The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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125×2=250

खण्ड A
SECTION A

Q1. विरोधाभास जीवन की विडंबनाओं को दर्शाते हैं।

Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life.

Q2. एक कृतज्ञ मन अति सुंदर होता है।

A grateful mind is very beautiful.

Q3. काँटा, कली का बदला हुआ रूप है।

A thorn is a changed bud.

Q4. जब दो हाथी लड़ते हैं, तब घास ही रौंदी जाती है।

When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.

खण्ड B
SECTION B

Q5. प्रकृति ही जीवात्मा का प्रतीक है।

Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

Q6. एक अच्छे शिक्षित दिमाग में, हमेशा उत्तर से अधिक प्रश्न होंगे।

A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

Q7. कठोर निर्णयों को टालना सबसे कम नैतिक मार्ग है।

Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

Q8. उत्तम नेता वह है जो अपने अनुयायियों का अनुसरण करता है।

A good leader is one who follows the followers.

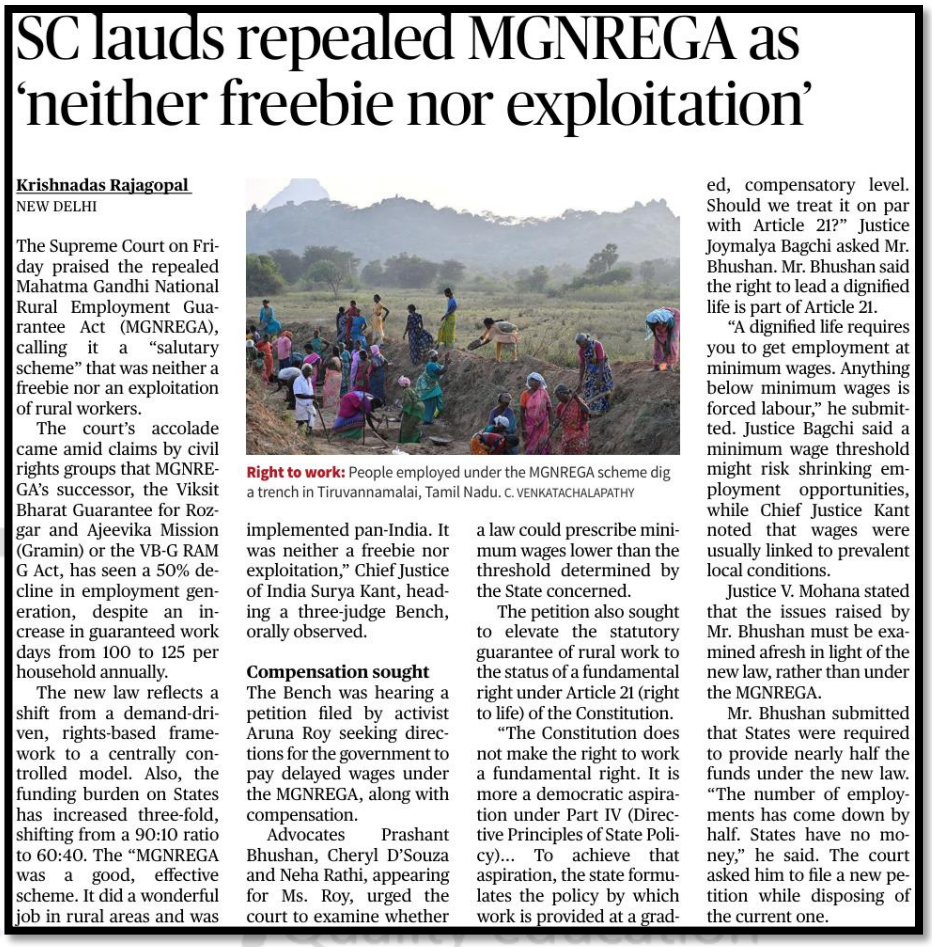
Page 01:GS II : Governance / Preliminary Examination

The Supreme Court's commendation of the repealed MGNREGA Act, 2005 as a "salutary scheme" highlights a crucial shift in India's social security landscape. The transition from a demand-driven right to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025 raises fundamental debates regarding fiscal federalism, constitutional guarantees, and rural employment.

Core Issues & Analytical Pillars

1. Paradigm Shift: Rights-Based to Top-Down Model

- **MGNREGA Framework:** Bottom-up, demand-driven legal entitlement ensuring 100 days of guaranteed work.
- **VB-G RAM G Model:** Offers 125 guaranteed work days, but introduces a centrally controlled system with normative funding allocations and a mandatory 60-day pause during peak agricultural seasons.



SC lauds repealed MGNREGA as 'neither freebie nor exploitation'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday praised the repealed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), calling it a "salutary scheme" that was neither a freebie nor an exploitation of rural workers.

The court's accolade came amid claims by civil rights groups that MGNREGA's successor, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or the VB-G RAM G Act, has seen a 50% decline in employment generation, despite an increase in guaranteed work days from 100 to 125 per household annually.

The new law reflects a shift from a demand-driven, rights-based framework to a centrally controlled model. Also, the funding burden on States has increased three-fold, shifting from a 90:10 ratio to 60:40. The "MGNREGA was a good, effective scheme. It did a wonderful job in rural areas and was implemented pan-India. It was neither a freebie nor exploitation," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, orally observed.

Right to work: People employed under the MGNREGA scheme dig a trench in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

Compensation sought

The Bench was hearing a petition filed by activist Aruna Roy seeking directions for the government to pay delayed wages under the MGNREGA, along with compensation.

Advocates Prashant Bhushan, Cheryl D'Souza and Neha Rathi, appearing for Ms. Roy, urged the court to examine whether a law could prescribe minimum wages lower than the threshold determined by the State concerned.

The petition also sought to elevate the statutory guarantee of rural work to the status of a fundamental right under Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

"The Constitution does not make the right to work a fundamental right. It is more a democratic aspiration under Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy)... To achieve that aspiration, the state formulates the policy by which work is provided at a graded, compensatory level. Should we treat it on par with Article 21?" Justice Joymalya Bagchi asked Mr. Bhushan. Mr. Bhushan said the right to lead a dignified life is part of Article 21.

"A dignified life requires you to get employment at minimum wages. Anything below minimum wages is forced labour," he submitted. Justice Bagchi said a minimum wage threshold might risk shrinking employment opportunities, while Chief Justice Kant noted that wages were usually linked to prevalent local conditions.

Justice V. Mohana stated that the issues raised by Mr. Bhushan must be examined afresh in light of the new law, rather than under the MGNREGA.

Mr. Bhushan submitted that States were required to provide nearly half the funds under the new law. "The number of employments has come down by half. States have no money," he said. The court asked him to file a new petition while disposing of the current one.

2. Fiscal Federalism & Financial Strain

- Replaces the former 90:10 funding ratio with a 60:40 share between the Centre and States (except Northeastern/Himalayan states).
- Shifts unexpected cost overruns and delay compensations to state budgets, creating severe fiscal pressure on resource-strapped state governments.

3. Constitutional Justiciability

- **Article 21 (Right to Life):** Petitioners argue that working below statutory minimum wages constitutes forced labour, violating human dignity.
- **Directive Principles (DPSP):** The judiciary maintains that the Right to Work under Article 41 remains a democratic aspiration rather than an automatically enforceable fundamental right.

Key Institutional Comparisons

Parameter	MGNREGA (2005)	VB-G RAM G Act (2025)
Legal Architecture	Demand-driven statutory right	Central normative allocation model
Guaranteed Work	100 days per household annually	125 days per household annually
Fiscal Share (Centre:State)	90:10 (90% Central contribution)	60:40 standard funding split
Planning Authority	Gram Sabha / Gram Panchayat	Integrated into National Rural Stack

Related Static Dimensions

- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV):** Article 39 (Livelihood), Article 41 (Right to Work), Article 43 (Living Wage).
- **Fundamental Rights (Part III):** Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity) and Article 23 (Prohibition of forced labour).
- **Devolution of Powers:** Impact on Panchayati Raj Institutions (73rd Constitutional Amendment) and local self-governance.
- **Fiscal Federalism:** Financial dynamics between the Centre and States regarding Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
- **Employment & Social Security:** Poverty alleviation, distress migration prevention, and rural wage dynamics.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's observation underscores the need to balance fiscal sustainability with constitutional ideals of social justice. While administrative streamlining and infrastructure alignment under the new act offer modernization, protecting rural livelihoods requires preserving demand-driven access, ensuring wage parity with state minimums, and maintaining federal cooperation.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, consider the following statements:

1. It provides a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment to eligible rural households.

2. The programme retains a demand-driven character.

3. The Centre determines State-wise normative allocations based on prescribed objective parameters.

4. The funding pattern is identical for all States.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

C. 2, 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Employment guarantees are not merely poverty-alleviation instruments but mechanisms for protecting livelihood security and human dignity." Discuss in the context of India's rural employment framework.**(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 02 :GS II :International Relations / Preliminary Examination

India's hosting of the 14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Ministerial Meeting in Chennai highlights its growing role as a leader in the Global South. Under the theme 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability' for its 2026 BRICS Presidency, India emphasized human-centric, accessible, and inclusive technology to address global digital divides.

Core Issues & Analytical Pillars

1. Inclusive & Human-Centric Technology

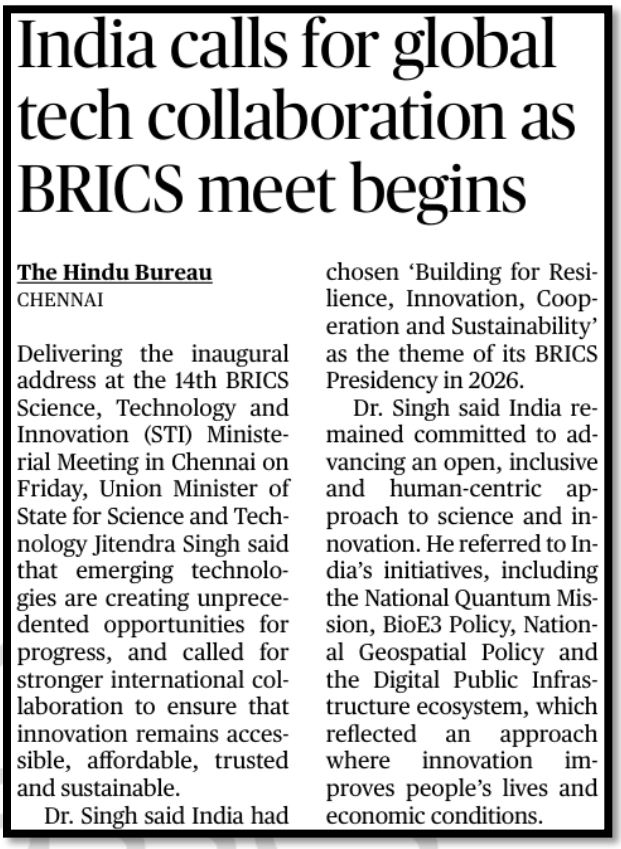
- **Accessibility & Affordability:** Pushing for open-source frameworks and shared technological solutions across BRICS nations to lower entry barriers for developing economies.
- **Ethical AI & Trust:** Emphasizing trusted technology governance to prevent digital monopolies and misuse while keeping human welfare at the center.

2. National STI Initiatives as Global Models

- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** Utilizing proven platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and CoWIN as blueprints for cross-border financial and digital integration.
- **Frontier Sectors:** Leveraging strategic national missions—such as the National Quantum Mission, BioE3 Policy, and Geospatial Policy—to position BRICS as a hub for quantum computing, biomanufacturing, and spatial analytics.

3. Multilateral Cooperation & Strategic Autonomy

- **Joint R&D Frameworks:** Fostering multilateral research collaborations to solve common challenges in climate resilience, renewable energy, and public health.
- **South-South Cooperation:** Reducing reliance on Western-dominated technological ecosystems by strengthening intra-BRICS scientific exchanges.



India calls for global tech collaboration as BRICS meet begins

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Delivering the inaugural address at the 14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Ministerial Meeting in Chennai on Friday, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said that emerging technologies are creating unprecedented opportunities for progress, and called for stronger international collaboration to ensure that innovation remains accessible, affordable, trusted and sustainable.

Dr. Singh said India had chosen 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability' as the theme of its BRICS Presidency in 2026.

Dr. Singh said India remained committed to advancing an open, inclusive and human-centric approach to science and innovation. He referred to India's initiatives, including the National Quantum Mission, BioE3 Policy, National Geospatial Policy and the Digital Public Infrastructure ecosystem, which reflected an approach where innovation improves people's lives and economic conditions.

Key Focus Areas of India's BRICS 2026 STI Vision

Sector / Mission	Strategic Objective	Relevance to BRICS Partnership
Digital Public	Scalable, open-source governance	Fosters financial inclusion and cross-border tech

Sector / Mission	Strategic Objective	Relevance to BRICS Partnership
Infrastructure (DPI)	tools	interoperability
National Quantum Mission	Advanced computing & secure communications	Direct collaboration on next-gen quantum research & encryption
BioE3 Policy	High-performance biomanufacturing	Drives sustainable bio-economy and green growth initiatives
Geospatial Policy	Open access to high-resolution spatial data	Enhances disaster management, urban planning, and climate resilience

Related Static Dimensions

- **BRICS Framework:** Dynamic of South-South cooperation, multilateral diplomacy, and institutional reforms.
- **Digital Governance:** Role of technology in public service delivery and international soft-power projection.
- **Indigenization of Technology:** Developing indigenous capabilities under quantum, biotech, and geospatial frameworks.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Balancing patent protection with affordable innovation for developing nations.
- **Inclusive Growth:** Utilizing technology to reduce socio-economic inequality and boost rural productivity.

Conclusion

India's call for global tech collaboration within BRICS underscores a strategic transition from technology consumption to global tech leadership. By championing open-source DPI and human-centric innovation, India presents a sustainable model that aligns technological advancement with socio-economic equity across the Global South.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: The BioE3 Policy is primarily associated with:

A. Expansion of conventional agricultural biotechnology alone

B. Promotion of high-performance biomanufacturing and a bio-based economy

C. Development of nuclear technology

D. Creation of digital identity infrastructure

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question:"Science and technology cooperation is emerging as an important instrument of India's engagement with the Global South." Discuss with reference to India's BRICS engagement.**(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 04:GS II :International Relations / Preliminary Examination

The 25th India-U.K. Defence Consultative Group (DCG) meeting held in New Delhi signifies a strategic momentum in bilateral security relations. Driven by the **India-U.K. Vision 2035** and the **10-year Defence Industrial Roadmap**, both nations are transitioning from traditional arms sales toward co-development, joint R&D, and enhanced maritime coordination in the Indo-Pacific.

Core Issues & Analytical Pillars

1. Defence Industrial Co-Development & R&D

- **Shift from Buyer-Seller Dynamic:** Emphasis on joint research, technology transfer, and collaborative manufacturing in critical sectors like jet engine technology and maritime propulsion.
- **Industrial Roadmap Alignment:** Integrating Indian defence ecosystems with U.K. defence technology firms to bolster self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

2. Indo-Pacific Strategic Convergence

- **Maritime Security Cooperation:** Operationalizing the Regional Maritime Security Centre of Excellence under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- **Rule-Based Order:** Shared commitment to ensuring freedom of navigation, open sea lanes, and strategic stability against assertive regional actors.

3. Interoperability & Institutional Ties

- **Joint Exercises & Capacity Building:** Expanding tri-service exercises (e.g., Ajeya Warrior, Konkan, Indradhanush) to build operational synchronization.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Reaffirming mutual respects for sovereign choices while building shared capabilities for regional peace and conflict prevention.

Key Dimensions of India-U.K. Defence Partnership

Pillar	Focus Areas	Strategic Objective
Industrial Cooperation	Joint R&D, 10-year Defence Roadmap	Technology transfer, domestic manufacturing, secure supply

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Permanent Under Secretary for Defence of U.K. Jeremy Pocklington in New Delhi. PTI

India, U.K. review bilateral defence ties at DCG meeting

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and the Permanent Under Secretary for Defence of the United Kingdom, Jeremy Pocklington, on Friday co-chaired the 25th India-U.K. Defence Consultative Group (DCG) meeting in New Delhi, reviewing bilateral defence cooperation with a focus on defence industry and research and development.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the two sides reviewed ongoing defence industrial cooperation, with particular emphasis on research and development under the India-U.K. Vision 2035 and the 10-year Defence Industrial Road map.

Maritime security

India and the U.K. also agreed to expand exchanges between their armed forces through joint exercises, training and capacity building initiatives.

They acknowledged the robust maritime security cooperation between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific, including the establishment of the Regional Maritime Security Centre of Excellence under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

The two sides exchanged views on regional peace and security and reaffirmed their commitment to mutual security and strategic autonomy.

They reiterated that the India-U.K. Strategic Partnership is anchored in shared values of peace, stability, freedom and mutual respect. The meeting marked Mr. Pocklington's first visit to India in his new capacity. During his visit, he laid a wreath at the National War Memorial and paid homage to soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation.

Pillar	Focus Areas	Strategic Objective
		chains
Maritime Domain	IPOI Alignment, Regional Security Hubs	Enhanced situational awareness in the Indian Ocean Region
Military Interoperability	Tri-service exercises, training exchanges	Improved tactical readiness for joint humanitarian & combat operations
Strategic Governance	Annual DCG reviews, Vision 2035 framework	Institutionalized strategic alignment and regional stability

Related Static Dimensions (UPSC Syllabus Alignment)

GS Paper II: International Relations

- **Bilateral & Regional Groupings:** Evolution of India-U.K. relations under the 2030 Roadmap and Vision 2035 frameworks.
- **Indo-Pacific Geopolitics:** Role of middle powers in maintaining maritime governance, sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), and global commons.

GS Paper III: Security &Defence

- **Indigenization of Technology:** Integration of foreign R&D with domestic defence manufacturing corridors (Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence).
- **Maritime Security Architecture:** Synergies between IPOI, Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), and international partners.

Conclusion

The 25th DCG meeting reinforces defence as a primary pillar of the India-U.K. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. By prioritizing co-development, technological synergy, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, both nations are modernizing their alliance to address emerging multi-domain security challenges effectively.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following pairs:

Exercise	**India–UK**
1. Ajeya Warrior	Army
2. Konkan	Navy
3. Indradhanush	Air Force
4. Malabar	India–UK naval exercise

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

A. 1, 2 and 3 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 2, 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

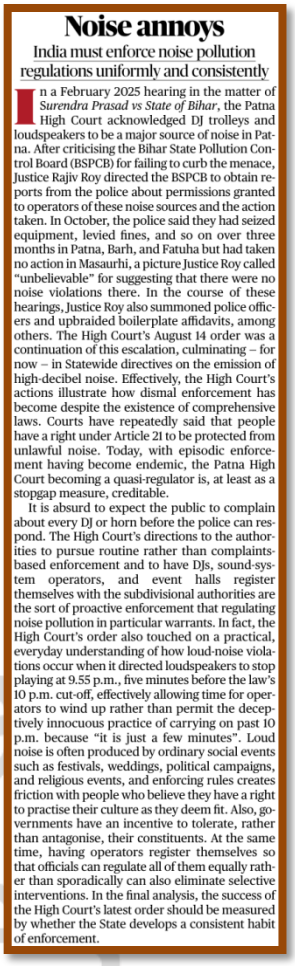
Ans:A)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question:"India-UK relations are increasingly moving beyond traditional trade and diplomatic engagement towards a comprehensive strategic and defence partnership." Discuss.**(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 06 :GS III : Environment / Preliminary Examination

The Patna High Court's intervention in Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar regarding unabated noise pollution from DJ trolleys and loudspeakers underscores a systemic enforcement failure. By addressing the gap between statutory regulations and ground-level execution, the judicial directive reinforces that freedom from noise pollution is an integral facet of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Indian Constitution.



Noise annoys

India must enforce noise pollution regulations uniformly and consistently

In a February 2025 hearing in the matter of *Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar*, the Patna High Court acknowledged DJ trolleys and loudspeakers to be a major source of noise in Patna. After criticising the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) for failing to curb the menace, Justice Rajiv Roy directed the BSPCB to obtain reports from the police about permissions granted to operators of these noise sources and the action taken. In October, the police said they had seized equipment, levied fines, and so on over three months in Patna, Barh, and Fatuha but had taken no action in Masaurhi, a picture Justice Roy called "unbelievable" for suggesting that there were no noise violations there. In the course of these hearings, Justice Roy also summoned police officers and upbraided boilerplate affidavits, among others. The High Court's August 14 order was a continuation of this escalation, culminating – for now – in Statewide directives on the emission of high-decibel noise. Effectively, the High Court's actions illustrate how dismal enforcement has become despite the existence of comprehensive laws. Courts have repeatedly said that people have a right under Article 21 to be protected from unlawful noise. Today, with episodic enforcement having become endemic, the Patna High Court becoming a quasi-regulator is, at least as a stopgap measure, creditable.

It is absurd to expect the public to complain about every DJ or horn before the police can respond. The High Court's directions to the authorities to pursue routine rather than complaints-based enforcement and to have DJs, sound-system operators, and event halls register themselves with the subdivisional authorities are the sort of proactive enforcement that regulating noise pollution in particular warrants. In fact, the High Court's order also touched on a practical, everyday understanding of how loud-noise violations occur when it directed loudspeakers to stop playing at 9.55 p.m., five minutes before the law's 10 p.m. cut-off, effectively allowing time for operators to wind up rather than permit the deceptively innocuous practice of carrying on past 10 p.m. because "it is just a few minutes". Loud noise is often produced by ordinary social events such as festivals, weddings, political campaigns, and religious events, and enforcing rules creates friction with people who believe they have a right to practise their culture as they deem fit. Also, governments have an incentive to tolerate, rather than antagonise, their constituents. At the same time, having operators register themselves so that officials can regulate all of them equally rather than sporadically can also eliminate selective interventions. In the final analysis, the success of the High Court's latest order should be measured by whether the State develops a consistent habit of enforcement.

Core Issues & Analytical Pillars

1. Judicial Intervention vs. Executive Inertia

- **Judiciary as Quasi-Regulator:** Sporadic administrative actions forced the High Court to step in, shifting the regulatory framework from a purely complaint-driven system to mandatory proactive enforcement.
- **Routine vs. Event-Based Enforcement:** Requiring mandatory prior registration of sound-system operators and venues removes selective executive discretion and ensures uniform compliance.

2. Socio-Cultural Friction & Cultural Rights

- **Individual Rights vs. Public Good:** High-decibel noise during religious processions, weddings, and political rallies often collides with the public's right to quietude.
- **Proportionate Restrictions:** The court's directive (such as halting equipment at 9:55 p.m. for a 10:00 p.m. cutoff) balances reasonable cultural expression under Article 25 (Freedom of Religion) with civic order and health protections.

3. Environmental Governance & Statutory Framework

- **Regulatory Under-Enforcement:** Despite existing provisions under the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, State Pollution Control Boards frequently suffer from institutional weakness and lack of police coordination.

Key Legislative and Judicial Benchmarks

Dimension	Provisions / Mandate	Key Implications
Constitutional Basis	Article 21 (Right to Life)	Guarantees a peaceful environment free from hazardous noise levels.
Statutory Rules	Noise Pollution Rules, 2000	Sets ambient noise limits for Industrial, Commercial, Residential, and Silence Zones.
Judicial Precedent	In Re: Noise Pollution (2005)	Supreme Court restricted loudspeaker usage between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

Dimension	Provisions / Mandate	Key Implications
Administrative Directive	Mandatory Pre-registration	Shifts burden from post-violation citizen complaints to preventive licensing.

Related Static Dimensions

- **Fundamental Rights (Part III):** Expanded scope of Article 21 to include health, environment, and freedom from sleep disturbance.
- **Statutory Bodies & Enforcement:** Performance, accountability, and institutional capacity of State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) under the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) umbrella.
- **Environmental Pollution & Degradation:** Noise categorized as an environmental pollutant affecting public health, cardiovascular wellbeing, and cognitive functions.
- **Environmental Law Enforcement:** Challenges in implementing environmental legislation due to administrative inertia and local socio-political pressure.

Conclusion

The Patna High Court's ruling serves as a vital reminder that laws are only as effective as their routine enforcement. Moving away from episodic police action toward systematic registration, strict night-time limits, and administrative accountability is essential to institutionalize noise control as a permanent civic standard across India.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, consider the following statements:

1. They prescribe ambient air quality standards in respect of noise for different areas/zones.

2. They recognise silence zones as a distinct regulatory category.

3. They completely prohibit the use of loudspeakers throughout the day.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "The right to a peaceful and healthy environment is an important dimension of the expanding interpretation of Article 21." Discuss with reference to noise pollution.**(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 06 :GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination

The op-ed emphasizes that unimpeded global commerce in the Indo-Pacific relies heavily on transparent, multi-nation Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Amid West Asian crises and global trade disruptions, operationalizing the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) under the Quad framework serves as a crucial pillar for ensuring secure sea lines of communication and transparent maritime transit.

Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer

Despite the diplomatic difficulties in United States-India relations due to mounting sanctions, it is increasingly clear that Washington needs regional powers such as New Delhi to support common global interests and values. Amid the U.S. visa issues for Indians and the energy crisis stemming from the war in West Asia, Indian and U.S. Foreign and Commerce Ministers have underscored the need for reciprocal trade and energy agreements. While the prime objectives in the present relations are clear, the strategy needs renewed focus on maritime domain awareness (MDA), which is crucial for the 'unimpeded trade' and has been unequivocally agreed to by both sides.

The Indo-Pacific is a trade artery

The West Asia crisis has demonstrated that the Indo-Pacific is not only a crucial geostrategic location for India and the U.S. but also for the rest of the world. Geoeconomically, it is the circulatory system of the global economy, a vast maritime corridor through which nearly $7 trillion in trade flows annually, connecting energy producers in the Persian Gulf to manufacturing hubs in East Asia and consumer markets across the Americas. Some of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints, the Straits of Malacca, the Lombok, and the Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb, and Mozambique channels sit squarely within its waters, crucial for both energy and container supplies. Yet, this indispensable artery of global commerce is increasingly being threatened by a convergence of state-sponsored coercion, illegal maritime activity, and a dangerous surveillance gap – geographically, jurisdictionally and institutionally – that even the U.S. is finding challenging to address alone.

The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) launched under the Quad framework in 2022, represents the most credible multilateral architecture yet devised to address this problem. It is a practical, technology-based mechanism for sharing near-real-time maritime data across partner nations to detect, deter, and respond to threats to the free flow of trade. And its full operationalisation is anchored in robust U.S.-India cooperation under Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.), which is now a strategic imperative. At the technological level, in 2025, India has already purchased SeaVision technology from the U.S., which includes software enhancements, training, and logistical support necessary for mutual MDA cooperation.

Pooja Bhatt

Teaches maritime geopolitics at the O.P. Jindal Global University

Maritime cooperation through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) can strengthen the Indo-Pacific's trading system

A surveillance deficit

The Indo-Pacific suffers from a persistent and widening maritime surveillance deficit. As a multilayered technological assimilation, MDA provides an effective understanding of the maritime domain and its impacts on security, safety, the economy, and the environment.

Across the broader waters of the Indian Ocean, which connect to the South China Sea and the Western Pacific, hundreds of vessels routinely disable their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders – a phenomenon analysts call "going dark" – likely to evade sanctions, conceal cargo, and cause safety and environmental threats.

Such vessels may also be engaged in smuggling or ship-to-ship transfers of contraband. Many smaller fishing vessels fall outside mandatory AIS transponder carriage requirements, and depending on the applicable national and international regulatory framework, they are also found engaged in illegal fishing practices in other nations' waters or even at high seas. This depletes regional stocks and undermines the food security of littoral states.

Furthermore, as witnessed in recent times, non-state as well as state-affiliated actors are conducting grey-zone operations designed to intimidate and coerce, while escaping any legal or conventional military response. The Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration 2026 (IPMSC), under the IPMDA architecture, is as elegant in its pragmatism as in its cooperation, based on a shared understanding that no country can monitor the vast oceans alone. By integrating data from commercial satellite-based radio-frequency monitoring, radar fusion, and existing partner-nation sensor networks, and sharing it with like-minded partners, it creates a layered, near-continuous picture of maritime activities.

The beneficiaries

For the U.S., regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean is essential if it aims to focus on its immediate neighbourhood in the Pacific and the Atlantic. For India, its Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), established in Gurugram in 2018, is a natural institutional complement to IPMDA's regional hub architecture. IPMDA is precisely the kind of arrangement that respects India's sovereignty while amplifying its reach. With the basics already in place, U.S.-India cooperation is necessary but not sufficient.

The full potential of IPMDA/IPMSC will be realised only through the active participation of existing Quad partners as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) partner states, the Pacific Island nations that constitute critical maritime corridors. The European Union, which has upheld the importance of free and open trade since the Hormuz crisis, signals an appetite for engagement that Washington and New Delhi must cultivate.

The contributions and benefits of IPMDA/IPMSC for smaller, capacity-constrained partners, such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Fiji, are significant. These countries have independent surveillance infrastructure, but their waters are frequently exploited because these systems remain ineffective at addressing maritime crimes beyond their jurisdictions. This provides an opportunity for collaboration.

The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has systematically dismantled the assumption that open trade is unilaterally sustainable. The freedom of navigation upon which global supply chains depend is increasingly contested, and such contestation, unrebutted, has become precedent in recent years. In a region where coercion has increasingly become the currency of power, transparency must present itself as a form of deterrence.

Core Issues & Analytical Pillars

1. Strategic Importance & Indo-Pacific Trade Vulnerabilities

- **Geoeconomic Lifeblood:** Over $7 trillion in global trade moves annually through critical regional chokepoints, including the Straits of Malacca, Lombok, Sunda, Hormuz, and Bab-al-Mandeb.
- **Surveillance Deficit:** The disabling of Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders ("dark shipping"), grey-zone operations, and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing undermine maritime security and littoral food security.

2. IPMDA as a Multi-Layered Security Architecture

- **Quad-Led Integration:** Launched in 2022, IPMDA fuses commercial satellite radio-frequency tracking, radar data, and partner sensor networks to create a near-real-time operational picture.
- **Technological Synergies:** Procurement of SeaVision technology and the creation of the Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration (IPMSC) framework enhance surveillance across the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

3. Capacity Building & Inclusivity for Littoral Nations

- **Institutional Nodes:** India's Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram acts as a primary hub linking partner liaison officers and smaller littoral states.
- **Empowering Smaller Partners:** Capacity-constrained nations (such as Bangladesh, Seychelles, Maldives, and Fiji) gain access to actionable maritime intelligence without facing sovereignty trade-offs or costly hardware investments.

Key Components of Maritime Security Architecture

Mechanism / Node	Lead Entity / Framework	Core Functional Role
IPMDA	Quad Nations (India, US, Japan, Australia)	Shares satellite-based RF data to monitor dark shipping & maritime threats.
IFC-IOR (Gurugram)	Indian Navy	Fuses white-shipping information and tracks non-traditional maritime risks.
IPMSC Framework	Quad Operational Collaboration	Coordinates multi-agency maritime surveillance and technology integration.
SeaVision& Commercial RF	U.S.-India Bilateral & Quad Tech	Fuses multi-source radar and vessel tracking data to expose illegal activities.

Related Static Dimensions

- **Bilateral & Multilateral Groupings:** Strategic relevance of the Quad, ASEAN partnership, and middle-power cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- **India's Maritime Vision:** Alignment with SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- **Non-Traditional Security Threats:** Countering IUU fishing, illegal trafficking, piracy, and sea-lane coercion.
- **Infrastructure & Supply Chains:** Safeguarding critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) to maintain global supply chain resilience.

Conclusion

The operational expansion of the IPMDA provides an effective, technology-driven framework to convert raw maritime data into actionable strategic transparency. By leveraging institutional hubs like India's IFC-IOR and expanding ASEAN and regional participation, Quad nations can ensure open sea routes and protect global trade against coercion.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), consider the following statements:

1. It is associated with the QUAD framework.

2. It seeks to enhance maritime domain awareness through information and technology.

3. It is a collective defence alliance involving mutual military obligations.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "In the Indo-Pacific, Maritime Domain Awareness is emerging as a public good that can simultaneously advance security, trade and regional cooperation." Critically examine India's role in this emerging architecture.**(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page :06 : Editorial Analysis

Ensuring equity amid India's educational progress

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India's educational progress needs stronger focus on equity, inclusion, accessibility, and quality

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report highlights notable progress in India's school education system, covering 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers. Progress has been recorded in gross enrolment, student retention, dropout reduction, teacher availability, and educational infrastructure. However, the report also shows that regional and social disparities persist in access, resources, learning opportunities, and educational outcomes. Disparities in gross enrolment ratios (GER), dropout rates, pupil-teacher ratios, and infrastructure availability across regions and social groups indicate the ongoing challenge of guaranteeing equitable, inclusive, and quality education in India.

Regional and social imbalances

The report confirms that significant variations exist across socioeconomic groups and geographic regions in terms of various indicators. The distribution of enrolled students shows that Andhra Pradesh leads in Aadhaar seeding (99.6%), followed by Chandigarh (99%), while Meghalaya records the lowest rate (35%), compared with the national average of 90.2%. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share of schools and student enrolment, while Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh have the lowest shares of schools relative to enrolment, indicating higher student-school ratios.

At the school level, West Bengal has recorded the highest proportion of foundational and preparatory schools (79%) of total, and among the lowest secondary schools (11%); Chandigarh has the highest secondary schools (83%) and the lowest foundational and preparatory schools (5%) of total. The social composition of enrolled students shows significant variation across regions. Chandigarh and Delhi have the highest proportions of General category students, while Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Ladakh have high proportions of Schedule Tribe (ST) enrolment. Punjab records one of the highest shares of Scheduled Caste (SC) enrolment, whereas Other Backward Classes representation is particularly high in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

At the national level, the GER has recorded highest for OBCs (49%), followed by General (27%), SCs (17%), and STs (10%). Thus, GER indicates large differences in school education enrolment in comparison to their corresponding population of each social group.

The Gender Parity Index across all school levels shows higher girls' enrolment and participation than boys across most of the States/Union Territories. The UDISE+ data show that students from minority communities account for more than 20% of enrolment, with Muslims and Parsis among the major minority groups. The average enrolment per school shows that Chandigarh registers the highest average enrolment per school (1,194), followed by Delhi (788); while Ladakh records the lowest average enrolment (64), indicating variation in the size of the schools across the country.

The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is an important factor influencing students' performance and achievement. The PTR varies highly, registering lowest in Union Territories and highest in densely populated States. A significant inter-State variation in PTR exists across pedagogical stages; i.e., foundational, preparatory, and middle PTRs are generally lower than secondary across most of the States. Jharkhand records the highest Secondary PTR (43), followed by Uttar Pradesh, signifying a heavy workload on teachers. On the other hand, Sikkim has the lowest secondary PTR (6), followed by Ladakh. The GER varies significantly at the levels of schools and regions across the country. Meghalaya records the highest Foundational GER (131), followed by Mizoram, while Bihar has the lowest GER (24), preceded by Uttar Pradesh. Meghalaya again records the highest Preparatory GER (171), followed by Manipur; whereas Gujarat has the lowest GER (74), preceded by Bihar. Chandigarh and Meghalaya record the highest Middle GER (118), followed by Delhi. On the contrary, Bihar has the lowest GER (70), preceded by Nagaland. Similarly, Chandigarh registers the highest Secondary GER (109), followed by Goa; while Bihar has the lowest GER (48), preceded by Nagaland.

The dropout rate determines the attainment and transition rate to the next stage of schools. Bihar accounts for the highest preparatory dropout rate (7.9%), followed by Meghalaya. On the other hand, many States/Union Territories such as Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra do not report dropout. Similarly, Bihar records the highest middle-level dropout rate (9%), followed by Uttar Pradesh. While several States/Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh do not register dropouts at this stage, Ladakh records the highest secondary dropout rate (14.8%), followed by Karnataka. West Bengal has the lowest dropout rate (1.5%), preceded by Telangana.

Persistent gaps

Generally, access to schooling has improved significantly over the years. Most children now have a school at a suitable distance, but regional differences continue. Remotely located places, hilly, tribal and border areas still have limited schools and transport facilities, where school-going children face greater difficulties in attending school regularly, such as in Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand, Ganjam and Kandhamal districts of Odisha, Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, and Palghar district of Maharashtra. Simultaneously, children from SCs, STs, minorities, and economically poor families have a greater likelihood to face different barriers that limit their enrolment, attendance, and completion of schooling.

School infrastructure has improved in several areas of the country, i.e., access to drinking water and electricity. However, the availability of infrastructure varies regionally across the country. Educationally backward districts are still struggling to provide a learning environment in rural schools in comparison to urban areas.

Teacher availability is a factor that significantly influences educational outcomes. The report shows that many States have recruited qualified teachers, while teacher shortages continue in several regions. Rural and remote schools often face a shortage of teachers performing multiple classes and subjects and many other non-teaching responsibilities allotted by the government. High student-teacher ratios reduce the individual attention students receive and adversely affect the learning process. Despite progress in girls' schooling, challenges persist in reducing dropout rates, enhancing transition from primary to secondary education, and providing sufficient and suitable facilities for disabled children. Inclusive infrastructure, accessible classrooms, and supportive teaching practices are essential for equitable education.

Targeted investment will help

The UDISE+ 2025-26 report shows that educational inequality persists across accessibility, infrastructure, teacher availability, digital resources, and social inclusion. Addressing these dimensions collectively is essential for equitable educational development. In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, targeted investment in educationally deprived regions, improved digital infrastructure, adequate teacher deployment, and stronger support for disadvantaged groups can help bridge persistent gaps.

Regional and social imbalances continue to influence educational opportunities and learning conditions. Reducing these disparities requires a balanced approach that collectively improves infrastructure, promotes equitable teacher deployment, strengthens inclusive social and economic policies, and provides dedicated support for disadvantaged social groups. A regionally and socially balanced approach that integrates educational quality, equity, and accessibility will help create a more inclusive education system, address the paradox of progress in India's evolving school education landscape, and contribute to the country's long-term social, economic, and regional development.

GS Paper II:Social Justice

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "India has largely moved from the challenge of school access to the more complex challenge of ensuring equitable access to quality education." Discuss in the light of recent school education data.(**10Marks, 150 Words)**

Context : The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025–26 report provides a comprehensive mapping of India's school education system, encompassing 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers. While the data demonstrates macroeconomic strides in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), gender parity, and foundational infrastructure, it exposes persistent regional and socio-economic fault lines. The core challenge facing Indian education has shifted from universal physical access to ensuring spatial, structural, and social equity.

Key Findings & Spatial-Social Disparities

- **Geographic & Administrative Disparities:**
    - **Student-School Ratios & School Sizes:** Large demographic states like Uttar Pradesh carry the highest share of enrolment and schools, whereas states like Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh show disproportionately high student-to-school ratios. Average school enrolment spans extreme ranges—from 1,194 in Chandigarh to 64 in Ladakh.
    - **Documentation & Digital Integration:** Aadhaar seeding ranges from 99.6% in Andhra Pradesh down to 35% in Meghalaya (against the national average of 90.2%), affecting targeted benefit delivery.
- **Social Group Dynamics & Enrolment Discrepancies:**
    - **Category Representation:** General category enrolment peaks in urban UTs (Chandigarh, Delhi), ST enrolment dominates in the Northeast and Ladakh, SC enrolment is prominent in Punjab, and OBC representation is highest in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.
    - **GER Imbalances:** At the national level, OBCs record the highest GER (49%), followed by General (27%), SCs (17%), and STs (10%), highlighting structural gaps relative to population baselines.
- **Pedagogical Stage & Human Resource Allocations:**
    - **Stage-Wise Variations:** West Bengal leads in foundational/preparatory school proportions (79%), whereas Chandigarh emphasizes secondary infrastructure (83%).
    - **Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR):** PTR worsens significantly at higher educational stages. Jharkhand records a critical secondary PTR of 43 (followed by UP), compared to Sikkim (6) and Ladakh.
    - **Dropouts:** Middle-school dropouts peak in Bihar (9%), while secondary-level dropouts are highest in Ladakh (14.8%) and Karnataka, driven by geographic terrain and socio-economic friction.

Related Static Dimensions

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
    - **Article 21A:** Right to Free and Compulsory Education (86th Amendment Act, 2002).
    - **Article 46:** Directive Principle to promote the educational interests of SCs, STs, and weaker sections.
    - **Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
- **Legislative Framework:**
    - **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** Mandates PTR norms, infrastructure standards, and 25% quota for disadvantaged groups in private non-aided schools.
- **Policy Alignments (NEP 2020):**
    - Focuses on Special Education Zones (SEZs) for educationally disadvantaged regions.
    - Promotes a 5+3+3+4 pedagogical structure to strengthen early childhood and foundational learning.
    - Emphasizes the Gender Inclusion Fund and targeted inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs).

Systemic Challenges Impeding Educational Equity

- **Infrastructure & Resource Asymmetry:** Persistent deficit in digital tools, accessible infrastructure for Children with Special Needs (CwSN), and basic amenities in remote border/tribal belts (e.g., Ganjam in Odisha, Palghar in Maharashtra).
- **Teacher Allocation Friction:** Structural shortage of qualified teachers in rural/remote areas, compounding the burden of non-teaching administrative duties.
- **Socio-Economic Barriers:** Intersection of poverty, caste, and regional remoteness leading to early dropouts, particularly at the secondary level during transitions.

Recommendations & Way Forward

- **Targeted Spatial Funding:** Allocate dedicated resources under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) and remote/border districts.
- **Rationalized Teacher Deployment:** Implement dynamic, technology-driven transfer policies to ensure balanced PTR across all pedagogical stages, especially in secondary schools.
- **Inclusive Infrastructure Enhancement:** Focus on CwSN-compliant facilities, transport vouchers for hard-to-reach terrains, and digital connectivity to bridge the rural-urban learning divide.

- **Community & Local Governance Engagement:** Empower School Management Committees (SMCs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to monitor attendance, retention, and local resource gaps.

Conclusion

The UDISE+ 2025–26 report underlines a vital transition point: expanding school capacity alone is insufficient without guaranteeing quality and accessibility for marginalized groups. Fulfilling the mandate of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education) and NEP 2020 requires transitioning from universal input-centric expansion to region-specific, outcome-oriented educational governance.