster response towards proactive risk reduction strategies.

Importance of Landslide Early Warning Systems:

Role in Disaster Risk Reduction:

- Landslides are predictable to a significant extent, especially in identified **high-risk zones**, when geological, climatic and environmental factors are continuously monitored.
- Effective **early warning systems** provide sufficient time for evacuation, thereby reducing loss of human lives, property damage and infrastructure disruption.
- Countries such as **Switzerland** have successfully reduced landslide-related casualties through advance warnings, hazard monitoring and planned evacuation systems.

Indian Experience with Early Warning Systems:

- The **2024 Munnar landslides in Kerala** demonstrated the effectiveness of scientific-based warnings, where timely evacuation based on expert advice prevented fatalities.
- Such examples highlight the importance of integrating scientific technology with local administration and community participation.

Landslide Vulnerability in India:

Extent of Landslide-Prone Areas:

- According to the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**, approximately **13% of India's geographical area**, covering around **0.42 million sq km**, is vulnerable to landslides.
- The major vulnerable regions include:
 - Himalayan region, Western Ghats, North-Eastern hill states and unstable mountainous zones.**

Highly Vulnerable Regions:

- Major landslide-prone areas include:
 - Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand,**
 - Mandi and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh,**
 - Aizawl region in Mizoram,**
 - Parts of Manipur.**

Relatively Less Vulnerable Regions:

- Despite frequent landslide events, **Sikkim** has comparatively lower vulnerability in certain areas due to:
 - Less extensive road construction,
 - Reduced mountain cutting,
 - Lower slope disturbance, which improves geological stability.

Major Approaches for Landslide Forecasting:***Sensor-Based Monitoring System:******Concept and Development:***

- Sensor-based monitoring systems have been developed by research institutions such as **Amrita University** for continuous monitoring of unstable slopes.
- These systems involve installing advanced sensors at identified high-risk locations.

Key Instruments Used:

- Important monitoring devices include:
 - **Tilt meters, pressure gauges, accelerometers, ground movement sensors and vibration sensors.**

Working Mechanism:

- Sensors continuously measure changes in:
 - **Slope movement, ground pressure, vibration levels and stability conditions.**
- When recorded values cross predefined safety limits, warnings are issued to local authorities for timely evacuation.

Advantages:

- The system is:
 - **Scientifically reliable, highly accurate and capable of providing sufficient evacuation time.**
- Such systems have been successfully tested in vulnerable areas of **Kerala**.

Limitations:

- The system can monitor only those slopes where instruments are installed.
- It cannot predict landslides occurring on nearby unmonitored slopes.
- Installation, maintenance and expansion of sensor networks require significant financial resources.

Probabilistic Forecasting Model:***Concept and Development:***

- The **Indian Institute of Technology Mandi** has developed a probabilistic model to estimate landslide probability over large geographical areas.

Methodology:

- The model combines:
 - **Satellite-based historical landslide mapping, rainfall forecasts, soil characteristics, rock stability, slope gradient and population density.**
- It uses approximately **7–10 rainfall-related parameters** for analysing landslide probability at specific locations.

Validation:

- The model has been validated against approximately **80 actual landslide events** in the Himalayan region.

Advantages:

- The model can cover:
 - **Large geographical regions**, including remote areas where physical monitoring is difficult.
- It can identify multiple vulnerable locations simultaneously.

Limitations:

- The accuracy of the model depends heavily on high-resolution rainfall forecasts.
- Current rainfall predictions are generally available only around **1 day in advance**, which limits evacuation time.
- Improved forecasting capability of the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** can significantly enhance landslide prediction accuracy.

Towards a National Landslide Early Warning System:***Need for Integrated Approach:***

- Experts suggest that India can develop an effective nationwide **Landslide Early Warning System** within approximately **2 years** with adequate resources, technology and institutional cooperation.
- A comprehensive system should combine:
 - **Satellite monitoring, sensor-based observations, high-resolution weather forecasting, Geographical Information System (GIS) and remote sensing technologies.**

Priority Actions Required:

- India should focus on:
 - Identification of **high-frequency and high-impact landslide zones**,
 - Preparation of detailed **hazard zonation maps and risk assessment maps**,
 - Installation of sensor networks in extremely vulnerable locations.

Institutional Coordination:

- Effective implementation requires coordination among:
 - **India Meteorological Department (IMD),**
 - **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA),**
 - **Geological Survey of India (GSI),**
 - **State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs),**

Local administration and communities.

Challenges and Way Forward:

Major Challenges:

Lack of Comprehensive Mapping:

- India lacks complete mapping of all high-risk landslide hotspots, which affects targeted monitoring and preventive planning.
- A national system combining sensor-based monitoring and probabilistic forecasting models is required.

Limited Sensor Network Coverage:

- Existing sensor deployment is limited and needs expansion through:
 - **Remote sensing, GIS-based analysis and artificial intelligence-based prediction tools.**

Dependence on Short-Term Rainfall Forecasts:

- Current rainfall prediction limitations reduce the available warning period.
- Development of high-resolution rainfall forecasting by the **India Meteorological Department** is essential.

High Infrastructure Costs:

- Monitoring infrastructure requires significant investment.
- Priority should be given to:

Critical infrastructure, transport corridors and densely populated hill settlements.

Way Forward Measures:

- India should promote:
 - Greater inter-agency coordination,
 - Long-term investment in monitoring infrastructure,
 - Community awareness programmes,
 - Evacuation drills and local disaster preparedness.
 - Disaster management should shift from post-disaster relief towards **anticipatory action and risk reduction.**

Conclusion:

- Climate change-induced extreme rainfall events are increasing the frequency and intensity of landslides in India.
- A combination of **scientific forecasting, advanced monitoring systems, institutional coordination and community preparedness** can transform landslide management from reactive response to proactive disaster risk reduction.
- A comprehensive national **Landslide Early Warning System** can protect human lives, infrastructure and sustainable development in vulnerable regions.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts:

- **Disaster Type:** Geological Disaster
- **Major Vulnerable Regions:** Himalayas, Western Ghats, North-Eastern Hills
- **Landslide-Prone Area in India:** Around **13% of geographical area**
- **Key Institution:** National Disaster Management Authority
- **Scientific Agencies:** Geological Survey of India, India Meteorological Department
- **Key Technologies:** Remote Sensing, Geographic Information System, Artificial Intelligence, Sensor Networks



QUESTIONS

1. Match List-I with List-II.

List-I (Heritage Site)

- (1) Prambanan
- (2) Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary
- (3) Vat Phou
- (4) Angkor Wat

List-II (Country)

- (a) Laos
- (b) Indonesia
- (c) Vietnam
- (d) Cambodia

Codes:

- (A) 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-d
- (B) 1-c, 2-d, 3-b, 4-a
- (C) 1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-c
- (D) 1-d, 2-c, 3-a, 4-b

2. With reference to India's demographic dividend, consider the following statements:

- (1) India's demographic dividend is primarily driven by a high proportion of working-age population.
- (2) The favourable dependency ratio is expected to continue well beyond the middle of the 21st century.
- (3) Declining fertility rates will eventually reduce the share of the working-age population.
- (4) The demographic dividend automatically translates into higher economic growth irrespective of labour market conditions.
- (5) Failure to generate productive employment can weaken the benefits of the demographic dividend.

How many of the above statements are correct?

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

3. With reference to the strategic significance of Oman for India, consider the following statements:

- (1) Oman is the only Gulf country that overlooks both the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman.
- (2) Operational access to Duqm Port enables India to sustain naval deployments without establishing a foreign military base.
- (3) Control over the Strait of Hormuz is vested exclusively in Oman.
- (4) India's engagement with Oman supports both its SAGAR and Indo-Pacific maritime objectives.
- (5) Duqm Port reduces India's dependence on ports located inside the Persian Gulf.

How many of the above statements are correct?

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

4. With reference to the Agnipath Scheme, consider the following statements:

- (1) It was launched in June 2022 as a pan-India military recruitment programme.
- (2) It recruits personnel below the rank of officers into the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- (3) Agniveers recruited under the scheme serve initially for a period of five years.
- (4) Permanent enrolment into the regular cadre is based on centralized and objective organizational criteria.

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

5. Which of the following technologies are recommended for developing a comprehensive National Landslide Early Warning System?

- (1) Satellite monitoring.
- (2) Sensor-based observations.
- (3) GIS and remote sensing technologies.
- (4) High-resolution weather forecasting.
- (5) Artificial intelligence-based analytics.

Select the correct answer:

- (A) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- (B) 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (C) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (D) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

ANSWER KEY

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



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