

**The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE**

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**Why in News?**

- The Union Health Ministry has recently **released the data of the National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6)**, for which the on-the-ground survey was conducted in the years 2023 and 2024. This is the first comprehensive survey to capture the health indicators of the country post the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Study Agency:** The survey has been conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) under the aegis of the Ministry of Health.
- **Central finding:** India has achieved significant breakthroughs in institutional deliveries (hospital births), child immunization, and reduction in malnutrition. However, the rising rate of caesarean deliveries (C-section) and obesity in adults have emerged as new concerns.

**Improvements in Maternal Health**

- **Institutional Deliveries:** India now has **90.6% of babies born in hospitals**, which is a major achievement compared to 88.6% in NFHS-5.
- **Antenatal Care (ANC):**
  - About **95.9% of pregnant women received prenatal care**. Of these, women who got tested in the first trimester increased from 70% to **76.2%**.
  - The number of mothers who have had at least four antenatal check-ups (4 ANC visits) has increased from 58.5% to **65.2%**.
- **Maternal Nutrition:** Mothers consuming iron-folic acid (IFA) supplements for 100 days or more during pregnancy increased from 44.1% to **54.9%**, while women consuming for 180 days increased from 26% to **37.8%**.

**Child Health & Nutrition Indicators**

- **Drop in Undernutrition:**
  - **Stunting:** The rate has dropped from 35.5% to 29.3% in children **under 5 years of age**.

## 90% of Indian babies are born in hospitals: NFHS-6

Survey records sharp rise in caesarean section, drop in stunting and severe wasting among young children, improvements in services such as antenatal care and nutrition for pregnant women

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**  
NEW DELHI

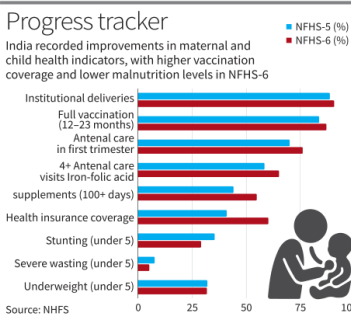
India made significant progress in maternal and child health, with improvements in vaccination and hospital births, and a drop in stunting and severe wasting among young children, according to the National Family Health Survey-6, for which field work was conducted in 2023 and 2024.

The Health Ministry released data from the survey on Friday. It showed that institutional deliveries rose from 88.6% in the previous round of the NFHS conducted between 2019 and 2021, to 90.6% this time, while 95.6% of infants under six months were being breastfed during the survey period.

The survey, which is the first to be conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, recorded improvements in child health indicators. Stunting among children under five years declined from 35.5% to 29.3%, severe wasting dropped from 7.7% to 5.2%, and the percentage of underweight children in this age group slipped marginally from 32.1% to 31.8%. Symptoms of acute respiratory infection among chil-

**Progress tracker**

India recorded improvements in maternal and child health indicators, with higher vaccination coverage and lower malnutrition levels in NFHS-6



Source: NFHS

caesarean section deliveries had increased sharply from 21.5% to 27.2%, with substantially higher rates in several States and in private healthcare facilities. In urban areas, the rate of caesarean sections stood at 40%, far exceeding the World Health Organization optimal threshold of 10%-15%.

Conducted by the Health Ministry along with the International Institute for Population Sciences, the survey documented progress towards universal immunisation coverage.

**Improved vaccination**  
Based on vaccination cards, full vaccination coverage among children aged 12-23 months rose from 83.8% to 87.1%, with 95.6% of children getting most of their vaccinations through public health facilities. Among major vaccines, rotavirus vaccination coverage rose substantially, from 36.4% to 85.4%. The coverage of the second dose of measles-containing vaccines also increased significantly from 58.6% to 71.8%.

The survey found that the use of hygienic methods of menstrual protection among women aged 15-24 years has increased from 77.6% to 79.2%.

- **Severe Wasting:** This is an indicator of severe malnutrition, which has decreased from 7.7% to **5.2%**.
- **Underweight:** There has been a slight improvement, from 32.1% to **31.8%**.
- **Breastfeeding and Pediatrics:** During the survey, it was found that 95.6% of infants under **6 months of age were being breastfed**. In addition, there has been a drastic reduction in cases of acute respiratory infections (ARI) and severe diarrhea (Diarrhoea) in children.
- **Improved Universal Immunization:** Full immunization coverage in children aged 12-23 months has increased from 83.8% to **87.1%**. Notably, **rotavirus vaccine coverage has jumped from 36.4% to 85.4%**. The special thing is that 95.6% of the children got these vaccines free of cost through government health facilities.

### Demographics & Social Indicators

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** India's TFR remains **stable at 2.0**. This is below the Replacement Level (2.1), indicating that India's population is now moving towards stabilization.
- **Contraceptive Prevalence Rate:** It has increased from 66.7% to **69.1%**.
- **Menstrual Hygiene:** The use of hygienic methods of menstrual protection among young women aged 15-24 years has increased to **79.2%**.

### Policy Concerns & Emerging Challenges

- **Uncontrolled Increase in Cesarean (C-section) Deliveries:** The rate of caesarean deliveries in the country has increased sharply from **21.5% to 27.2%**.
  - **In urban areas, the rate has reached 40%**, which is much higher than the World Health Organization (WHO) norm (10%-15%).
  - This growth is particularly evident in private hospitals, pointing to the commercialization of medicine.
- **Dual Burden of Nutrition:** While malnutrition among children is decreasing, obesity among adults is increasing rapidly.
- **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):** The rising graph of lifestyle risks and non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes, hypertension) is becoming a new and major crisis for India's health system.

### Conclusion

The results of NFHS-6 show that government interventions such as 'Poshan Abhiyaan', 'Mission Indradhanush', and 'Janani Suraksha Yojana' have shown positive impact on the ground, bringing India closer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of reducing infant and maternal mortality. However, the unbridled growth of C-section deliveries in private hospitals and rising obesity among adults warn that India now urgently needs stringent regulatory reforms in the health sector and a new national strategy towards lifestyle diseases (NCDs).

**UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions**

**Question:** Which of the following programmes is directly related to increasing universal immunization coverage?

- (a) Janani Suraksha Yojana
- (b) Mission Indradhanush
- (c) Poshan Abhiyan
- (d) Ayushman Bharat

Answer: **(b)**

**UPSC Mains Practice Questions**

**Question:** The National Family Health Survey-6 has highlighted several regulatory challenges along with achievements in the health sector. Discuss the problem of increasing caesarean deliveries and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in particular. **(150 words)**



**Page 05 : GS II : Indian Polity / Preliminary Examination**

**Why in News?**

- Recently, a bench of the Supreme Court (Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan) has issued comprehensive and detailed guidelines for the protection of young women and young women who are victims of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).
- 22-year-old case: This landmark verdict comes on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in 2004 by the non-governmental organization (NGO) 'Prajwala'. The court itself admitted that the case, pending for 22 years, was "extremely close to his heart".
- Court's Observation:** The Supreme Court stated in clear terms that human trafficking is **an affront to the human dignity** (Article 21) guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.

**Key Highlights & Guidelines of Supreme Court Judgments & Guidelines**

- Uniform Victim Protection Protocol:** The court has directed the government and the competent authorities to establish a 'Uniform Victim Protection Protocol' across the country for survivors of Occupational Sexual Abuse (CSE).
- Removal of Lack of Safety Mechanism:** The petition had primarily highlighted that there is a severe lack of adequate laws and protective systems in the country to rescue and rehabilitate young girls who have been pushed into the quagmire of prostitution. These directions of the Court will fill this gap.
- Appreciating Legal Representation:** The Court appreciated the continuous efforts of the NGO and Senior Advocate Aparna Bhat in this long legal battle, stating that "history will remember your efforts in this case for a long time."

**Human Trafficking and Indian Law: UPSC Context & Existing Framework**

- Constitutional Provisions:** Article 23 of the Indian Constitution completely prohibits human trafficking and forced labour (Begar). This new decision of the Supreme Court strengthens this Article and Article 21 (Right to Life).
- Statutory Framework:** The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) in India is the main legislation dealing with trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Apart from this, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BJS) also has stringent provisions against human trafficking.
- Institutional Mechanism:** The 'Anti-Human Trafficking Units' (AHTUs) under the Ministry of Home Affairs work on the ground. The new Supreme

**SC issues guidelines for protecting survivors of human trafficking**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday issued comprehensive guidelines for the government and competent authorities to protect young women from trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan said the judgment in the case, pending for over 22 years in the apex court, was "close to our hearts".

The court gave detailed guidelines on establishing a uniform victim protection protocol for survivors of CSE. The court said trafficking was an affront to constitutional dignity.

"We have tried to do our best," Justice Pardiwala said.



The short pronouncement in the courtroom saw Justice Mahadevan appreciate the long representation of senior advocate Aparna Bhat in the matter. "History will long remember your efforts in this case," Justice Mahadevan addressed Ms. Bhat.

The petition highlighting the lack of laws and protective mechanism for young girls trafficked into prostitution was filed by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Prajwala in 2004.

Court guidelines will make these agencies more sensitive and responsive to victims.

### Need for these guidelines and future significance

- **Focus on Rehabilitation:** Mere rescue is not enough to help trafficked women return to society to live a dignified life. The court's emphasis on 'protocol' means that there will now be a uniform policy on their mental health, medical, legal aid and skill development.
- **Curbing Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE):** Organized crime networks often exploit security gaps to traffick girls at the inter-state level. Having a national uniform protocol will improve coordination among the states.
- **Example of Judicial Activism:** Surviving the case for 22 years and eventually issuing policy guidelines shows how serious the judiciary is about addressing the legislative shortcomings of the executive.

### Conclusion

These comprehensive guidelines issued by the Supreme Court for victims of human trafficking are a major step towards protecting social justice and human rights in India. This legal journey, which began in 2004, is a testimony to the fact that the rule of law may be delayed, but it is committed to protecting the dignity of the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of society. It is now entirely up to the executive and state governments to implement this 'victim protection protocol' sensitively and strictly on the ground.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

**Question:** With reference to the Indian Constitution, consider the following statements:

1. Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labour.
2. Article 21 only guarantees the right to **life**, not a dignified life.
3. Protection against human trafficking is a fundamental right subject.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

**Answer: b)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Questions

**Question:** Review India's constitutional and legal framework in dealing with human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Are strict laws alone enough? Explain the role of rehabilitation in your answer. **(150 words)**

Page 06 :GS III :Environment / Preliminary Examination

Why in News?

- Recently, the temperature in Rajasthan's Sriganganagar **reached 48** degrees Celsius, which is the highest temperature in the country this year. The frequency and duration of heatwaves in India are increasing steadily due to monsoon delays and climate change.
- **Growing Crisis:** According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), there has been a steady increase in the number of heat wave days in the 'core heatwave zone' (central, north-western and eastern coastal region – 30% of India's landmass) since 1961. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has also recorded the period 2015-2025 as the hottest decade in history.

Urban Heat Island (UHI) and 'Concrete Fever'

- **Huge Difference in Temperature:** Indian cities are recording **hotter than their surrounding rural areas, from 2°C to 10°C**. This has been called 'Urban Heat Island' or 'Concrete Fever' of cities.
- **The main causes of this crisis:**
  - **Concrete and Asphalt:** Concrete buildings and asphalt roads in cities absorb heat during the day and release it slowly at night, making the nights even hotter.
  - **Destruction of Green Cover:** Trees and forests are constantly being cut down in cities in the name of development.
  - **'Waste Heat' of Air-Conditioners (ACs):** Thousands of ACs that keep offices and homes cool release a huge amount of heat into the outside air, which further increases the temperature.
  - **Sealed Urban Surface:** **Due to the** complete covering of the soil with concrete, the average humidity in cities like Delhi has increased by 8 percentage points, leading to the deadly heat of humidity.

The Paradox of Inequality and 'Technological Solutions' (The AC Paradox)

- **Privilege vs. Marginal Class:** The increasing use of AC is a 'dangerous technological fix'. It only protects the privileged working class, but the informal sector workers, construction workers and street vendors have to pay the price.
- **Thermodynamic Paradox:** According to the laws of physics, ACs throw out the heat inside. Thus, this machine to create coolness inside is multiplying the problem by overheating the environment outside.

Policy Recommendations & Way Forward

- **Green Cover & Reflective Materials:** The use of 'cool roofs' (roofs with white or reflective coating) and permeable materials instead of concrete should be mandatory in urban planning. It is necessary to promote intensive forestry in cities.
- **Climate-Calibrated Building Codes:** India's building bylaws need to be recalibrated to suit the changing environment and rising temperatures, so that buildings remain naturally cool.
- **Strict enforcement of labour laws:** The existing labour laws in the country should be strictly enforced. When the 'heat index' (the combined effect of temperature and humidity) exceeds the endurance limit of the human body, it should be mandatory for employers to stop outdoor work.
- **Heat Budgeting:** India has to initiate a serious national debate towards allocating special financial budgets for the effective implementation of the Heat Action Plan (HAP) at the national and state levels.

### Conclusion

To combat climate change, it is not enough to reduce global emissions, but adopting sustainable urban design at the local level is the need of the hour. India will have to adopt prudent and environment-friendly policies instead of immediate technological pleasures (such as the use of excessive ACs) to bring down this 'fever' of concrete. Only then will crores of informal and outdoor workers who drive the economic wheel of the country be saved from this deadly environmental crisis.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

**Question:** Which of the following are the major causes of the "Urban Heat Island (UHI)" effect?

1. Concrete and asphalt surfaces
2. Reduction of green cover
3. Waste heat emitted by air conditioners
4. **Increased use of permeable surfaces**

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

**Answer: b)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Questions

**Q:** What is the "Urban Heat Island" effect? Discuss the major causes and consequences of this in Indian cities. (150 words)

### Why in News?

- The historic port city of Ningbo in **China's Zhejiang** province, which was once the center of Buddhist culture and maritime trade, has emerged as the global face of China's green industrial push.
- **Central Theme:** The city tells the story of China's global dominance in future technologies through electric vehicles (EVs), advanced manufacturing, and integrated supply chains.

### 'Future Factory' and Technological Advancements (Zeekr Factory Case Study)

- **Robotics and Automation:** 60-70% of the work is done by robots at the factory of Ningbo-based GeelyAuto Group's premium EV brand '**Zeekr**'. The welding factory here is fully autonomous.
- **Lean Production:** The factory manufactures only cars that have received firm orders, which does not waste resources. It has a daily capacity of 1,300 cars.
- **Live Tracking of Carbon Footprint:** ₹10 billion RMB (\$1.47 billion) has been invested in this 'Future Factory'. Here electricity, water consumption and carbon emissions per vehicle are measured in real-time.

### Rejuvenating Old Industries: Ningbo Iron & Steel (Ninggang)

- **Investing in Pollution Control:** China has not only set up new green industries but has also rejuvenated old heavily polluting industries. The steel-producing company 'Ninggang' has spent about 4 billion RMB (\$588 million) on emissions renewables projects.
- **Zero Solid Waste:**
  - No solid waste is allowed to go out of the factory; Waste containing iron and carbon is recycled.
  - All the water used in manufacturing comes from the city's sewage treatment plant, which is purified and desalinated and used repeatedly.

### The Three Pillars of China's Green Transformation

- **First Pillar – Strict Laws and Prevention of Corruption:** Bribing local officials for violating pollution regulations was previously common in China. With strict crackdown on corruption in the last decade and the use of 'Big Data', factories are now monitored in real time.
- **Second Pillar - Sustained Investment:** Renewables in Zhejiang Province now account for 50% of the total installed energy capacity. 100% surface water meets national standards due to stringent control over industrial waste.

### Concrete fever

India must mandate green cover and reflective materials for its cities

**S**ri Ganganagar, in Rajasthan touched 48° Celsius this week, the hottest that India has been this year so far. Scorching summer heat in the run-up to the monsoon, which is delayed, is not unusual, but many Indians in the informal sector have to work directly under the sun in unprotected environments. Climate change is inextricably linked to heatwaves. India Meteorological Department data show that the frequency of heatwave spells has risen by 0.1 days per decade since 1961 over India's Core Heatwave Zone that includes the central, northwestern, and eastern coastal regions, or about 30% of India's total land area. Their maximum duration has increased by 0.55 days per decade; and the 2015-25 interval is, according to the World Meteorological Organization, the warmest 11-year stretch since records began. But the emissions that produced these numbers are only the proximate villain. What makes India's heat uniquely lethal is not the atmosphere alone. Urban heat islands across Indian cities now run 2°C to 10°C hotter than their surrounding rural areas, the difference manufactured by concrete, asphalt, the butchering of tree cover, and the waste heat exhaled by the thousands of air-conditioners cooling offices. Delhi's average humidity rose by eight percentage points between 2015-19 and 2020-24. This has a lot to do with an increasingly sealed urban surface than global warming alone. This is where the seduction of the technological fix becomes dangerous with the instinct being to reach for more, better and cheaper ACs. This might shield the privileged office worker at the expense of the vast majority, many of whom are outdoor workers and street vendors. Paradoxically, the machines are, in a thermodynamic sense, fuelling the problem.

What is called for instead is unglamorous, slow and politically difficult: urban design that mandates reflective materials and green cover, building codes calibrated to a climate that has already shifted; and, most urgently, the enforcement of labour laws that already exist but are honoured largely in the breach. These laws require employers to stop outdoor work when the heat index crosses thresholds that human physiology cannot safely absorb. India has not yet had a serious national conversation about budget heads for heat management.

- **Third Pillar - Advanced Technology:** The competitiveness of Chinese companies rests not only on lower prices, but on more efficient systems and technologies.

### China's monopoly on the global market (Global Market Dominance)

- **EV and Battery Sector:** China accounts for about **60% of total** EV sales globally. In addition, China controls **76% of lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing**.
- **Solar PVs:** In 2023, China installed as many solar photovoltaics (PVs) alone as the whole world combined. China accounts for more than 80% of all sectors of the solar value chain.
- **Critical Minerals:** China processes 90% of Rare Earth Elements and 60-70% of lithium and cobalt, which are essential for modern batteries.

### Geopolitical & Global Impact

- **Energy Security:** Amid the current tensions in West Asia (such as the Strait of Hormuz), China is becoming self-reliant by removing dependence on traditional energy sources.
- **Concern of developed countries (such as the European Union):** According to a recent report from France (February 2026), China's imports of cheap and technologically advanced green products pose a threat of "deindustrialization" in Europe. 70% of Germany's and 60% of Italy's manufacturing output are under threat due to Chinese competition.
- **Opportunities for the Global South:** Developing countries like the Maldives, which spends 33% of their GDP on fossil fuels, are looking at China as an affordable green option. The Maldives is seeking technical cooperation from China for its 'RasMale' zero-carbon island project.

### Conclusion

China's eco-friendly transformation proves that economic growth and environmental protection can go hand in hand, provided there is strong political will, strict regulatory enforcement, and continuous technological innovation. While Western countries are retreating from climate leadership, China has established its monopoly on the entire green supply chain. The lesson for countries like India is that energy security and green transition are not mutually exclusive, but the only practical way to maintain economic sovereignty in a complex global environment.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

**Question:** Consider the following statements:

1. China controls more than 75% of the global lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing capacity.
2. China plays a major role in the processing of global rare earth elements.
3. China's share of global EV sales is less than 20%.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

**Answer: a)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Questions

**Question:** Examine the implications of China's dominance on the global supply chain of electric vehicles, batteries and critical minerals on international relations and global trade. **(150 words)**



**Page 10 GS II : Indian Polity & Social Justice / Preliminary Examination**

**Why in News?**

- The Andhra Pradesh Police has busted a major inter-state child trafficking and child-selling racket that has recently spread across the state. The gang was taking advantage of extremely poor, destitute women and surrogacy diplomacy to sell newborns directly to rich but childless couples.
- Extensive Network:** The syndicate has links with major states/cities like Gujarat (Ahmedabad), Maharashtra (Mumbai) and Delhi apart from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. At least 25 children are expected to have been sold by this network in the last few months.

**Gang Modus Operandi**

- Penetration in Hospitals and Fertility Centres:**
  - The main accused in this network (most of whom are women, such as Sarojini, Farhina and Satyamani) used to spread the trap by bribing the lower staff (nurses, lab staff, Class IV staff and midwives of government and private hospitals and IVF centres).
  - These employees would give the gang data of couples who have been undergoing fertility treatment for a long time, or report unmarried/abandoned women who are unable to raise children.
- Targeting poor and beggar women:** Gang members used to target begging women and extremely poor mothers in temples or public places. They would lure them with a small amount (₹5,000 to ₹10,000) or kidnap their children and take them into their custody.
- Illegal Operation of Baby Care Centres:** Hindi-speaking women were hired to transport trafficked babies so that they could pretend to be mothers. These children were kept in illegally operated secret centers before being sold, where women were stationed to care for them and protect them.
- Extortion of huge sums:** Taking advantage of the helplessness and social pressure of childless couples, these newborns were sold at hefty prices ranging from ₹2 lakh to ₹10 lakh.

**Social & Legal Factors Driving the Crime**



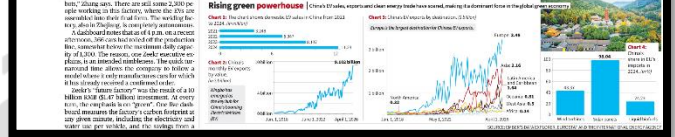
**Inside China's green transition**

Ningbo in southern Zhejiang province of China was once a historic maritime hub shaped by Buddhist culture and trade. It has now emerged as a key hub for showcasing China's green industrial push, where electric vehicles, advanced manufacturing, and tightly integrated supply chains are powering the country's bid for global leadership in the technologies of the future. *Anand Krishnan reports from the port city.*

While at the forefront of the blue economy in southern China, the Temple of Buddha in Ningbo, a port city of 10 million, is also a hotbed of green innovation. In the city's industrial parks, there are 200,000 electric vehicles, 100,000 solar panels, and 100,000 wind turbines. The city's green transition is a key part of China's broader push for a green economy, which is being driven by the government's 'dual carbon' goals. The city's green transition is a key part of China's broader push for a green economy, which is being driven by the government's 'dual carbon' goals.

**China's green transition**

China's green transition is a key part of the country's broader push for a green economy, which is being driven by the government's 'dual carbon' goals. The city's green transition is a key part of China's broader push for a green economy, which is being driven by the government's 'dual carbon' goals.



## Daily News Analysis

- **Social Stigma:** In Indian society, there is a lot of family and social pressure on couples regarding childlessness. Due to this pressure, many couples (such as Sushila and her husband) fall into the clutches of these gangs without understanding the difference between legal and illegal and later face legal cases.
- **Complex Adoption Process:** The process of legally adopting a child through the official State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA) or the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is highly lengthy and complex. To avoid this long waiting period, many couples unknowingly or deliberately fall into the trap of brokers.
- **Links to Surrogacy and Egg Donation Racket:** The main leader of the gang (such as Balgam Sarojini) has been found to be involved not only in child trafficking, but also in illegal egg donation by luring poor women with money and in the racket of commercial surrogacy.

### Police Action & Institutional Support

- **Strict Surveillance and Arrests:** Dozens of accused have been arrested and a huge amount of cash has been recovered in raids in several districts (Krishna, Eluru, NTR) led by Andhra Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta and District Superintendents of Police.
- **Rescue of Victim Children:** So far, many children have been rescued safely in various raids. All the rescued infants have been handed over to the state Women Development and Child Welfare (WD&CW) **department and government creches for proper care, protection and rehabilitation.**
- **New Dimension of Bonded Labour:** In some cases, it has also been observed that not only newborns, but slightly older children (around 10 years of age) were being kidnapped and sold for forced labour in duck farming or agricultural operations in other districts.

### Policy Recommendations & Way Forward

- **Simplification of the adoption process:** According to police officials (such as Eluru Deputy SP D. Shraavan Kumar), if the process of legally adopting a child in the country and the state is made simple, transparent and quick, people will stop going to the touts, which will automatically eliminate the demand for this illegal market.
- **Strict audit of hospitals and IVF centres:** The activities of staff working in fertility clinics and maternity wards should be monitored through CCTVs and stringent regulatory mechanisms to prevent data leaks and illegal child-selling.
- **Awareness Campaign:** It is necessary to make the general public, especially rural and middle-class couples, understand that taking a child without any means without legal documents falls under the serious crime of "child trafficking", which provides for stringent punishment.

### Conclusion

This illegal trade of children of poverty-stricken mothers and the helplessness of childless couples is a deep stain on the moral fabric of society. This child trafficking crisis is not just a failure of law and order, but it is a combination of economic inequality, social norms and administrative complexities. Strengthening inter-state police coordination, humanizing and accessible legal

processes for adoption and providing economic security to marginalized women is an imperative need of the hour to completely eliminate this organized crime.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

**Question:** Which of the following institutions is primarily responsible for regulating and facilitating **the legal** adoption-making process **in India**?

- (a) NCPCR
- (b) NHRC
- (c) CARA
- (d) NCRB

Answer: **(c)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Questions

**Q:** "Child trafficking is not only a law and order **problem**, but also a result of socio-economic inequality. Comment on the recent Andhra Pradesh child trafficking case. **(150 words)**



## International law, 'optional' for powerful states

Voltaire's famous quip about the Holy Roman Empire – that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire – has often come to mind when I think about the contemporary state of public international law. For all its lofty aspirations, it is frequently neither truly public, nor reliably international, nor consistently law. It is public only in the sense that it concerns states rather than private actors; international only insofar as sovereigns consent to be bound; and law only to the extent that it can be enforced – an increasingly fragile proposition in a world where power, not principle, is again determining outcomes.

### The erosion of an edifice of norms

Over the last century and a half, humanity painstakingly constructed an edifice of norms, treaties and institutions meant to restrain the worst impulses of states. From the Hague Conventions to the Geneva Conventions, from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), from human rights covenants to arms-control regimes, the international community sought to replace the anarchy of the past with a rules-based order. Yet, in recent years, that order has been fraying at an alarming pace. Across continents and conflicts, states have violated foundational principles with impunity, eroding the credibility of the very system meant to protect global peace and stability.

The most fundamental of these principles is the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force and its guarantee of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran in 2026 stand as the starkest breaches of this norm in decades: an unprovoked assault on a sovereign state, justified through dubious claims and enforced through overwhelming military might. Both invasions confirmed that the Charter's core promise could be shredded when a powerful state chose to do so.

The U.S. and Russian records are equally deplorable in disregarding the prohibition on force. The 2003 Iraq invasion, undertaken without Security Council authorisation and justified on grounds later proven baseless, remains one of the most consequential breaches of the Charter that set a precedent for Russia's conduct. More recently, the targeted killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran have raised serious questions about the erosion of the norm against unilateral force. Israel's repeated military operations in Gaza and Lebanon, including large-scale bombardments causing extensive civilian casualties, have also drawn widespread allegations of disproportionate force and violations of international humanitarian law.

The pattern is not confined to major powers. Türkiye's incursions into northern Syria,



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Imperfect though it may be, the rules-based order remains humanity's strongest defence against chaos

Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ethiopia's conduct in the Tigray conflict, including cross-border strikes into Sudan, have all arguably breached international norms.

Beyond the use of force, states have violated UNCLOS, one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. The South China Sea has become a theatre of systematic disregard for maritime law. China's expansive "nine-dash line" claim, rejected by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016, continues to be enforced through militarised artificial islands, harassment of foreign vessels, and coercive coast-guard tactics. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have all faced incursions into their exclusive economic zones.

The Strait of Hormuz has witnessed repeated blockades and interdictions. Iran and the U.S. have seized foreign tankers, closed the Strait, and imposed maritime blockades in the region, without clear legal justification under UNCLOS. These actions undermine the principle of freedom of navigation, a cornerstone of global trade and maritime stability.

### Brazen actions across the world

International humanitarian law has also suffered grievous violations. In Syria, the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, and siege tactics have been extensively documented. Non-state actors such as the Islamic State (ISIS) and various militias have committed atrocities on a massive scale. In Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi rebels alike have been accused of targeting civilians, hospitals, and critical infrastructure. In Ethiopia's Tigray region, reports of mass killings, sexual violence, and starvation as a weapon of war have shocked the conscience of the world.

Human rights treaties, too, have been flouted with increasing brazenness. Israel's indiscriminate killing of civilians in Gaza and China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang – including mass detention, forced labour, and cultural erasure – have been described by several governments and scholars as crimes against humanity. Myanmar's military junta has carried out systematic abuses against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, prompting genocide allegations. In Iran, the violent suppression of protests following the death of Mahsa Amini revealed a pattern of extrajudicial killings and torture. Even democratic states have not been immune: the U.S.'s use of torture during the "war on terror", Australia's offshore detention of asylum seekers, and Europe's pushbacks of migrants in the Mediterranean have all raised serious legal and moral concerns.

Arms-control regimes have also weakened. The collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the erosion of the Open Skies

Treaty, and the uncertain future of the New START agreement have revived fears of a new arms race. North Korea continues to defy UN resolutions with missile tests and nuclear development.

Iran's nuclear programme, once constrained by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has allegedly accelerated following the agreement's unravelling. These developments threaten to undo decades of painstaking progress in nuclear restraint.

Environmental law, too, has suffered. States have failed to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement, with emissions rising and climate targets slipping out of reach. Illegal deforestation in the Amazon, often abetted by state actors, violates international norms on biodiversity and environmental protection. Deep-sea mining, pursued without adequate regulation, threatens fragile marine ecosystems.

### There is a vacuum

What ties these disparate violations together is not merely their frequency but their impunity. International law depends on consent, reciprocity, and enforcement through collective mechanisms. Yet, the Security Council is paralysed by geopolitical rivalries; the International Criminal Court faces accusations of bias and lacks jurisdiction over major powers; and treaty bodies often rely on voluntary compliance. In this vacuum, states increasingly act as though power, not principle, determines legality. Thucydides' bleak observation – "the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must" – resonates today with unsettling clarity. When powerful states violate international law without consequence, they signal to others that norms are optional and that might is right. The result is a world sliding back toward the law of the jungle.

This is not merely a philosophical concern. The erosion of international law has tangible consequences: conflicts become harder to resolve, civilians bear the brunt of violence, global commons are degraded, and trust between nations evaporates. The rules-based order, imperfect as it is, remains humanity's best defence against chaos.

The challenge in reaffirming the value of international law is that it requires strengthening multilateral institutions, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and cultivating a global political culture that prizes restraint over adventurism. It also requires recognising that international law is not a panacea but a framework – a set of shared expectations that guide behaviour even when perfect compliance is elusive. Without it, the world risks returning to a state where power alone determines outcomes. And in such a world, it is not only the weak who suffer; ultimately, everyone does.

## GS Paper II: International Relations

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions:** Analyze the growing conflict between sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. Answer with reference to recent global conflicts. (250 words)

**Context:** The author uses Voltaire's famous sarcasm about the 'Holy Roman Empire' (that it was neither sacred, nor Roman, nor empire) and says that today's international law is neither completely public, nor credibly international, nor continuously applicable law.

- **Central Crisis:** In the current global scenario, principles have been left behind and power is dictating the consequences, threatening the relevance of international rules.

## Erosion of Territorial Integrity

- **Violation of the UN Charter:** The most basic rule of the UN Charter is to respect the sovereignty of a country and prohibit the use of force. But the superpowers have torn it to shreds:
  - **The Russia-Ukraine war (2022) and the US-Israel war on Iran (2026):** These are the most convincing evidence that when the interests of a powerful country get in the way, it turns the principles of sovereignty into rubble. The recent targeted killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and air strikes on Iran have seriously hurt the global norms against the use of unilateral force.
  - **Historical precedent:** The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 without Security Council approval was a dangerous turning point that paved the way for countries like Russia to break the rules in the future.
- **Aggressive stance of regional powers:** Not only superpowers, but also regional countries are on the move:
  - Turkey entering northern Syria.
  - Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh.
  - Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and cross-border attacks on Sudan.

## Violation of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- **South China Sea:** China has forcibly enforced its illegal claim to the "Nine-Dash Line" through militarized artificial islands and coastal guards, rejecting the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in 2016. This has led to persistent violations of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** Both Iran and the US have seized commercial tankers and imposed a maritime blockade without any clear legal basis, which is against the 'freedom of navigation', the lifeline of global trade.

## International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Violations

- **War Crimes and Barbarism:** The Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Syria, the bombing of hospitals by the Saudi coalition and Houthi rebels in Yemen, and the use of starvation as a weapon in Tigray, Ethiopia, are brutal examples.
- **Injury to Human Dignity:**
  - Israel's large-scale bombing and civilian deaths in Gaza and Lebanon have been considered by many scholars to be a violation of the principle of proportionality.
  - China's mass detention, forced labor and cultural extermination of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang has been described as crimes against humanity.
  - Systematic atrocities (genocide allegations) of the Rohingya minority by Myanmar's military junta.
  - The double standard of democracies: the use of torture by the US in the war on terror, the offshore detention of migrants by Australia and the pushbacks by Europe to the Mediterranean show that even democracies are not milkwashed when it comes to human rights.

## Disarmament and the collapse of environmental laws

- **End of Nuclear and Arms Control Treaties:** The collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the weakening of the Open Skies Treaty, and the uncertain future of the 'New START' agreement are pushing the world towards a new nuclear arms race. After North Korea's missile test and the breakdown of the JCPOA agreement, Iran's nuclear program accelerates is a major threat to global security.
- **Reneging on Climate Promises:** Countries have failed to meet the carbon emission reduction promises made under the Paris Agreement. Illegal logging of Amazon forests and deep-sea mining without adequate regulations are destroying global biodiversity.

## Zero of accountability and 'jungle raj' (The Vacuum of Enforcement)

- **Institutional Paralysis:** International law mainly depends on the mutual consent and collective enforcement of countries. But currently:
  - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been completely paralyzed due to geopolitical rivalry and veto.
  - International Criminal Court (ICC): It is always accused of Western leanings and favoritism and has no real jurisdiction against the superpowers.
- **Thucydides' statement:** This statement of the Greek historian Thucydides fits the present day—"The strong do what they can, and the weak endure what they have to endure." When powerful countries break the law without fear of repercussions, the world starts moving back to 'Jungle Raj' (Might is Right).

## Conclusion & Way Forward

The weakening of international law is not a philosophical debate, but has practical and terrible consequences—civilians are killed, trust between countries is eroded, and global crises are resolved.

### Essential Steps for Improvement:

1. Strengthen multilateral institutions (such as the UN) and bring about democratic reforms in them.
2. To make accountability mechanisms more fair and effective.
3. To develop a global political culture that prioritizes restraint over military misadventure.

International law is not a magic solution, but it is the only common framework humanity has to avoid chaos. If it is allowed to be completely destroyed, eventually not only the weakling, but one day the superpowers and the entire human civilization will bear the brunt.