

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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After a nine-month declining trend, India's retail inflation rose marginally to **2.1% in August 2025**, edging close to the lower bound of the RBI's **2-6% target band**. While food prices showed subdued movement, categories such as fuel, oils, and light contributed to the upward pressure. The development has implications for monetary policy, fiscal management, and broader economic stability.

Current Affairs Context (Sept 2025)

- **Inflation Trend:** Retail inflation rose to **2.1% in August** from 1.55% in July 2025.
- **Food & Beverages:** Flat at 0.05% (sharp contrast to 5.3% in Aug 2024). Vegetables (-15.9%) and pulses (-14.5%) dragged prices, while oils (+21.2%) pushed upward.
- **Other Categories:** Clothing & footwear stable (2.67%), housing (3.06%), fuel & light rose to 2.9%.
- **Policy Outlook:** Economists expect RBI to pause policy changes in the near term but keep scope for **25-50 bps rate cuts from Dec 2025**, depending on growth risks and Fed rate actions.

Static Background

- **Retail Inflation (CPI):** Measured by Consumer Price Index, tracks changes in retail prices of goods & services.
- **RBI's Inflation Target:** 4% \pm 2% (legal mandate under Monetary Policy Framework, 2016).
- **Inflation Categories in CPI:** Food & beverages, fuel & light, clothing & footwear, housing, pan-tobacco-intoxicants, etc.
- **Causes of Inflation:** Demand-pull, cost-push, imported inflation (global oil/commodity prices).
- **GST & Inflation:** Rate cuts in GST can reduce effective prices but may be offset by supply-side shocks.

Prelims Pointers

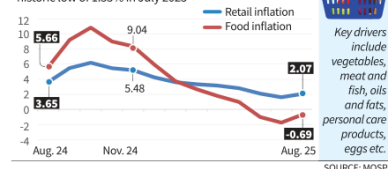
- **CPI vs WPI:** CPI reflects retail inflation; WPI reflects wholesale price movements.
- **RBI's Inflation Target Band:** 2-6% under the RBI Act, 1934 (amended 2016).
- **Base Effect:** Impact of last year's price levels on current inflation rate.
- **Fuel & Light Component:** Sensitive to global crude oil prices.
- **Vegetables & Pulses Volatility:** Seasonal fluctuations often drive food inflation in India.

Mains Analysis

Retail inflation climbs to 2.1% in August after a nine-month decline

Inching up

August retail inflation rose marginally. This follows nine consecutive months of falling inflation, culminating in a historic low of 1.55% in July 2025.



The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Retail inflation broke a nine-month declining streak in August, quickening to 2.1% from 1.55% in July 2025, according to official data.

The inflation in August was marginally higher than the lower bound of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) comfort band of 2-6% for retail inflation.

The rate of retail inflation had been declining every month since November 2024.

Food and beverages

The data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Friday showed that the inflation in the food and beverages category remained flat in August, at 0.05%, compared to 5.3% in August last year.

Inflation in the clothing and footwear category remained virtually unchanged at 2.67% in August 2025 compared with 2.62% in July. Similarly, inflation in the housing segment stood at 3.06% in August compared with 3.03% in July.

The fuel and light category saw a relatively faster increase in inflation, which quickened to 2.9% in August 2025 from 1.4% in July.

'GST rate cut impact'

"Within food products, the main drivers of low inflation are vegetables and pulses which recorded -15.9% and -14.5% respectively," according to a note by the Bank of Baroda's economics research wing.

"Oils continue to exert upward pressure with 21.2% inflation due to higher global prices as well as low base effect."

According to Upasna Bhardwaj, Chief Economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank, the GST rate cut impact is likely to play out in the year ahead, partly offsetting the impact of an adverse base effect in 2026-27.

"While we see a pause by the RBI in the upcoming policy, we do see some scope for rate cuts worth 25-50 basis points opening up from December policy if downside risks to growth materialise and the Fed moves ahead with aggressive rate cuts," Ms. Bhardwaj said.

1. Drivers of the Current Inflation Trend

- **Low Food Inflation:** Vegetables and pulses dragging overall food inflation to near-zero.
- **High Oil Prices:** Global market pressures + low base effect keeping edible oils inflation high.
- **Fuel & Light:** Faster rise reflecting volatility in global crude markets.

2. Implications for Monetary Policy

- With inflation still well within RBI's tolerance band, scope exists for a **status quo or mild rate cuts** to support growth.
- Fed's aggressive rate-cut cycle may give RBI space for accommodative stance.

3. Impact on Economy & Households

- **Positive:** Stable and low inflation supports consumption, protects household budgets, and allows lower interest rates.
- **Concerns:** Prolonged deflationary trend in food items may harm farmers' incomes. Oil and fuel inflation risks remain.

4. Fiscal and Policy Dimensions

- **GST rate cuts:** Likely to soften prices further, though their effect may take time.
- **Government Role:** Managing supply chains of vegetables & pulses, ensuring oil imports remain stable.

5. Challenges & Opportunities

- **Challenges:** Imported inflation (oil), climate-linked volatility in food crops, balancing farmer and consumer interests.
- **Opportunities:** Low inflation offers RBI fiscal space, encourages growth revival, and strengthens India's global macroeconomic stability.

Conclusion

The slight uptick in retail inflation to **2.1% in August 2025** signals stabilization rather than concern, as it remains comfortably within RBI's 2–6% band. With food prices subdued and risks arising mainly from oil and fuel, the inflation trajectory appears manageable. For policymakers, the focus should remain on **balancing growth and price stability**, safeguarding farmers' incomes, and ensuring inflation expectations remain anchored. In the larger picture, sustained low inflation provides India a window to accelerate growth, manage external shocks, and work toward **Viksit Bharat 2047** with macroeconomic stability.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: The term “Base Effect” is related to which of the following?

- a) RBI's policy to control inflation
- b) The impact of the previous year's price level on the current inflation rate
- c) A technique to increase agricultural production
- d) The level of foreign exchange reserves

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: “Inflation control is not only about providing relief to consumers, but also linked to farmers' income and overall macroeconomic stability.” Critically analyze. **(250 Words)**



The Supreme Court's **Ram Charan vs Sukhram (July 2025)** judgment equating the exclusion of daughters from ancestral property with denial of their fundamental right to equality has revived the debate on **tribal women's property rights**. While women constitute the backbone of tribal agriculture and economy, they remain largely excluded from land inheritance due to customary practices. Ensuring gender justice in tribal property rights is crucial for inclusive development and constitutional equality.

Property rights, tribals and the gender parity gap

It is over a month since International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was observed on August 9, but it is still not late to ponder over the rights of India's indigenous population. The proposition becomes all the more topical following a judgment of the Supreme Court of India on July 17, 2025. In *Ram Charan and Ors. vs Sukhram and Ors.*, the Bench of Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice Joymalya Bagchi equated the exclusion of daughters in ancestral property to be a negation of their fundamental right to equality. Thus, looking at the issue of a tribal woman's property rights through the lens of gender equality becomes significant. It is a matter of deep gender injustice that most tribal women (except in the north-east where there is matrilineal in some tribes) do not have pieces of legislation giving them statutory rights in ancestral property.

Plea of equal share

In this case, the appellant-plaintiffs were the legal heirs of Dhaiya, a Scheduled Tribe (ST) woman in Sarguja district, Chhattisgarh, who sought partition of a property that belonged to their maternal grandfather, Bhajju alias Bhajan Gond. Their mother (one of the six children – five sons and a daughter), they claimed, was entitled to an equal share. The cause of action arose in October 1992 when the defendant refused to make a partition. The appellant-plaintiffs approached the trial court seeking a declaration of title and partition of the suit property, which was dismissed on the ground that no such custom existed in the Gond tribe where female heirs are given rights in ancestral property.

After being rejected by the first Appellate court and Trial court, the plea then came before the



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It is a matter of deep gender injustice that most tribal women do not have statutory rights in ancestral property

Chhattisgarh High Court. In so far as the argument of the appellant-plaintiff that they had adopted Hindu traditions and so be granted such rights according to the Hindu Succession Act, it was held that since there was no evidence on record, the Trial Court and the First Appellate Court had rejected this contention. However, it granted Dhaiya's legal heirs an equal share in the property stating that denying the female heir a right in property under the garb of customs only exacerbated gender discrimination – which the law should weed out.

In *Madhu Kishwar and Ors. vs State Of Bihar and Ors.* (1996), a petition had raised the issue of parity between female and male tribal members in the matter of intestate succession. This pertained to customary laws excluding women from inheritance of land or property. The majority judgment of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the provisions as violative of the right to equality, stating that this would cause chaos in the existing law.

Laws in Scheduled Five Area States

In matters of marriage, succession and adoption, tribals in Scheduled Areas are governed by their customary laws. Despite women contributing more in farms than the men, none of the tribal customary laws prevalent in the Scheduled Five Area States (which also includes Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha) give land inheritance rights to females in ancestral properties. The All India Report on Agriculture Census 2015-16 shows that 16.7% of ST women possess land when compared to ST men (83.3%).

It is also argued that in tribal society, land is a communitarian property, where there cannot be an individual owner. But, it rarely happens that

money received against the sale or acquisition of tribal lands goes to the gram sabha of villages. The fear of tribal women marrying non-tribal men, leading to land alienation, is another reason for denying women land inheritance rights. The fact that the nature of land remains indigenous despite its transfer to non-tribal as it happens in forest land is to be understood before any such denial.

Any custom must pass the test of parameters such as antiquity, certainty, continuity, reasonableness and conformity with public policy in order to be transformed into a law. A court of law can verify the legality of a custom based on these. A similar situation arose in *Prabha Minz Daughter Of Late Saran Linda vs (A) Martha Ekka Wife Of Late Ajit Ekka* (2022), where the Jharkhand High Court historically decided in favour of property rights of women of the Oraon tribe in the State as the defendant failed to prove that there was any custom in the Oraon community of Jharkhand where daughters have been continually deprived of inheritance rights in paternal property.

A case for a separate act

The Supreme Court took an affirmative stand on tribal women's property rights, in *Kamala Neti (Dead) Thr. Lrs. vs Special Land Acquisition Officer*, on December 9, 2022, which was one of the first steps towards celebrating the beginning of gender parity in property rights among the tribal women. If Section 2(2) of the Hindu Succession Act, 2005 excludes tribal women from its purview, why not have a separate Tribal Succession Act made for tribals? Codification of tribal laws on the lines of Hindus and Christians can also help resolve the issue substantially.

Current Affairs Context

- **Case:** Ram Charan and Ors. vs Sukhram and Ors. – SC granted equal share in ancestral property to legal heirs of an ST woman, rejecting the customary denial of female inheritance.
- **Previous Landmark Cases:**
 - MadhuKishwar vs State of Bihar (1996) – SC upheld customary denial of succession rights.
 - PrabhaMinz vs Martha Ekka (2022, Jharkhand HC) – upheld women's inheritance rights among Oraon tribe.
 - Kamala Neti vs SLAO (2022, SC) – affirmative step for tribal women's land rights.
- **Ground Reality:** Only **16.7% of ST women own land** (Agriculture Census 2015–16).
- **Constraints:** Fears of land alienation via marriage to non-tribals, communitarian nature of tribal land, lack of codified succession law.

Static Background

- **Constitutional Safeguards:**
 - Article 14 (Equality before law), Article 15 (Non-discrimination), Article 21 (Right to life with dignity).
 - Fifth Schedule: Governance of Scheduled Areas with special laws/customs.
- **Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:** Granted equal coparcenary rights to daughters in Hindu law, but **Section 2(2)** excludes Scheduled Tribes.
- **Customary Law in Tribals:** Governs succession, marriage, and adoption; often patriarchal and resistant to codification.
- **International Frameworks:**
 - UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007).
 - CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

Prelims Pointers

- **Article 13:** Customs inconsistent with Fundamental Rights can be struck down.
- **Antiquity, Certainty, Continuity Test:** Parameters for recognizing a custom as law.
- **Matrilineal Tribes:** Khasi, Garo, Jaintia (exceptions where women inherit land).
- **Agriculture Census 2015-16:** Only 16.7% ST women possess land ownership.
- **Section 2(2), Hindu Succession Act:** Excludes Scheduled Tribes from its ambit.

Mains Analysis

1. Gender Injustice in Tribal Societies

- Despite **higher contribution in farming**, women denied land inheritance.
- Patriarchal customs reinforced by fears of land alienation through inter-community marriage.
- Women's lack of land ownership perpetuates economic dependency and social marginalization.

2. Judicial Evolution

- 1996: MadhuKishwar – SC avoided intervention, citing disruption of tribal customs.
- 2022: Kamala Neti, PrabhaMinz – progressive judgments affirming women's rights.
- 2025: Ram Charan vs Sukhram – landmark SC ruling upholding equality over discriminatory custom.

3. Developmental Implications

- Land ownership crucial for **credit access, empowerment, poverty reduction**.
- Gender parity in property rights essential for SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).
- Land reforms linked to **inclusive growth, food security, and social justice**.

4. Policy Gaps

- Exclusion from Hindu Succession Act creates **legal vacuum**.
- Customary laws inconsistent across regions; lack of codification fuels arbitrariness.
- Women's voices underrepresented in gram sabhas and tribal councils.

5. Way Forward

- **Separate Tribal Succession Act** ensuring equality while respecting tribal autonomy.
- **Codification of Customary Laws** – balancing tradition with constitutional rights.
- **Awareness & Capacity Building**: Legal literacy campaigns among tribal women.
- **Strengthening PESA (1996) & FRA (2006)** to integrate women's rights in governance of Scheduled Areas.
- **Community Dialogues** to reduce fears of land alienation and promote collective ownership models.

Conclusion

The debate on tribal women's property rights highlights the tension between **customary practices** and **constitutional equality**. Recent judicial pronouncements have shifted towards upholding gender justice, but legislative intervention is urgently needed. A **Tribal Succession Act**, codifying inheritance rights in line with equality, can ensure justice without undermining community autonomy. Closing the gender parity gap in property rights is not just about women's empowerment but also about **inclusive tribal development, social equity, and fulfilling India's constitutional promise of equality**.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements with reference to the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:

1. The Act grants daughters equal coparcenary rights as sons.
2. Section 2(2) of this Act excludes Scheduled Tribes from its ambit.
3. The Act applies to all religious communities in India.

Select the correct statement(s):

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The question of property rights of tribal women reflects the need to balance tradition with constitutional equality. Discuss in the context of recent judicial pronouncements. **(150 Words)**

India–U.S. relations have often been described as a “defining partnership of the 21st century”. However, trade and strategic irritants continue to surface despite cooperation in security, technology, and geopolitics. The latest episode of **“doublespeak” by the U.S. Trump administration**—inviting India for trade talks while simultaneously pressuring it over Russian oil imports—highlights both opportunities and challenges in bilateral ties.

Current Context

- **Trade Talks:** After weeks of tension, the U.S. has invited Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and his team to Washington to resume Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions.
- **Contradictions:** U.S. officials have threatened sanctions if India continues Russian oil imports, even though a Quad Summit and smoother ties were being promised.
- **Economic Costs:**
 - India and Brazil face the highest U.S. tariffs (50%).
 - Indian textile exports are already hit; job losses and GDP reduction (up to 0.5%) are projected.
- **Geopolitical Factor:** The U.S. is linking **trade cooperation to strategic compliance** with its Russia policy.

Static Context

1. **India–U.S. Trade Snapshot:**
 - U.S. is India's largest trading partner (goods & services combined).
 - Trade = ~\$190 billion (2024).
 - U.S. investments in India in IT, defence, pharma; Indian IT services major contributor to U.S. economy.
2. **Key Frictions:**
 - **Tariffs & Market Access:** High tariffs on steel, aluminium, textiles.
 - **GSP Withdrawal:** In 2019, U.S. withdrew Generalized System of Preferences for Indian exports.
 - **Visa Issues:** H1-B visa restrictions hurt Indian IT sector.
 - **Energy Dependence:** Earlier U.S. forced India to cut imports from Iran & Venezuela; now Russia.
3. **Strategic Framework:**
 - **Indo-Pacific Strategy:** U.S. wants India as a counterweight to China.
 - **Quad Cooperation:** India–U.S.–Japan–Australia grouping.
 - **Defence Agreements:** BECA, COMCASA, LEMOA signed to strengthen interoperability.

Prelims Pointers

Doublespeak

India is finding the Trump administration increasingly unreliable

Weeks after calling off the visit of trade negotiators to Delhi, the U.S. administration says it has invited Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and the Indian trade team to Washington to resume talks for the India-U.S. FTA. The announcement came days after U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi signalled, through public comments and social media posts, a halt to tensions of the last four months. On Thursday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Mr. Trump's Ambassador-designate to India Sergio Gorrer also said they expect ties to be smooth, a trade deal to be announced shortly, and a Quad Summit later this year. Despite the U.S.'s punitive actions against India on trade, visas, deportations, and Mr. Trump's comments on Operation Sindoor, the ceasefire and his dealings with Pakistan, New Delhi has appeared prepared to move forward as well, with Mr. Goyal and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar confirming India's active engagement with the U.S. However, other comments by the Trump administration on India's import of Russian oil could throw a spanner in the works. Mr. Gorrer has said that stopping the imports by India remains the U.S.'s “top priority”, while Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has said that India has “got to stop” buying Russian oil for a U.S. trade deal. Meanwhile, reports suggest that Mr. Trump has personally asked the European Union to slap “100% sanctions” on India and China to make Russia stop the Ukraine conflict.

The U.S.'s doublespeak will disappoint many in government and industry circles who had expressed relief over the Modi-Trump détente, and the resumption of trade talks. At 50%, India and Brazil face the highest U.S. tariffs, and Indian textile exporters have begun to see orders being cancelled. According to the Chief Economic Adviser, V. Anantha Nageswaran, the tariffs could mean a loss of half a per cent from India's GDP, and job losses will be a concern as well. In theory, the government could consider the U.S.'s demands on reducing Russian oil if they had not been served as an ultimatum. However, even if New Delhi was so inclined, Washington is making the choice much harder with its crudely worded diktats. While the Modi government did accept the U.S. demands to stop the imports of Iranian and Venezuelan oil earlier, repeating that in 2025 with Russia is more complex. While the costs of oil sanctions and high tariffs can be absorbed, the costs of caving in now and the resultant reputational damage may seem greater in the balance.

Daily News Analysis

- **GSP Scheme** (withdrawn for India in 2019).
- **Tariff vs Non-tariff barriers** (definitions, WTO context).
- **India–U.S. defence pacts**: LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA.
- **Major trading partners of India** (U.S. = top partner).
- **Impact of oil sanctions on India's energy security**.

Conclusion

The U.S. remains a **critical partner for India's economic growth and strategic security**, but the relationship is marked by recurrent frictions. For India, the challenge lies in **leveraging convergences (technology, defence, Quad)** while **resisting coercive trade diplomacy**. A calibrated approach—diversifying trade partners, strengthening domestic manufacturing, and balancing strategic autonomy—will help India safeguard both its economic and geopolitical interests.



UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques :With reference to India–U.S. trade relations, consider the following statements:

1. The United States is India's largest trading partner in goods and services.
2. India continues to enjoy benefits under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) scheme.
3. Recently, India has faced some of the highest U.S. tariff rates on exports like textiles.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans : c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India–U.S. relations oscillate between strategic partnership and trade frictions. In light of recent developments, discuss the challenges and opportunities for India in managing this relationship. **(150 Words)**

Mains Answer Framework**1. Opportunities**

- Strategic Convergence: Indo-Pacific, countering China.
- Technology & Defence: U.S. support in critical technologies (semiconductors, AI, space).
- Investment & Energy: U.S. is a major FDI source; LNG & defence sales.

2. Challenges

- Trade Uncertainty: Tariffs on textiles, steel, and agriculture.
- Conditional Diplomacy: U.S. linking trade deals with India's stance on Russian oil.
- Visa & Labour Issues: H-1B restrictions impacting services exports.
- Unpredictability of U.S. Policy: Frequent shifts (Iran oil ban → Venezuela ban → Russia ban).

3. India's Strategic Dilemma

- Energy Security vs Strategic Autonomy: India depends on Russian crude (discounted prices).
- Geopolitical Balance: India cannot afford to alienate Russia given defence dependence.
- Reputation Costs: Yielding to U.S. diktats may weaken India's global image as an independent power.

Page 07 :GS 3 : Disaster Management / Prelims

The recent floods in Punjab (Aug–Sept 2025) have claimed 55 lives, displaced nearly 4 lakh people, and destroyed crops on 1.91 lakh hectares of land across 18 districts. Beyond the immediate humanitarian tragedy, the disaster raises questions of climate resilience, agricultural vulnerability, relief governance, and the political economy of disaster management.

Current Context

- **Human Impact:** 111 relief camps sheltering ~4,600 people; families left uncertain about homes, belongings, and livelihood.
- **Agriculture Losses:** Paddy & Basmati submerged, delayed wheat sowing, higher costs of mechanised harvesting.
- **Livelihood Crisis:** Daily wage labourers and marginal farmers left without work; landless labourers unlikely to get compensation due to lack of land titles.
- **Infrastructure & Relief:** Boats without safety gear, shortage of rations, cattle fodder and medicines, inadequate disaster preparedness.
- **Political Angle:** Relief package of ₹1,600 crore announced by PM criticised by opposition as “meagre” compared to losses (~₹20,000 crore). Dispute over State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) utilisation.

Static Context

1. **Floods in India**
 - Punjab receives ~75% of its annual rainfall during monsoon.
 - IMD: 253.7 mm rainfall in August 2025 (74% excess).
 - Recurring floods recorded in 1988, 2023, 2019, 2013, 2010.

After the disaster

Punjab's floods have taken 55 lives and left thousands of people homeless. **Vikas Vasudeva** reports on the anxiety around the loss of farm produce and jobs. People in relief camps wonder when they can return home and worry about the condition of their houses and belongings collected over years of work and struggle

The dark monsoon clouds that hang over Fazilka have given way to sunlight that filters through the eucalyptus trees surrounding the government middle school at Selen Shah village. Kiran Rani, 22, cannot enjoy it. She sits on the floor of the corridor, gently stirring a saucup of water and a four-jugger mixture over a shared mini-gaspy-lender stove.

These are emergency rations, given to those who were forced out of their homes in Punjab's floods that killed 55 and left thousands homeless. Heavy rains hit the Sutlej, Ravi, and Beas rivers in state, and they soon overflowed their banks inundating low-lying areas and farmland.

Rani and her family of four, along with a dozen other people from her village, who had been at the school that was transformed into a camp overnight, feel the weight of uncertainty. "The water started to rise in the balled close to our village, somewhere in early August. Initially, it was rising slowly and we didn't anticipate that it would suddenly swell," she remembers.

The night after Raksha Bandhan, on August 10, when women tie threads on their brothers' wrists for protection, she says water gushed into their three-room house in Dona Sakandri village in Fazilka district. They waded through knee-deep water, most of their belongings destroyed, yet clinging to the hope that the water would recede. "For a few days, we stayed inside the house. We climbed on tables and tried to survive," she says. They realised their paddy crop, planted across 5-6 acres had been submerged and destroyed.

The Army rescued families by boat, taking them to Kawan Wali Pattan village across the Sutlej. Dona Sakandri and about a dozen other villages lie between the Sutlej and the Pakistan border. A bridge connects them to the rest of India, but the river raged over it. This strip of land was impacted during Operation Sindoor, in May, when schools were closed and villages under strict curfew.

Rani's two children, three-year-old Tanveer and Harimant Rani, who is still a baby, huddle close to her hoping to get their favourite meal soon.

"It's difficult to stay in the camp for long, but there's no other option. We don't know how long we will have to stay here. I don't know whether our house is even intact. Nothing will be the same as before," she says, hoping the government will compensate them.

The relief camp at the school building is one of 111, sheltering 4,600 people, set up in the flood-affected areas of Punjab, the country's grain bowl. Besides Fazilka, Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Ferozepur, were all impacted.

People still remember the floods of 1988, when several hundreds died here, a part of devastation across several States in north India. "This time, according to the State government, at

most 4 lakh people have been affected in about 2,200 villages across Punjab.

Boats and bridges

Sham Singh, 36, from Bete Wali Bhatti village, doesn't own land and works as a daily wage labourer on farms. "My house has been badly damaged by the floodwater. With most farmland under water, I have no work. For the past couple of weeks, my family of four has been here at the camp, but I am worried about how I will sustain them once the camps are closed," says Singh, the sole breadwinner.

Robab Singh, 65, a farm labourer from Teja Bhatla village, says "A big problem for most of us living in the village is that land is not registered in our name. Most families settled here after the Partition (India-Pakistan in 1947). Many of us will not get financial relief as we do not have any documents. Where do we go? What do we do?"

Punjab received 253.7 mm of rain in August, which was 74% in excess of normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Now, the floodwaters invade with the retreating monsoon, but people's lives are not returning to what they were used to.

Chand Singh, 65, from Ram Singh Bhatti village, gauges the current of the water flow before he takes a call to walk over the bridge from Kawan Wali Pattan village. Chand says, "For the first time in years, I have seen water flowing over this bridge. The water has receded now, but the current is still strong, so I'll take a boat." He has

been able to stay, because water didn't enter his house. He crossed the river in the morning to get a few medicines and rations.

His neighbour, Sukhvinder Singh, 30, says that while the administration has provided manually operated boats, villagers have to row the boats by themselves. Most are not trained to do this, which puts their lives at risk, he says. "There's also a shortage of safety jackets," says Sukhvinder, a daily wage. He has come with Chand to replenish fodder and cattle medicine stocks.

"Relocating cattle to dry, high ground has been challenging. Teams of veterinarians have been paying visits, but the situation requires more attention. Also, there's a shortage of cooking gas cylinders now, forcing many to share the limited supplies," he says.

Survival through the storm

As relief efforts continue, the residents face the dual challenge of immediate displacement and long-term livelihood loss. Makhtar Singh, 50, a school cab driver, is anxious about his family's sustenance amid the crisis. "I have a family of eight to support and our income savings are nearly depleted. The floods have submerged my village and surrounding areas. I can't drive my school cab, and with no work available for my two sons, who are daily wages, our situation is dire," he says.

Robab Singh, the Sarpanch (village head) of Jangar Bhatti, feels that the situation has in fact just begun. "As the water level has started to go down, the sight of destruction is slowly revealing itself. In my village, there are around 270 houses and about all of them have suffered damage, completely or partially and the entire crop has been lost. Animal carcasses can be seen at some places, the stench is unbearable and there is a growing fear of disease outbreak." He says the administration is working hard to provide relief though.

Fazilka's Deputy Commissioner Amarjeet Kaur Sandhu points out that of 30 relief camps immediately set up in the district, 14 remain active, sheltering 12,946 people. "Till September 3, about 12,539 ration kits have been given to affected families. Additionally, 6,290 bags of cattle feed have been distributed for livestock," she says. Many people have brought their cattle to the relief camps, and the government is supplying green fodder for their feed.

Floods of water

In Gurdaspur, another flood-ravaged district, which accounts for the bulk of agricultural losses,

the water levels in the Ravi have gradually gone down. However, farmers like Gurdarpal Singh, 48, from Kalamaur village are worried about the next season's losses. The rice crop and the investment has sunk, and he says the ground will be too wet to plant the winter wheat crop.

"My paddy crop was under 1-4 feet of floodwater for days, leaving it completely ruined. We usually sow wheat in late October and early November here, but it will be difficult this time. Late sowing will result in low yield, which again means less," says Gurdarpal, who had sown paddy in around 70 acres of land on lease. This year, crops have been damaged on at least 1.91 lakh hectares spread over 18 of the 22 districts of the State, the government says.

The Punjab monsoon season, welcomed after the dry summer of May and June, when temperatures soared into the 40-degrees, gives the State 75% of its annual rainfall. A State government assessment points out Punjab's vulnerability to recurring floods, seen in 2023, 2019, 2013, 2010, 2008, and 2004.

Devinderjeet Singh, 51, a farmer in Maranval Kalan village of Amritsar district, explains that heavy rains and gusty winds have adversely impacted his Basmati, the aromatic, long-grain rice crop. The cost of harvesting has also shot up. "As the rain spells continued till the first week of September, the harvesting of whatever crop is left has also been delayed. I usually harvest Basmati in the last week of July," Devinderjeet says.

He is now using combine machines with chains, designed for harvesting on moist land, which has increased his farming cost. "I have to shell out ₹6,000 per acre for using these machines. Otherwise it would have been ₹2,000 an acre," says Devinderjeet, who has sown rice in around 75 acres of land.

Politics in a crisis

Amid the flood catastrophe, political parties continue to point fingers at each other. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who on September 9 travelled to Punjab, announced financial assistance package of ₹1,600 crore for the State. Soon after, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) termed the amount as "meagre and insufficient".

Punjab Cabinet Minister and AAP president Aman Arora accused the Prime Minister of delivering a "cried joke" in the name of the relief package to the people of Punjab instead of the meaningful national response they had hoped for, noting the State was starting at losses exceeding ₹20,000 crore. Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Ragi Warring described the relief package as "miserably meagre", similar to "a drop in the ocean".

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), urged the Prime Minister to enhance the financial assistance, while questioning the AAP about the ₹12,000 crore available to the State government under the State Disaster Management Fund (SDMF). Punjabians want to know the whereabouts of the ₹2,000 crore referred to by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to flood-affected areas. This money was to be used to provide speedy aid to the flood-affected, but now the State is asserting that it does not have this money, noted senior SAD leader Daljit Singh Chamma.

Blaming the AAP for "squandering away ₹2,000 crore of SDMF received from Centre, on publicity stunts and other purposes," Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP) State President Sanjay Jha said, "The money has not been utilised for flood mitigation efforts".

Reacting to the charges, Punjab Cabinet Minister Harpal Singh Chhina has accused the BJP of deliberately misleading the public on government relief funds. "BJP leaders have been shamelessly posing as saviours to defame the AAP government. The truth is before the people, and every single rupee received and spent from SDMF is in the public domain," he said, in a statement.

Division of Suburbs Office at relief camps in Fazilka, Punjab, after the floods. (Source: Vikas Vasudeva)

2. Causes of Flood Vulnerability

- Climate change → erratic monsoon + heavy rainfall.
- Poor drainage infrastructure & encroachment on floodplains.
- Over-dependence on paddy cultivation in flood-prone areas.
- Lack of early-warning dissemination to farmers and rural poor.

3. Disaster Management Framework

- Governed by **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
- SDRF & NDRF (State & National Disaster Response Funds).
- Role of NDMA: preparedness, mitigation, resilience building.
- **Sendai Framework 2015–2030**: Risk reduction, build-back-better.

Prelims Pointers

- **Disaster Management Act, 2005** → statutory basis for NDMA/SDRF/NDRF.
- **Sendai Framework** → UN global framework for disaster risk reduction.
- **Crop Insurance Schemes** → PM Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- **Flood-prone states in India** (UP, Bihar, Assam, Punjab, etc.).
- **River systems** of Punjab (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi).

Conclusion

Punjab's 2025 floods are a reminder that disasters are not merely "natural" but deeply socio-economic in their impacts. Building resilience requires more than financial relief—it calls for **structural reforms in agriculture, transparent governance of disaster funds, and climate-adaptive infrastructure**. For India, safeguarding the "grain bowl" of Punjab is not just a state priority but a matter of **national food security**.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following rivers:

1. Sutlej
2. Ravi
3. Beas
4. Ghaggar

Which of the above rivers were directly mentioned as being in spate during the 2025 Punjab floods?

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans :c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the socio-economic impact of recurrent floods in Punjab. Suggest policy measures for building long-term flood resilience in India's agrarian regions. **(150 Words)**

Mains Answer Framework

1. Impacts

- Humanitarian: Loss of lives, mass displacement, health risks (epidemics, sanitation).
- Agriculture: Crop destruction (paddy, basmati), delay in wheat sowing, increased input costs.
- Livelihoods: Daily wage earners, landless labourers worst hit; compensation gap due to lack of land titles.
- Infrastructure: Damaged houses, roads, bridges; inadequate rescue gear.
- Governance & Trust Deficit: Relief funds vs political blame game.

2. Challenges

- Structural dependence on water-intensive crops (paddy) in flood-prone regions.
- Poor flood forecasting and early warning systems at village level.
- Inadequate compensation for landless and marginal groups.
- Climate change unpredictability: erratic rainfall patterns.

3. Way Forward

- Climate Resilient Agriculture: Diversification from paddy → maize, pulses, horticulture.
- Flood-Resistant Infrastructure: Strengthening embankments, bridges, storage facilities.
- Inclusive Relief: Ensure compensation for landless workers, not just landowners.
- Strengthen NDMA & SDRF: Transparency, community participation, real-time monitoring.
- Technology: Satellite-based flood forecasting, mobile alert systems.
- International Best Practices: Dutch "living with water" model, Bangladesh's community-based flood shelters.



Page 12 :GS 3 : Indian Economy/ Prelims

The Palestinian question remains one of the most enduring conflicts in international politics. India's consistent stand on the two-state solution reflects its historical support for Palestinian self-determination while balancing its strategic ties with Israel. The recent vote at the UNGA endorsing the 'New York Declaration' highlights India's nuanced diplomacy in West Asia.

Prelims Relevance

- **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA):** Principal deliberative organ with 193 member states.
- **Two-State Solution:** Proposal to resolve the Israel–Palestine conflict by creating an independent Palestine alongside Israel.
- **New York Declaration (2025):** Outcome of a high-level conference co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, calling for immediate ceasefire, recognition of Palestine, and halting Israeli settlements.
- **India's Foreign Policy:** Balancing Act between Palestine (historical solidarity) and Israel (strategic, defence, and technology partner).

Mains Relevance

Static Context

- India was among the first non-Arab countries to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1974 and later recognized Palestine as a state in 1988.
- Support for the **two-state solution** has been a constant element of India's foreign policy.
- India has deepening defence and economic ties with Israel since the 1990s, especially after normalization of relations in 1992.

Current Context

- **UNGA Resolution (2025):** Endorsed by 142 nations, including India, calling for peaceful settlement of the Palestine issue and effective implementation of the two-state solution.
- **Geopolitical Dynamics:**

India votes in favour of UNGA resolution on Palestine state

Press Trust of India
 UNITED NATIONS

India on Friday voted in favour of a resolution in the UN General Assembly that endorses the 'New York Declaration' on peaceful settlement of the Palestine issue and implementation of the two-state solution.

The resolution, introduced by France, was adopted with an overwhelming 142 nations voting in favour, 10 against and 12 abstentions. Those voting against included Argentina, Hungary, Israel and the U.S.

India was among the 142 nations that voted in favour of the resolution titled 'Endorsement of the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine

The resolution was adopted with an overwhelming 142 nations voting in favour, 10 against and 12 abstentions

and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution'.

The declaration was circulated at a high-level international conference held in July at the UN headquarters and co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia.

In the declaration, the leaders "agreed to take collective action to end the war in Gaza, to achieve a peaceful and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the effective implementation of the two-state solution, and to build a better future for Palestinians, Israelis

and all peoples of the region".

The declaration called on the Israeli leadership to issue a clear public commitment to the two-state solution, including a sovereign, and viable Palestinian State

It also called on Israel to "immediately end violence and incitement against Palestinians, to immediately halt all settlement, land grabs and annexation activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, publicly renounce any annexation project or settlement policy, and put an end to settlers' violence".

The declaration reaffirmed "support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination".

Daily News Analysis

- Resolution urged Israel to halt settlements and violence.
- Reaffirmed Palestinian right to self-determination.
- Signalled international consensus against annexation and land grabs.
- **India's Position:** Aligns with historical support for Palestine while not straining ties with Israel, a key partner in defence, agriculture, and technology.
- **Strategic Balancing:** India maintains **energy and diaspora interests in West Asia**, engages with Gulf states, and participates in platforms like I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA).

Conclusion

India's vote in favour of the UNGA resolution reflects its consistent support for the two-state solution and Palestinian self-determination. At the same time, it demonstrates New Delhi's pragmatic diplomacy in balancing its ties with Israel and Arab states. Going forward, India's ability to uphold international law while safeguarding its strategic interests in West Asia will define its credibility as a responsible global actor.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), consider the following:

1. UNGA resolutions are legally binding on member states.
2. Each member of the UNGA has one vote, regardless of population size or economic strength.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "India's West Asia policy represents a delicate act of balancing between moral principles and realpolitik." Critically analyse with reference to the Israel-Palestine conflict. **(150 Words)**

The RTI's shift to a 'right to deny information'

The Right to Information (RTI) Act is founded on the principle that in a democracy, which is defined as "rule of the people, by the people, for the people", all information held by the government inherently belongs to the citizens. The government acts as a custodian of this information on behalf of the populace. Citizens legitimise their representatives by electing them, who in turn legitimise the bureaucracy. Therefore, the default mode under the RTI is that all information must be shared with citizens.

However, the Act always included specific exemptions to protect certain interests, such as national sovereignty. One crucial exemption is the Act's Section 8(1)(j), which is on "personal information".

The original Section 8(1)(j) was a detailed provision designed to balance the right to information with individual privacy. It stipulated that personal information could be denied if it had no connection to public activity or constituted an "unwarranted invasion on the privacy of an individual", unless there was a larger public interest in its disclosure.

A key aspect of this original provision was a proviso which is an acid test. It said: "provided that the information which cannot be denied to the Parliament or a State Legislature shall not be denied to any person". This meant that if information could not be denied to Parliament or a State Legislature it could also not be denied to an ordinary citizen.

The intent was to guide public information officers (PIOs) in discerning what constituted public activity, private activity, or an invasion of privacy, especially given the difficulty in definitively defining "privacy" (even *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union Of India* acknowledged that it would evolve on a case-to-case basis). The government routinely collects information from an individual in the normal course of its duties, and such information is generally not considered to be an invasion of privacy and should, therefore, be shared. However, if it invades his privacy, it must not be taken routinely. Restrictions on the fundamental right to information should be within the limits set by Article 19(1)(2) of the Constitution. Here, there are only two words relating to privacy: 'decency' or 'morality'. If disclosure violates decency or morality, it should be denied to Parliament and citizens.

The ambiguity of 'personal information'

The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act – a drastic alteration of Section 8(1)(j) that reduces its length to six words. This significant abbreviation makes it easy for most information to be denied. The core concern revolves around the interpretation of "personal information" itself.



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One of the most pressing issues is the lack of a clear and consistent definition of "personal information" under the amended RTI Act, especially in its relationship with the new Data Protection Law. There are two conflicting views: the first is Natural Person Interpretation: One view holds that "person" should be understood in its general sense, referring to a "normal person" or natural person. The second is the DPDP Bill Definition. The other, equally valid view, interprets "person" as defined in the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill. The DPDP Bill's definition is expansive, including a "Hindu undivided family, a firm, a company, [and] any association of individuals and the State".

If the latter definition is adopted, "almost everything is personal information". A significant amount of information can be shown to be related to some person. Thus the law gives a handle to deny most information. The RTI is transformed into a Right to Deny information. It becomes an 'RDI'. This broad interpretation poses a fundamental threat to the spirit of transparency. Adding to the complexity, the DPDP Bill contains a provision that overrides all other laws in cases of conflict. This is alarming because the DPDP Bill specifies strong penalties for violations which can be as high as ₹250 crore.

This creates an untenable situation for PIOs. As much of the government information is now digital, PIOs are apprehensive that a mistake in disclosing information could lead to severe financial penalties. This fear will incentivise PIOs to err on the side of information denial rather than disclosure, effectively creating a "right to deny information". The DPDP Act must not override the RTI Act, though it might be acceptable for it to override other Acts.

Facilitating corruption

The practical implications of these amendments are dire for public accountability and the fight against corruption. Transparency is a crucial tool in this battle, especially when other anti-corruption mechanisms have proven to be ineffective.

The first is the loss of public monitoring. Citizens are the best monitors against corruption. If information is denied, this vital monitoring mechanism is severely hampered. India's multilayered government agencies such as vigilance departments, anti-corruption bureaus and the Lokpal, have abjectly failed to curb corruption.

The second is denial of essential information. The broadened scope of "personal information" means that even mundane yet crucial documents could be withheld – a citizen's own corrected marksheets could be denied as "personal". The example of Rajasthan sharing details of pension beneficiaries to combat "ghost employees" and "ghost cards" will cease. Even a simple order

signed by an official could be denied as "personal information". It can result in over 90% of information being denied.

The third is unfettered corruption. The amendment "makes it the easy thing to be corrupt". Information relating to ghost employees or corruption charges falls under "personal information". It will be hidden, allowing corruption to 'flourish and continue unhindered'.

While the "larger public interest" clause still exists in the RTI Act (in Section 8(2)), its practical application is extremely rare and difficult. Citizens should not have to demonstrate "larger public interest" to access information as it is their fundamental right. This requirement only applies if information is already exempt.

There will be less than 1% orders where an exemption is accepted, but disclosure is based on larger public interest. This is because it is an incredibly challenging decision for any officer to make, weighing potential harm to an individual against the broader public benefit of disclosure. Therefore, relying on this clause to ensure transparency after the amendment is largely futile.

Apathy and a call to action

Despite the gravity of these amendments, there has been a notable lack of public and media outcry when compared to previous RTI changes, such as those concerning Commissioner's salaries and tenures. This apathy may be due to the amendment being "under the guise of data protection", making it seem less threatening to the average citizen. There is also a common sentiment that an individual's own information should not be shared, regardless of its relevance, leading to an 'ego takes over' mentality.

Sections 8(2) and 44(3) of the DPDP Bill constitute a "very fundamental regression on our democracy" and a "very fundamental attack on our fundamental rights".

There needs to be a focus on four issues. First, media and citizen engagement – there must be widespread public discussion across the country. Second, political accountability – citizens should demand assurances from political parties in their election manifestos that these amendments will be reversed. Third, public opinion – it is crucial to build strong public opinion with the support of the media. Fourth, recognition of gravity – this issue deserves as much attention as any other critical national debate, as the fundamental right to information is being compromised.

If citizens continue to remain silent, they will imperil their freedom and democracy. Collective action can lead to these changes being reversed. The future of transparency and accountability in India hinges on whether citizens and media can push back and protect the integrity of the RTI Act.

Citizens and the media need to challenge the Digital Personal Data Protection Act's amendment of Section 8(1)(j) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act

GS. Paper 02 – Indian Polity

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Analyse how the conflict between Right to Privacy (as upheld in *K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India*, 2017) and Right to Information is shaping India's governance framework. (150 Words)

Context :

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, was hailed as a landmark legislation to promote transparency and accountability in governance. It empowered citizens by making government information accessible, thereby acting as a strong weapon against corruption and maladministration. However, the recent amendment through the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act has drastically altered Section 8(1)(j), shifting the balance from the citizen's "right to know" towards a bureaucratic "right to deny information".

Background (Static Context)

- **RTI Act, 2005:** Ensures time-bound access to government information, with limited exemptions under Section 8.
- **Section 8(1)(j) [Original]:** Exempted disclosure of personal information only if unrelated to public activity or an unwarranted invasion of privacy, unless public interest justified it.
- **Proviso:** Information that cannot be denied to Parliament/State Legislature cannot be denied to citizens.
- **Constitutional Basis:** RTI is linked to **Article 19(1)(a)** (Freedom of Speech & Expression) and is subject to reasonable restrictions under **Article 19(2)**.

Current Developments (Dynamic Context)

- **DPDP Act Amendment:** Section 8(1)(j) has been cut down to just six words, making it ambiguous and easy to deny most information.
- **Ambiguity:** No clear definition of "personal information"; if the DPDP's broad definition (covering firms, HUFs, companies, etc.) is applied, almost every document can be withheld.
- **Fear of Penalties:** Severe fines (up to ₹250 crore) under DPDP Act make PIOs more likely to deny information to avoid risks.
- **Impact:** RTI risks becoming "RDI" — Right to Deny Information.

Implications

1. **Transparency & Accountability**
 - Citizens' ability to monitor government functioning weakens.
 - Public interest disclosures (e.g., pension beneficiary lists to expose ghost entries) may stop.
2. **Corruption**
 - Denial of records on recruitment, contracts, and fund allocations could shield corrupt practices.
 - "Ghost employees" or fake beneficiaries can remain undetected.
3. **Citizen Rights**
 - Even individuals may be denied access to their own corrected marksheets or official records.
 - Burden shifts on citizens to prove "larger public interest", which is rarely accepted.
4. **Democratic Regression**
 - Fundamental right to information diluted.
 - Weakens the principle of government as custodian of public information.

Way Forward

- **Public Awareness & Engagement:** Civil society, media, and academia must highlight the implications.

Daily News Analysis

- **Political Accountability:** Parties should commit to reversing restrictive amendments in manifestos.
- **Judicial Review:** Courts may need to strike a balance between privacy (as upheld in Puttaswamy judgment, 2017) and transparency.
- **Clear Definitions:** Need to harmonise DPDP and RTI Acts, with a narrow, precise meaning of "personal information".
- **Strengthen Oversight:** CIC and SICs should be empowered to check arbitrary denial of information.

Conclusion

The RTI Act was a watershed in deepening democracy by empowering citizens. The DPDP-linked amendment risks reversing this achievement, making information denial the norm rather than the exception. To safeguard transparency, accountability, and participatory democracy, it is imperative that citizens, civil society, and political institutions push back against this regression. Protecting RTI is essential not just for governance reforms but for the very health of India's democratic framework.

