

CA COMPASS — UPSC Daily

STEP 1: CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES

22 May 2026 (Friday)

The Hindu + Indian Express

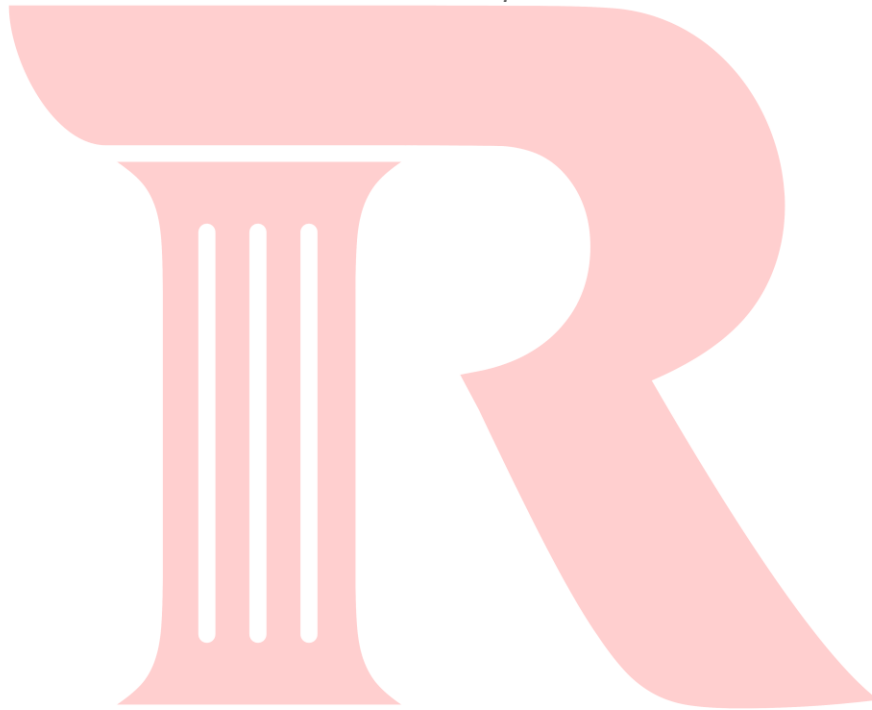


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GS2/GS3: IR / Environment / Climate Governance / UNGA / CBDR

1. India Abstains on UNGA Climate Resolution + The Case for Climate Justice

Source: The Hindu (PTI) + Indian Express (Editorial) | Subject: International Relations / Environment / Climate Governance / CBDR / GS2-GS3

Context: India abstained from voting on a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling on countries to comply with their obligations on climate change. The resolution was adopted in the 193-member General Assembly on Wednesday with 141 votes in favour, eight against (including the US), and 28 abstentions (including India). India voiced concern that the draft “undermines” the “sacrosanct architecture” of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In the Explanation of Vote, First Secretary in India’s Permanent Mission to the UN, Petal Gahlot, said adoption of the resolution by the General Assembly does not create binding commitments for India. The resolution welcomed the July 2025 unanimous advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on States’ obligations on climate change. In July 2025, the ICJ had ruled that countries are “obliged” to “prevent harm from climate change.” More than two-thirds of UN members (141) voted in favour. The resolution gives vulnerable nations, particularly small island states — among the sponsors of the move — stronger diplomatic and legal grounds to demand action from major emitters. The Indian Express editorial argues the resolution could change the tenor of international climate debate by strengthening the idea that mitigation measures cannot be founded on the principle of voluntarism. However, the editorial notes the resolution does not fully reflect concerns of developing countries like India: countries with a longer history of industrialisation, accompanied by extractive colonialism, bear greater responsibility (CBDR). The transition to green energy systems must take into account the need for economic and social development in countries outside the developed world. The resolution does not adequately recognise this imperative, especially on climate finance. Opening global-warming mitigation plans of countries to legal scrutiny without similar audits of the financial commitments of industrialised countries further undermines CBDR. India’s abstention should not be seen as a vote against small island states. India’s initiatives — ISA, SAGAR — demonstrate sensitivity to climate-vulnerable nations. India must remain alert to growing sentiment among climate-vulnerable countries that emerging economies need to do more to reduce fossil-fuel dependence.

EXAMINER'S LENS

* Prelims: UNGA climate resolution: 141 in favour, 8 against (including US), 28 abstentions (including India). ICJ advisory opinion July 2025: States “obliged” to “prevent harm from climate change.” India: resolution “undermines sacrosanct architecture of UNFCCC.” First Secretary Petal Gahlot: UNGA resolution not binding. UNFCCC (1992). CBDR principle. Paris Agreement (2015). ISA (International Solar Alliance, 2015). SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Small island developing states (SIDS).

* Mains: GS2 (IR) / GS3 (Environment). UNGA climate resolution. ICJ advisory opinion. CBDR and climate finance. India’s climate diplomacy. Voluntarism vs legal obligation. Developing country concerns. India’s abstention rationale.

* GS4/Interview: India abstained, not voted against. The distinction matters: India supports climate action but opposes a framework that holds developing countries to the same legal standard as historical emitters without equivalent scrutiny of climate finance commitments. When is strategic abstention a principled position, and when does it become diplomatic evasion?

Key Points:

- The ICJ advisory opinion (July 2025) is a watershed moment in international climate law: for the first time, the world’s highest court declared that States are “obliged” to prevent harm from climate change. The UNGA resolution “welcoming” this opinion is not legally binding but carries immense diplomatic weight: 141 countries voting in favour creates a normative consensus that climate mitigation is an obligation, not a voluntary choice. This shifts the burden of justification onto non-acting States.
- India’s abstention is strategically calibrated, not obstructionist. The core concern — that the resolution “undermines the sacrosanct architecture of the UNFCCC” — refers to the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), embedded in the UNFCCC (1992) and reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement (2015). CBDR holds that developed countries, which have historically contributed the most to cumulative greenhouse gas emissions, bear greater responsibility for mitigation and must provide climate finance to developing countries. The UNGA resolution, by opening all countries’ mitigation plans to legal scrutiny without equivalent scrutiny of developed countries’ climate finance commitments, effectively erodes this differentiation.
- The diplomatic risk for India is significant: India’s abstention places it alongside 27 other abstainers and in implicit proximity to the eight countries that voted against (including the US).

For a country that has championed the International Solar Alliance, SAGAR, and the LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative, being perceived as resisting climate obligations risks damaging relationships with small island developing states (SIDS) and climate-vulnerable African nations — precisely the countries India is courting through trilateral cooperation frameworks (as seen in the India-Italy Africa partnership on May 21).

- The climate finance gap is the substantive core of India's position. Developed countries committed to \$100 billion per year in climate finance at Copenhagen (2009) but consistently fell short until 2022. The New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) agreed at COP29 remains contentious on the quantum and composition (grants vs loans). India's argument is that legal obligations for mitigation without matched obligations for finance create an asymmetric burden on developing countries that are least responsible for historical emissions but most vulnerable to climate impacts.

STATIC CONNECT

► Climate Governance & CBDR

* UNFCCC (1992): Framework convention. CBDR (Art 3). Annex I (developed) and Non-Annex I (developing) countries. COP: annual Conference of Parties.

* ICJ: Principal judicial organ of UN. Advisory opinions: non-binding but authoritative. Requested by UNGA or Security Council. July 2025: climate obligations opinion.

* Paris Agreement (2015): Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). 1.5°C target. Global Stocktake. Loss and Damage Fund (COP27, 2022).

* CBDR: Common But Differentiated Responsibilities. Historical emissions. Climate finance (\$100 bn target, NCQG). Equity principle.

* India's climate initiatives: ISA (2015, HQ: Gurugram). SAGAR. LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment). Panchamrit targets (COP26): 500 GW non-fossil by 2030, net-zero by 2070.

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

* UNGA climate resolution: 141 in favour, 8 against (US included), 28 abstentions (India included).

ICJ advisory opinion July 2025: States "obliged" to prevent climate harm. Resolution: not legally binding (UNGA resolutions are recommendatory).

* India: resolution "undermines sacrosanct architecture of UNFCCC." First Secretary Petal Gahlot: no binding commitments. CBDR principle. UNFCCC 1992. Paris Agreement 2015. Climate finance: \$100 bn target (Copenhagen 2009).

* ISA (International Solar Alliance, 2015, Gurugram). SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). LiFE initiative. Panchamrit targets: 500 GW non-fossil by 2030, net-zero by 2070. Small Island Developing States (SIDS).


2 Mains:

* The UNGA resolution represents a normative shift from voluntarism to obligation in climate governance, backed by the ICJ's July 2025 advisory opinion. India's abstention reflects a legitimate concern: opening mitigation plans to legal scrutiny without equivalent scrutiny of climate finance commitments asymmetrically burdens developing countries. But the abstention carries diplomatic risk — it places India alongside the US (which voted against) and away from 141 countries (including climate-vulnerable SIDS) that India actively courts through ISA and development partnerships. India must ensure its abstention is read as a defence of CBDR, not as resistance to climate action.

* The deeper structural question is whether the UNFCCC's architecture — built on voluntary NDCs and differentiated responsibilities — can survive the shift towards legally enforceable obligations. The ICJ opinion creates a pathway for climate litigation against States; the UNGA resolution amplifies this. For India, the challenge is to defend CBDR while demonstrating through domestic action (500 GW non-fossil target, EV transition, green hydrogen) that its resistance is to asymmetric obligations, not to climate ambition itself.

1 Essay:

When the ICJ says States are “obliged” to prevent climate harm and 141 countries vote to affirm this, the architecture of voluntarism that has defined climate governance since 1992 begins to crack. India's abstention is a defence of differentiated responsibility — but differentiation loses credibility if it becomes a shield for inaction. The strongest defence of CBDR is not diplomatic — it is domestic: climate targets met, transitions demonstrated, obligations honoured at home. Use: Climate governance, CBDR, ICJ, UNGA, India's climate diplomacy.

 **Mains Q:** Discuss India's abstention on the UNGA climate resolution in the context of the ICJ's advisory opinion on climate obligations. How should India balance the defence of CBDR with its climate diplomacy commitments? (15M)

GS2: Polity / Federalism / Sixth Schedule / Ladakh / UT

Governance

2. Ladakh's Demand for Sixth Schedule Protection and Legislature: Beyond Administrative Convenience

Source: Indian Express (Gitanjali J. Angmo) | Subject: Polity / Federalism / Sixth Schedule / UT Governance / Frontier Regions / GS2

Context: Gitanjali J. Angmo (founder, Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh; she moved the SC against the detention of her husband, Sonam Wangchuk) argues that the Union Ministry of Home Affairs' position — that Ladakh needs more districts rather than a legislature or stronger constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule — is fundamentally flawed. The MHA contends that Ladakh's sparse population, strategic sensitivity, and financial dependence on the Centre make a legislature unnecessary, offering instead administrative decentralisation through additional districts. Five new districts — Nubra, Changthang, Sham, Zaskar, and Drass — have been announced and celebrated as a major governance reform. But Angmo argues that districts are instruments of administration, not representation. Districts cannot legislate on land protection, demographic safeguards, ecological preservation, employment priorities, cultural autonomy, renewable-energy negotiations, education policy, or the long-term developmental vision of the region. Legislatures are instruments of representation; no amount of administrative decentralisation and convenience can substitute for political agency. The British Empire argued that Indians lacked the maturity and institutional capacity for self-rule; Sri Aurobindo championed Purna Swaraj — absolute self-governance rooted in dignity and national selfhood. Close to 80 years after Independence, the argument that Ladakh should be content with districts echoes the same colonial logic. The Centre repeatedly promised Sixth Schedule protections to Ladakh: after Art 370 abrogation and UT creation in 2019, the party won based on these manifestos (MP and Hill Council elections 2019 and 2020 respectively), then went back on commitments. Precedents: Nagaland (1963, population 3.5 lakh), Mizoram (1987, 5 lakh), Sikkim (1975, 2 lakh), Arunachal Pradesh (statehood 1987, 6 lakh people) — none was financially self-sufficient; all were strategically sensitive; all were granted statehood/legislature. Several Northeastern states derive between 70% and 90% of their expenditure from central assistance. The Pang region of Changthang: renewable energy project totalling ~13 gigawatts of combined capacity, spread across tens of thousands of acres of high-altitude pastureland. Investment of approximately ₹50,000 crore and

a potential of ₹7,000 crore of annual income. This is central to India's energy future. The real question: Who decides the land rights, the grazing rights, the ecological limits, the royalties owed to the people whose ground it is, and inter-generational sustainability? That is the work of a legislature — of representatives who answer to the people.

EXAMINER'S LENS

- * Prelims: Ladakh: UT without legislature (since 2019, Art 370 abrogation). Five new districts: Nubra, Changthang, Sham, Zaskar, Drass. 59,000 sq km. Sixth Schedule: Art 244(2), para 20 of Sixth Schedule. Applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram. Autonomous District Councils. Ladakh demand: Sixth Schedule protection + legislature. Pang region Changthang: ~13 GW renewable energy, ₹50,000 crore investment. Precedents: Nagaland (1963), Mizoram (1987), Sikkim (1975), Arunachal Pradesh (1987). NE States: 70-90% expenditure from central assistance.
- * Mains: GS2 (Polity/Federalism). UT governance. Sixth Schedule. Districts vs legislature. Frontier region governance. Administrative decentralisation vs political representation. Broken electoral promises. Land rights and resource governance.
- * GS4/Interview: The Centre promises Sixth Schedule protections before elections, then offers districts after winning. Angmo invokes Sri Aurobindo's Purna Swaraj: self-governance as dignity, not privilege. When a frontier population asks for a legislature and receives a district, is the response governance reform or democratic denial?

Key Points:

- The distinction between districts and legislatures is constitutionally fundamental. Districts are administrative units created by executive order; they cannot legislate, they cannot protect land rights, they cannot negotiate resource-sharing arrangements, they cannot safeguard demographic composition. Legislatures are representative bodies that enact law, appropriate funds, and hold the executive accountable. Angmo's argument is that offering Ladakh districts instead of a legislature is offering the form of governance without its substance — administration without representation.
- The broken-promise pattern is politically significant. The BJP's 2019 MP election and 2020 Hill Council election manifestos publicly articulated Sixth Schedule protections for Ladakh. After winning on these platforms, the party retreated from these commitments. This raises fundamental questions about electoral accountability: can promises made to frontier populations become expendable after elections? The pattern — promise, win, withdraw — is what Angmo characterises as the core ethical failure.

- The precedent argument is powerful: Nagaland at statehood (1963) had a population of barely 3.5 lakh; Mizoram (1987) had roughly 5 lakh; Sikkim (1975) had barely 2 lakh; Arunachal Pradesh at statehood (1987) had roughly 6 lakh. None was financially self-sufficient. Many remain substantially dependent on central transfers even today (several NE States derive 70-90% of expenditure from central assistance). India did not tell them they were too small, too poor, or too remote for a legislature. The MHA's argument that Ladakh's sparse population and financial dependence disqualify it from a legislature applies equally to most Northeastern states that have legislatures.
- The Changthang renewable energy dimension transforms the debate from cultural preservation to economic sovereignty. The Pang region project (~13 GW, ₹50,000 crore, ₹7,000 crore annual income potential) will occupy tens of thousands of acres of Changpa nomadic pastureland. Without a legislature, Ladakhis have no institutional mechanism to negotiate land rights, grazing compensation, ecological conditions, royalty-sharing, or intergenerational sustainability. A district officer appointed by the Centre cannot substitute for elected representatives accountable to the people whose land is being used. This is the resource-governance argument for legislative representation.

STATIC CONNECT

► **Sixth Schedule & UT Governance**

* Sixth Schedule: Art 244(2). Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). Legislative, judicial, and executive powers over tribal areas. Currently applies to: Assam (3 ADCs), Meghalaya (3), Tripura (1), Mizoram (3).

* Ladakh: UT without legislature since Aug 2019 (J&K Reorganisation Act 2019). Lt Governor administration. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) for Leh and Kargil — limited powers.

* Fifth Schedule vs Sixth Schedule: Fifth Schedule (Art 244(1)): tribal areas in 10 States, Governor's powers, Tribes Advisory Council. Sixth Schedule: NE tribal areas, ADCs with legislative powers.

* Art 370 abrogation (Aug 2019): J&K bifurcated into J&K (UT with legislature) and Ladakh (UT without legislature). Constitutional validity upheld by SC (Dec 2023, Art 370 judgment).

* Frontier governance: Strategic borders. Demographic sensitivity. Military presence. Development vs ecological preservation. Resource extraction in tribal/frontier areas.

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

- * Ladakh: UT without legislature (since 2019). Five new districts: Nubra, Changthang, Sham, Zaskar, Drass. 59,000 sq km. Demand: Sixth Schedule + legislature. MHA: districts, not legislature.

* Sixth Schedule: Art 244(2). ADCs in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram. LAHDC (Leh and Kargil): limited powers. Pang region Changthang: ~13 GW renewable energy, ₹50,000 crore investment, ₹7,000 crore annual income.

* Precedents: Nagaland (1963, 3.5 lakh), Mizoram (1987, 5 lakh), Sikkim (1975, 2 lakh), Arunachal Pradesh (1987, 6 lakh). NE States: 70-90% central transfers. BJP manifestos 2019/2020: promised Sixth Schedule. Sonam Wangchuk detention.

2 Mains:

* The Ladakh debate exposes a structural gap in India's UT governance framework: Ladakh is the only UT without a legislature that faces simultaneous pressures of strategic sensitivity, ecological fragility, and large-scale resource extraction (13 GW renewable energy project). The MHA's offer of districts instead of a legislature provides administrative accessibility but denies political agency. Districts can deliver services; only legislatures can protect rights, negotiate resource-sharing, and hold the executive accountable. The Northeastern precedent demolishes every argument against a Ladakh legislature: population, financial dependence, strategic sensitivity, and remoteness — all apply to states that were granted legislatures decades ago.

* The broken-promise dimension raises questions about democratic accountability to frontier populations. Electoral commitments on Sixth Schedule protections were made, votes were secured, and commitments withdrawn. The Changthang renewable energy project makes this urgent: ₹50,000 crore of investment on Changpa pastureland without legislative representation for the affected population is resource extraction without consent — a pattern that India's own tribal governance framework (Fifth and Sixth Schedules, PESA, FRA) was designed to prevent. Ladakh is not asking to belong to India less; it is asking to belong more completely.

1 Essay:

Sri Aurobindo wrote that freedom is the necessary atmosphere for a nation's soul to grow. India's greatness has been largest at its edges: the frontier regions that chose belonging through hardship. Ladakh's voice today is not a demand for privilege but an appeal to be trusted with its own future. The strength of a republic is measured not by how tightly it controls its frontiers, but by how deeply its farthest regions feel they belong. Use: Federalism, Sixth Schedule, UT governance, frontier regions, resource rights, democratic representation.

Mains Q: Discuss the constitutional and governance arguments for extending Sixth Schedule protections and a legislature to Ladakh. How does the absence of legislative representation affect resource governance in frontier regions? (15M)



GS3: S&T / Space / ISRO / Gaganyaan / ECLSS

3. How Does the Gaganyaan's Life-Support System Operate?

Source: The Hindu (Unnikrishnan Nair S.) | Subject: Science & Technology / Space / ISRO / Gaganyaan / ECLSS / GS3

Context: Unnikrishnan Nair S. (Former Director, VSSC and IIST; Founding Director, HSFC; expert in launch vehicle systems, orbital re-entry, and human spaceflight; currently Dr Sarabhai Professor at VSSC) explains the Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS) that will sustain astronauts aboard Gaganyaan in a 400 km orbit around the Earth. The ECLSS replicates Earth's atmosphere by managing air, water, temperature, and waste. In short-term space missions, all supplies are carried from Earth and waste is stored for disposal later. Long-duration missions recycle waste back into useful resources. Air revitalisation: Carbon dioxide is removed from Earth's atmosphere by photosynthesis and ocean absorption. In Gaganyaan, CO₂ is removed using lithium hydroxide canisters. Each canister has activated charcoal that absorbs odours. The Air Revitalisation System (ARS) provides fresh air, removes CO₂, and filters trace contaminants. For short missions, oxygen is supplied from high-pressure gas bottles. A healthy crew member needs 0.84 kg of oxygen per day. A healthy adult exhales around 1 kg of CO₂ per day (increases with physical exertion). Elevated CO₂ levels lead to hypercapnia (headaches, dizziness, impaired cognitive function). Small fans in the ECLSS are the circulatory system that prevents lethal CO₂ and hazardous oxygen pockets from lingering (no natural convection in microgravity). Pressure, temperature, humidity: Gaganyaan crew module maintains 20-26°C and relative humidity between 30% and 70%. Pressure at 101.3 kPa (sea-level conditions). Heat from crew (100-150 W per person) and electronics removed by active cooling system through heat exchangers that expel heat into space. Humidity managed by condensing units. Low humidity: dry skin, irritated eyes, static electricity risk. High humidity: microbial growth, condensation, short-circuits. Water: In microgravity, water doesn't pour but forms floating globules (can cause short-circuits or be inhaled). Stored in pressurised bladders; crew uses specially designed pouches pressed to force water into the mouth. Waste: Specialised faecal collection bags, urine through funnels with suction-based airflow systems. Waste chemically treated, stored in sealed containers. Fire: No gravity means fires expand into spheres, harder to reach. Gaganyaan uses smoke detectors and water mist fire extinguishers (cools fire + scrubs toxic smoke). Russia's Soyuz: option to depressurise cabin as last resort after crew dons pressure suits.

EXAMINER'S LENS

* Prelims: Gaganyaan: ISRO's human spaceflight mission. 400 km orbit. ECLSS (Environmental Control and Life Support System). ARS (Air Revitalisation System). Lithium hydroxide canisters for CO₂ removal. 0.84 kg O₂/day per crew. 1 kg CO₂/day exhaled. Hypercapnia: elevated CO₂. Cabin: 101.3 kPa, 20-26°C, 30-70% humidity. Heat: 100-150 W per crew member. Pressurised water bladders. Water mist fire extinguishers. Soyuz: cabin depressurisation option. HSFC (Human Space Flight Centre). VSSC (Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre).

* Mains: GS3 (S&T). Gaganyaan ECLSS. Life-support engineering. Space technology. India's human spaceflight programme. Microgravity challenges.

* GS4/Interview: Designing a life-support system for space forces engineers to replicate what Earth does automatically: clean air, drinkable water, stable temperature, waste processing. The ECLSS is a reminder that every breath we take on Earth is a system functioning perfectly — and that maintaining human life requires infrastructure, whether in orbit or on the ground.

Key Points:

- The ECLSS is the most critical subsystem of Gaganyaan: every other system (propulsion, navigation, communication) serves the mission, but the ECLSS keeps the crew alive. The system must manage five interdependent variables simultaneously: air composition (O₂, CO₂, trace gases), pressure (101.3 kPa), temperature (20-26°C), humidity (30-70%), and water supply — all in an environment where natural convection, gravity-driven fluid separation, and atmospheric self-regulation do not exist.
- The microgravity-specific challenges are engineering problems that have no terrestrial equivalent. Without convection, exhaled CO₂ forms a lethal bubble around the astronaut's face unless mechanically dispersed by fans. Water doesn't flow downward; it forms floating globules that can short-circuit electronics or be inhaled. Waste doesn't settle; it must be mechanically contained. Fire expands in a sphere rather than rising — water mist extinguishers work by cooling and scrubbing toxic smoke simultaneously, unlike terrestrial extinguishers that rely on gravity to direct suppressant downward.
- Gaganyaan's ECLSS is designed for short-duration missions (carrying all supplies from Earth, storing waste for return). This distinguishes it from ISS-class systems that recycle water from humidity, urine, and waste (the ISS Water Recovery System reclaims ~93% of water). India's next step after Gaganyaan — a space station (Bharatiya Antariksha Station, BAS) — will require closed-loop ECLSS with recycling, representing a significant technology escalation.

- The article's authorship matters for credibility: Unnikrishnan Nair S. is the former Director of VSSC and IIST, Founding Director of HSFC (the centre responsible for Gaganyaan), and a recognised expert in launch vehicles and human spaceflight. His explanation carries institutional authority and provides exam-relevant technical detail at a level suitable for GS3 answers.

STATIC CONNECT

► **Gaganyaan & Human Spaceflight**

- * Gaganyaan: India's first crewed orbital mission. 400 km LEO. 3-day mission. Crew module + service module. LVM3 (GSLV Mk III) launch vehicle. HSFC (Human Space Flight Centre), Bengaluru.
- * ISRO milestones: Chandrayaan-3 (Aug 2023, lunar south pole landing). Aditya-L1 (solar observatory). Gaganyaan abort tests. Bharatiya Antariksha Station (BAS) announced.
- * ECLSS global comparison: ISS ECLSS: Oxygen Generation System (electrolysis), Sabatier reactor ($\text{CO}_2 + \text{H}_2 \rightarrow \text{CH}_4 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$), Water Recovery System. Soyuz: simpler, shorter-duration.
- * Microgravity effects: Fluid shift, bone density loss, muscle atrophy, radiation exposure. ECLSS must also manage cabin air quality to mitigate health effects.
- * Space policy: Indian Space Policy 2023. IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre). NSIL (NewSpace India Limited).

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

- * Gaganyaan: ISRO's crewed mission. 400 km orbit. ECLSS: air, water, temperature, waste management. ARS (Air Revitalisation System). Lithium hydroxide canisters for CO_2 . Activated charcoal for odours. O_2 : 0.84 kg/day per crew (high-pressure gas bottles). CO_2 : 1 kg/day exhaled.
- * Cabin: 101.3 kPa, 20-26°C, 30-70% humidity. Heat: 100-150 W per crew. Heat exchangers expel to space. Pressurised water bladders. No natural convection in microgravity — fans circulate air. Hypercapnia risk.
- * Fire suppression: water mist extinguishers (cool + scrub toxic smoke). Soyuz: cabin depressurisation as last resort. Waste: faecal collection bags, urine funnels, suction-based systems. HSFC: Human Space Flight Centre. VSSC: Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre. BAS (Bharatiya Antariksha Station) planned.

2 Mains:


- * The Gaganyaan ECLSS represents India's first indigenous human life-support system for space, a critical technology capability that only the US, Russia, and China have previously demonstrated. The system's engineering challenges — managing air composition, pressure, temperature, humidity,

water, waste, and fire in microgravity — require solutions to problems that do not exist on Earth. The absence of natural convection makes CO₂ management life-critical; the absence of gravity makes water and waste management engineering challenges. Mastering these for short-duration missions is the prerequisite for India's planned space station (BAS), which will require closed-loop recycling ECLSS.

* The strategic significance extends beyond Gaganyaan: ECLSS technology has dual-use applications for submarine life support, sealed-environment habitats (nuclear emergency, chemical contamination), and long-duration isolation environments. India's indigenous development of ECLSS reduces dependence on foreign technology for human spaceflight and positions ISRO for international collaboration on future crewed missions (Artemis Accords, lunar exploration).

1 Essay:

The ECLSS reminds us that human life requires infrastructure — whether in orbit or on Earth. Every breath an astronaut takes aboard Gaganyaan depends on a system that removes CO₂, supplies O₂, manages temperature, and processes waste. Earth does all this invisibly. The engineering challenge of space is the transparency of dependence: in orbit, every life-support failure is immediately lethal. On Earth, we have the luxury of taking the system for granted — until climate change, pollution, or resource depletion reminds us that our planetary ECLSS is not invulnerable. Use: S&T, Gaganyaan, ECLSS, space technology, life-support engineering.

 **Mains Q:** Discuss the engineering challenges of the Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS) for India's Gaganyaan mission. How does mastering short-duration ECLSS technology position India for future space station development? (15M)

GS3: Economy / Currency / Rupee Depreciation / RBI / Capital Flows

4. Should the Rupee Be Left to Depreciate? The Intervention Debate

Source: Indian Express (Rahul Menon, Explainer) | Subject: Economy / Currency / RBI / Capital Flows / Current Account / GS3

Context: Continuous days of sustained losses have seen the rupee close at almost ₹97 to the dollar, with no indication that the slide has been arrested. Rising oil prices and the threat of external inflation will put further pressure on the rupee. Some writers, like Harvard professor Gita Gopinath, have resisted calls for intervention by the RBI, advocating for letting the rupee find its own level. A weaker rupee would automatically curtail imports and boost exports. Intervention would only obstruct the free flow of market forces. However, Rahul Menon (associate professor, O.P. Jindal Global University) argues there is danger in letting depreciation continue unabated, especially when much of it is being driven by speculative finance. With foreign interest rates bound to rise, capital will flow out faster, leading to stronger negative pressures on the rupee. Key distinction: weak rupee vs falling rupee. A fall in the rupee value would not automatically increase export demand if the market expects a further fall (buyers wait for even cheaper prices). Exports might be higher when the rupee is weak, but may not rise when it is falling. At the same time, if the economy imports essential goods like oil, demand may not automatically reduce sufficiently as the rupee falls. If people expect further depreciation, they may front-load purchases today (rush to buy petrol), increasing import demand in the short run. A current account deficit implies more imports than exports and hence a greater need for foreign currency. If this is met by foreign capital inflows (FII purchasing stocks), the rupee's value relative to the dollar will not change. But if the economy experiences a deficit without sufficient inflow of foreign capital, the rupee must depreciate. Intervening to artificially prop up the value only delays the inevitable: it inhibits adjustment by ensuring import demand does not fall. Much of the rupee's decline has been driven by speculative outflows of foreign institutional investment. These speculative expectations can lead to capital outflow and depreciation, necessitating current account adjustments driven by market sentiment, not fundamentals. Japan's Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama signalled the government would take 'decisive action' in financial markets to maintain the yen. Intervention is one amongst many policies that must be considered, but we must not assume the rupee can find an equilibrium value soon when its fall is driven by speculation rather than fundamental economic behaviour.

EXAMINER'S LENS

- * Prelims: Rupee: close to ₹97/dollar. FII speculative outflows driving depreciation. Gita Gopinath (Harvard, former IMF Chief Economist): let rupee find its level. Current account deficit. Weak rupee vs falling rupee distinction. Front-loading of imports. Japan FM Satsuki Katayama: “decisive action” for yen. RBI intervention debate. Foreign exchange reserves. Capital account flows.
- * Mains: GS3 (Economy). Rupee depreciation. RBI intervention. Speculative capital flows. Current account adjustment. Weak vs falling currency distinction. Import bill and oil prices. J-curve effect.
- * GS4/Interview: When the rupee falls due to speculation rather than fundamentals, the free-market argument for non-intervention weakens: markets driven by sentiment rather than real economic values can overshoot, causing unnecessary hardship to importers, consumers, and the poor who bear the brunt of imported inflation.

Key Points:

- The weak rupee vs falling rupee distinction is analytically crucial and frequently tested. A weak rupee (stable at a lower level) makes exports competitive and curtails imports — the standard textbook adjustment mechanism. A falling rupee (actively depreciating with expectations of further decline) produces perverse effects: exporters delay repatriation expecting an even better rate, importers front-load purchases expecting higher costs, and foreign investors exit anticipating further losses. The adjustment mechanism works only at equilibrium, not during active depreciation driven by speculative expectations.
- The speculative capital flow driver changes the policy calculus. If depreciation is driven by fundamental factors (trade deficit, productivity differentials), non-intervention allows necessary adjustment. But if depreciation is driven by speculative FII outflows — foreign investors exiting based on expectations of rising interest rates abroad or perceived risk — the rupee's fall does not reflect economic fundamentals. Intervening to prevent speculation-driven overshooting is different from intervening to prevent fundamental adjustment.
- The import bill vulnerability is India-specific: India imports ~85% of its crude oil. A falling rupee directly increases the oil import bill, which feeds through to transport costs, manufacturing costs, and retail inflation. Unlike countries with diversified import baskets, India's commodity-heavy imports mean rupee depreciation has a faster and larger pass-through to domestic prices. This disproportionately affects the poor, who spend a larger share of income on food and fuel.
- The Japan parallel is instructive: Japan's Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama signalled “decisive action” to defend the yen after it slid against the dollar. Developed economies routinely

intervene in currency markets when speculative flows threaten stability. The argument that India should refrain from intervention while developed economies actively manage their currencies creates an asymmetric policy constraint on emerging markets.

STATIC CONNECT

► **Currency, RBI & Capital Flows**

* Exchange rate regimes: Fixed (pegged), floating, managed float. India: managed float (dirty float). RBI intervenes to prevent excessive volatility.

* RBI forex reserves: ~\$640+ billion. Used for intervention. Adequacy measured by import cover (months of imports), short-term debt cover.

* Current account: Exports minus imports of goods and services + net income + net transfers. India: typically deficit (oil imports). CAD/GDP ratio: comfort level <2.5%.

* Capital account: FDI, FII/FPI, ECBs, NRI deposits. FII flows: volatile, sentiment-driven. FDI: more stable. Capital account convertibility: partial in India.

* J-curve effect: Depreciation initially worsens trade balance (imports costlier in rupees before volumes adjust). Eventually, export competitiveness improves. Time lag: 12-18 months.

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

* Rupee near ₹97/dollar. FII speculative outflows. Gita Gopinath: let rupee find level. Managed float regime. RBI forex reserves ~\$640+ bn. CAD driven by oil imports (~85% imported).

* Weak rupee vs falling rupee: weak = stable at lower level (boosts exports). Falling = active depreciation with expectation of further decline (perverse effects: front-loading imports, delaying export repatriation). J-curve effect.

* Japan FM Satsuki Katayama: “decisive action” for yen. Speculation-driven vs fundamentals-driven depreciation. Import pass-through to inflation. Current account deficit and capital flows.


2 Mains:

* The rupee depreciation debate requires distinguishing between fundamental and speculative drivers. If the rupee's fall reflects a structural trade deficit or productivity decline, non-intervention allows necessary adjustment (currency as shock absorber). But if the fall is driven by speculative FII outflows — investors exiting based on global interest rate expectations rather than India-specific fundamentals — non-intervention allows market sentiment to determine economic outcomes for 1.4 billion people. The weak-vs-falling distinction matters: a falling rupee produces perverse import and export dynamics that prevent the adjustment mechanism from working.

* India's policy response must be multi-pronged: (1) RBI intervention to prevent speculative overshooting (not to defend a specific level, but to smooth volatility); (2) capital flow management measures (graduated tightening of FII outflow channels if speculative exit intensifies); (3) structural measures to reduce oil import dependence (renewables, strategic reserves, domestic production); and (4) communication strategy that signals resolve without inviting speculative attack. The Japan parallel shows that even developed economies intervene when speculation threatens stability; India should not be held to a higher non-intervention standard than the economies whose monetary policy actions are causing the outflows.

1 Essay:

When the rupee falls because foreign investors are chasing higher interest rates abroad rather than responding to Indian economic fundamentals, the market is not discovering a price — it is amplifying a sentiment. Letting speculation determine the purchasing power of 1.4 billion people is not free-market economics; it is abdication. Intervention is not a failure of market faith; it is a recognition that markets driven by speculation need guardrails. Use: Currency, RBI, capital flows, speculation, managed float.

 **Mains Q:** Distinguish between a weak rupee and a falling rupee. Why does speculation-driven depreciation warrant a different policy response from fundamentals-driven depreciation? Discuss with reference to RBI's intervention options. (15M)

GS2: Polity / Census / Caste / Democratic Paradox

5. Caste Away: The Census, the Paradox, and the Casteless Option

Source: *The Hindu* (Editorial) | Subject: Polity / Census / Caste / Social Justice / GS2

Context: The Hindu editorial argues that the Supreme Court was not wrong to dismiss a petition that sought to stall the caste census, which is part of the ongoing Census 2027. The Chief Justice of India remarked that “any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare.” In April 2025, the Modi government made a turnaround to announce caste enumeration alongside the fresh census, the first such exercise since 1931. Mr. Modi had earlier derided the idea as a sign of “urban Naxal” thinking, and the RSS had warned that such surveys were attempts to fracture Hindu society. The Congress too had made a dramatic turnaround in its historical position to demand a caste census. Early governments of independent India decided not to enumerate caste with the census. The dominant thinking then was that counting caste communities would only reinforce the institution of caste that the state wanted to dismantle. On the one hand, state policies sought to create a casteless society, while on the other, they also accounted for caste identities for positive discrimination in legislative representation and employment. This dual approach has created a paradox that continues to this day. The Census itself has been long overdue: the decennial population survey was originally due in 2021 but was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and logistical hurdles. The caste enumeration will take place in the second phase and will involve asking every individual their caste, rather than merely recording whether they belong to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, as in previous Censuses. The one attempt at a post-Independence national caste count — the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 — used an open-ended caste identification process that produced over 46 lakh distinct caste names and 8 crore data errors, rendering the dataset unusable. Most of its findings remain unpublished. The Modi government is still grappling with the challenge of finding the appropriate methodology for accurate enumeration of caste communities. The editorial argues that a caste census detracts from the effort to eradicate caste as it ossifies identities, but is helpful if viewed alongside other socioeconomic indices to better target welfare measures and ensure representation. The annihilation of caste must remain a goal, and people must be allowed to classify themselves as casteless if they so wish.

 **EXAMINER'S LENS**

* Prelims: Census 2027: caste enumeration in Phase 2. First since 1931. CJJ: “any government must know how many are backward.” SECC 2011: open-ended process, 46 lakh distinct caste names, 8 crore data errors, dataset unusable, mostly unpublished. April 2025: Modi government turnaround on caste enumeration. Previously: only SC/ST enumerated. Census originally due 2021, delayed by COVID-19.

* Mains: GS2 (Polity/Governance). Caste census paradox. Counting vs reinforcing caste. SECC 2011 lessons. Methodology challenges. Casteless option. Welfare targeting vs identity ossification.

* GS4/Interview: The paradox of caste enumeration: the state simultaneously seeks to dismantle caste (Art 17, Ambedkar’s annihilation vision) and to enumerate it (for reservation, welfare targeting, representation). Counting caste can empower marginalised communities with data, or it can reinforce the very categories the Constitution seeks to transcend. The editorial’s solution — a “casteless” option — acknowledges this tension without resolving it.

Key Points:

- The editorial identifies the foundational paradox of India’s caste policy: the Constitution simultaneously seeks to annihilate caste (Art 17: abolition of untouchability; Ambedkar’s vision of a casteless society) and to operationalise it (reservation in education, employment, and legislative representation; welfare targeting based on caste identity). Post-independence governments decided not to enumerate caste in the Census precisely because counting was seen as reinforcing — but designed reservation policy using 1931 data, creating a system that uses caste without measuring it.
- The political turnarounds on both sides are significant. The BJP/RSS initially opposed caste enumeration as “urban Naxal” thinking that would “fracture Hindu society”; by April 2025, the Modi government announced caste enumeration in Census 2027. Congress, which historically avoided caste enumeration as a governing party, now demands it as opposition. Both turnarounds suggest that caste enumeration has become electorally compelling regardless of ideological position — confirming that the data vacuum created by the 1931 gap is politically unsustainable.
- The SECC 2011 failure is a cautionary tale for Census 2027. The open-ended caste identification process produced 46 lakh distinct caste names (many being the same caste spelled differently, regional variations, sub-castes, and entirely fabricated entries) and 8 crore data errors. The dataset was so unreliable that most findings remain unpublished. Census 2027 must avoid this by using a pre-determined caste classification (not open-ended) — but any pre-

determined list will face political contestation over which castes are included, how they are categorised, and whether sub-castes are separately enumerated.

- The “casteless” option is the editorial’s most significant normative contribution. Allowing individuals to classify themselves as casteless in Census 2027 would accomplish three things: (a) respect individual autonomy for those who reject caste identity; (b) provide data on the extent to which caste identification is declining (if any); and (c) preserve the Ambedkarite aspiration of caste annihilation within the enumeration framework. However, the practical challenge is significant: caste-based reservation incentivises caste identification, not castelessness.

STATIC CONNECT

► Caste Census & Social Policy

* Census and caste: 1881-1931 (comprehensive caste data). Post-1941: only SC/ST enumerated. SECC 2011: separate exercise, open-ended, data quality issues. Census 2027: caste in Phase 2.

* Ambedkar and caste: Annihilation of Caste (1936). Art 17 (abolition of untouchability). Art 15(4), 16(4) (reservation). Art 46 (promote educational and economic interests of SC/ST/weaker sections).

* Mandal Commission (1980): used 1931 data. Estimated OBC at 52%. Indra Sawhney (1992): 50% ceiling on reservation. 103rd Amendment: EWS reservation (10%).

* SECC 2011: Socio-Economic and Caste Census. Parallel to Census 2011. Open-ended caste question. 46 lakh distinct names. 8 crore errors. Dataset largely unpublished.

* Caste and welfare: Reservation (Art 15, 16, 330, 332, 335, 340). Creamy layer (Indra Sawhney). Sub-categorisation (Rohini Commission for OBCs, 2017). SC sub-categorisation (2024 judgment).

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

* Census 2027: caste enumeration Phase 2. First since 1931. CJI: “any government must know.” April 2025: Modi govt turnaround. Previously: only SC/ST enumerated. Census due 2021, delayed by COVID.

* SECC 2011: open-ended caste identification. 46 lakh distinct caste names. 8 crore data errors. Dataset unusable, mostly unpublished. Challenge: appropriate methodology for Census 2027.

* BJP previously: “urban Naxal” thinking. RSS: fracture Hindu society. Congress: historical reversal to demand caste census. Paradox: state seeks to dismantle caste but operationalises it for reservation. Editorial proposes “casteless” option.


2 Mains:

* The caste census paradox is India's deepest governance contradiction: the state simultaneously aspires to annihilate caste (Art 17, Ambedkar's vision) and institutionalises it through reservation and welfare targeting. Post-independence leaders resolved this by not counting — but that decision created a 96-year data vacuum that forced policy to rely on 1931 data. The SECC 2011 attempt failed spectacularly (46 lakh caste names, 8 crore errors), demonstrating that open-ended enumeration in a country with thousands of castes, sub-castes, and regional variations produces noise rather than data. Census 2027 must use a pre-determined classification — but every classification will be politically contested.

* The editorial's "casteless" option addresses the normative tension: allowing people to opt out of caste identification preserves individual autonomy and Ambedkar's annihilation aspiration within the enumeration framework. But the practical challenge is that caste-based reservation creates incentives for caste identification, not castelessness. The truly casteless in India are likely to be privileged individuals who can afford to reject caste identity — not the marginalised communities for whom caste remains a lived reality of discrimination. The option is symbolically important but operationally limited.

1 Essay:

India's caste paradox is constitutional: the same document that abolishes untouchability also institutionalises caste through reservation. Counting caste can empower with data or entrench with categories. The editorial's "casteless" option is an honest attempt to hold both truths simultaneously: count, but allow people to refuse the count. The annihilation of caste begins not with refusing to count but with creating a society where the count ceases to matter. Use: Caste census, Ambedkar, reservation paradox, SECC 2011, Census 2027.

 **Mains Q:** Discuss the paradox of caste enumeration in India: the state seeks to dismantle caste while operationalising it for welfare and reservation. What lessons does the SECC 2011 failure offer for Census 2027's methodology? (15M)

GS2: Polity / Media Freedom / Press Freedom Index / Democracy

6. On Measuring Freedom of the Press in India

Source: The Hindu (Varghese K. George, Notebook) | Subject: Polity / Media Freedom / Democracy / International Rankings / GS2

Context: Varghese K. George (The Hindu) examines the World Press Freedom Index prepared annually by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). India is ranked 157. Norway is number one. Ukraine is at 55, Qatar at 75, Burkina Faso at 110, Oman at 127, Kuwait at 136 — countries some of which do not even hold a pro forma election rank higher on press freedom than India. The rankers have clarified that the quality of journalism is not a criterion; the racism of the freest press does not affect its standing (a Norwegian mainstream newspaper portrayed Modi as a snake charmer). Mr. Modi has not addressed a press conference as Prime Minister. After a joint appearance with US President Donald J. Trump, he took a couple of questions in February 2025. Trump routinely seeks out confrontational interviews while simultaneously seeking to delegitimise the media. Press conferences and probing interviews have become rare across India's leadership. No leader wants to take questions. Political communication has become a one-way street. Media space contestations are a reflection of society; state control of media extends to controlling movement, thinking, learning, mingling. Norway (55 lakh people, 95% speak Norwegian, 60% Church-affiliated) is a largely homogenous country not comparable to a large, diverse country riven by conflicting viewpoints and where the state is simultaneously trying to control the thinking of its people. Those who dismiss Western standards are curiously selective: they dismiss the Press Freedom Index but celebrate Ease of Doing Business rankings or foreign national honours. Rankings are methodologically dubious, frequently corrupted by subjective factors and sometimes outright prejudice. But no ranking is required to establish that Indian media is under severe stress — from market forces and from state measures alike. The index's own methodology undermines its conclusions at the extremes. The better argument is that rankings are blunt instruments — useful for identifying broad patterns, unreliable as precise judgements.

EXAMINER'S LENS

* Prelims: World Press Freedom Index: Reporters Without Borders (RSF). India: ranked 157. Norway: #1. Criteria: does not include quality of journalism. Ukraine: 55, Qatar: 75, Burkina Faso: 110, Oman:

127, Kuwait: 136. PM Modi: no full press conference as PM. Feb 2025: couple of questions with Trump. Art 19(1)(a): Freedom of speech and expression. Art 19(2): Reasonable restrictions.

* Mains: GS2 (Polity/Democracy). Press freedom. International rankings methodology. State-media relations. Political communication. India's media environment. Democracy and press accountability.

* GS4/Interview: Rankings reduce complex realities to single numbers. Dismissing them entirely is convenient; accepting them uncritically is naive. The honest position — that rankings identify patterns but not precise truths — requires the intellectual discipline to engage with criticism rather than deflect it. The PM not holding press conferences is not a ranking; it is a fact.

Key Points:

- The article makes a sophisticated argument that is neither dismissive nor uncritical of the Press Freedom Index. The core thesis: rankings are “blunt instruments” — useful for identifying broad patterns (Indian media is under stress) but unreliable as precise judgements (India at 157 is not a meaningful comparison with Kuwait at 136). The methodology's own criteria (press freedom measured by regulatory environment, political context, legal framework, safety of journalists) produce anomalous results when applied across radically different political systems.
 - The selectivity critique is powerful: those who dismiss the Press Freedom Index readily celebrate India's Ease of Doing Business ranking improvement or a foreign country's national honour conferred on Indian leaders. If rankings are methodologically dubious when they criticise India, they are equally dubious when they praise it. Consistency requires either engaging with rankings as imperfect indicators or rejecting all rankings — not selectively dismissing unfavourable ones.
 - The factual observation about political communication is independent of any ranking: the PM has not held a press conference in India as Prime Minister; probing interviews of political leaders have become rare; political communication has become a one-way broadcast. These are observable facts that no index is needed to establish. The article's strength is separating the ranking's methodology critique from the underlying reality it attempts to measure.
1. The Norway comparison reveals methodological weakness: a homogenous country of 55 lakh people with near-universal language and religious coherence is not comparable to a country of 1.4 billion with thousands of languages, religions, castes, and competing political interests. The press in Norway operates in a different structural context. But this comparative weakness does not invalidate the Index's identification of specific Indian press freedom concerns (journalist safety, state advertising pressure, media ownership concentration, digital surveillance).

STATIC CONNECT

► Press Freedom & Democracy

* Art 19(1)(a): Freedom of speech and expression. Art 19(2): Reasonable restrictions (sovereignty, security, public order, decency, morality, contempt, defamation, incitement). Press freedom not separately enumerated but implied.

* RSF (Reporters Without Borders): Paris-based. Annual Press Freedom Index since 2002. Methodology: expert questionnaire + quantitative data on abuses. Categories: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, safety.

* Press freedom cases: Romesh Thappar v State of Madras (1950): pre-censorship invalid. Indian Express v Union of India (1985): newspaper newsprint control unconstitutional. Anuradha Bhasin v Uoi (2020): internet shutdowns and press freedom.

* Media regulation: Press Council of India (PCI). Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act 1995. IT Act 2000 (Sec 66A struck down: Shreya Singhal 2015). IT Rules 2021: digital media regulation.

* Global comparisons: Freedom House: Freedom in the World (India: Partly Free). V-Dem Institute: democracy indices. EIU Democracy Index (India: Flawed Democracy).

3-2-1 RAPID REVISION

3 Prelims:

* World Press Freedom Index: RSF (Reporters Without Borders). India: 157. Norway: #1. Ukraine: 55, Qatar: 75, Burkina Faso: 110, Kuwait: 136. Quality of journalism: not a criterion.

* PM Modi: no full press conference as PM. Feb 2025: questions with Trump. Art 19(1)(a): freedom of speech. Art 19(2): reasonable restrictions. Press freedom: implied in Art 19(1)(a).

* RSF methodology: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, safety. Other indices: Freedom House (India: Partly Free), V-Dem, EIU Democracy Index (India: Flawed Democracy).


2 Mains:

* The Press Freedom Index debate requires intellectual honesty: neither wholesale dismissal nor uncritical acceptance. The article's argument that rankings are "blunt instruments" correctly identifies methodological weakness (Norway's homogeneity vs India's diversity; quality of journalism excluded; anomalous country placements) while acknowledging the underlying reality that Indian media faces significant pressures from both state and market forces. The selectivity critique — celebrating favourable rankings while dismissing unfavourable ones — reveals political convenience rather than methodological principle.

* The factual indicators of press freedom stress require no ranking to establish: the PM has not held press conferences; journalist safety incidents (multiple journalists killed, arrested, charged under UAPA/sedition); media ownership concentration (cross-media ownership by political-business entities); state advertising as economic leverage; IT Rules 2021 expanding digital media regulation. These are measurable, observable phenomena. The policy question is not whether India's press is free (no press is absolutely free) but whether the trajectory is towards greater or lesser freedom — and whether institutional mechanisms (Press Council, courts, RTI) are functioning as accountability tools or as instruments of control.

1 Essay:

A ranking that places Kuwait above India on press freedom is methodologically suspect. But a Prime Minister who does not hold press conferences does not need a ranking to raise questions about democratic accountability. The intellectually honest position is to critique the thermometer while acknowledging the fever. Indian media is under stress — from state pressure, market concentration, and self-censorship. No index number is needed to see this; the silence itself is the evidence. Use: Press freedom, democracy, international rankings, political accountability, media environment.

 **Mains Q:** *Critically examine the utility and limitations of international press freedom rankings for assessing India's media environment. What factual indicators of press freedom stress exist independent of such rankings? (15M)*



— End of Step 1 —

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