CURRENTLY – 4th NOVEMBER 2026

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PYQ Integration: 6 Prelims PYQs + 8 GS Mains PYQs + 2 PSIR Optional Mains PYQs = **16 PYQ Linkages**

Digital pathogen: why cyber hygiene is no longer considered as an option

In cyberspace, neglecting basic hygiene can be as deadly as ignoring an epidemic, the opportunity cost of which is not merely in money lost, but disrupted businesses, compromised identities, regulatory liabilities and above all eroded public trust; average cost of a data breach in India is ₹25.5 cr.

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Perumal



Equally vulnerable: Cyber risks do not discriminate sectors. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Even as the stains of Covid-19 has yet to recede entirely in the physical world, the pathogen in the digital age – poor cyber hygiene – has found foothold across sectors that it has not even spared the authenticating agency.

The term cyber hygiene, the first line of defence against cybercrime, increasingly got into the vocabulary after financial institutions and public bodies suffered serious security scares.

In cyberspace, neglecting basic hygiene can be as deadly as ignoring an epidemic, the opportunity cost of which is not merely in money lost, but disrupted businesses, compromised identities, regulatory liabilities and above all eroded public trust.

Digital trust, like public health, depends upon a simple principle: prevention is invariably cheaper than the cure. It was Internet pioneer Vinton Cerf, who coined the term cyber hygiene in 2000, when he used it in his testimony before the U.S. Congress' Joint Economic Committee.

"Good cyber hygiene is essential for staying safe in today's digital world. Simple and responsible online practices can go a long way in protecting your personal and financial information," says a mail from a nationalised bank to a customer. Global average cost of a data breach slid to $4.44 million, down 9% year-on-year (YoY) while it rose in India, an IBM 2025 report said.

The IBM's 2026, report, released in August, puts average cost of a data breach in India at ₹25.5 crore, up 15.9% YoY. The breach compromised 39,500 records against 38,200 in the previous year. The financial services sector faced an even higher average cost of ₹40.9 crore/breach.

The IBM report measures the average total organisational cost of a breach, including detection, investigation, recovery, business disruption and reputational damage.

> The term cyber hygiene, the first line of defence against cybercrime, increasingly got into the vocabulary after financial institutions and public bodies suffered serious security scares

Banking vulnerable

The data assumes importance especially in the country's systemically important banking sector, as compromised information can lead to identity theft, financial fraud and further attacks on customers.

Against this backdrop, reported or suspected data exposures involving State Bank of India and HDFC Bank highlight India's rising and sophisticated cybersecurity challenge.

Cyber risks do not discriminate sectors as seen from reported issues involving in the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) and digital-certification company eMudhra.

Banks hold financial and identity data, sovereign bodies manage sensitive public records and certification bodies underpin digital trust. Hence, vulnerability in any of these could lead to far-reaching consequences. Security must therefore extend across the entire technology supply chain.

In a reply to Parliament, the Union Home Ministry reported increasing financial cyber-fraud losses from ₹551 crore in 2021 to ₹2,290 crore in 2022, ₹7,465 crore in 2023, ₹22,848 crore in 2024 and marginally dipping to ₹22,495 crore in 2025.

As per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, in FY2023-24, banks reported 36,075 fraud cases involving ₹13,930 crore. Of these, 29,082 cases related to cards or internet banking, which accounted for ₹1,457 crore.

Actual losses

However, the central bank data comes with a caveat that the amount involved in reported frauds is not equivalent to actual loss incurred. Recoveries may reduce the loss and frauds reported in one financial year may have occurred years earlier.

Notable international historical cases such as Equifax (2017) and Capital One (2019) illustrate the potential financial consequences in terms of settlements and judicial costs.

Even as India's rapid digital transformation has widened and deepened the reach of the banking industry, it has exposed the sector more to cyber risks.

The integrated financial ecosystem – comprising UPI, mobile banking, internet banking and digital lending – complicated the complex architecture that the vulnerabilities at one point can have dire consequences far beyond it.

The National Payments Corporation of India data suggest that UPI processed around 186 billion transactions during 2024-25, illustrating the scale of digital payments infrastructure.

Indispensable practice

This growth makes cyber hygiene – the routine practices to keep digital systems, devices and data secure – indispensable for all stakeholders alike – banks, customers, technology vendors, payment intermediaries and regulators.

In view of this, campaigns have already been strengthened on the need for effective cyber hygiene action at various levels.

Individual level cyber hygiene calls for employing unique, strong passwords/password managers, enabling multifactor authentication, installing software updates and avoid clicking suspicious links.

Corporate level measures suggest embedding security into operations with timely patching, encryption, secure software, phishing simulations, independent penetration testing and regular incident-response exercises.

And finally...

Just as the pace of transactions is important, the integrity of systems and institutions behind it is integral to the credibility of digital finance.

1. Digital Pathogen: Why Cyber Hygiene Is No Longer Optional

GS Paper III – Internal Security: Cybersecurity, Cybercrime and Digital Infrastructure

Context: Rapid digitalisation has increased India's exposure to cyberattacks, making cyber hygiene essential for protecting financial systems, personal identities and public trust.

1. Understanding Cyber Hygiene

Cyber hygiene refers to routine practices adopted by individuals and organisations to secure digital devices, networks and personal information against cyber threats.

2. Key Data: India's Cybersecurity Vulnerability

1. **Data breach cost:** Average cost of a data breach in India reached ₹25.5 crore in 2026, a 15.9% increase over the previous year.
2. **Records compromised:** Around 39,500 records were compromised per breach, compared with 38,200 in the previous year.
3. **Banking fraud:** Reserve Bank of India data for 2023–24 recorded 36,075 bank fraud cases involving ₹13,930 crore.
4. **Digital payments:** Unified Payments Interface (UPI) processed around 186 billion transactions in 2024–25.
5. **Cyber-fraud losses:** Reported losses increased from ₹551 crore in 2021 to ₹22,848 crore in 2024, before marginally declining in 2025.

3. Major Cybersecurity Risks

1. **Financial fraud:** Phishing, identity theft and unauthorised banking transactions.
2. **Data breaches:** Exposure of sensitive personal, financial and institutional information.
3. **Supply-chain attacks:** Vulnerabilities in banks, technology vendors and payment intermediaries can compromise interconnected systems.
4. **Digital infrastructure threats:** Attacks on UPI, mobile banking, internet banking and digital lending platforms can disrupt essential financial services.
5. **Loss of public trust:** Repeated cyberattacks undermine confidence in digital banking and public digital infrastructure.

4. Strengthening Cyber Hygiene: Way Forward

1. **Individual security:** Strong passwords, password managers and multi-factor authentication.
2. **Regular updates:** Timely software updates, security patches and avoidance of suspicious links.
3. **Data protection:** Encryption and secure handling of personal and financial information.
4. **Institutional preparedness:** Regular penetration testing, phishing simulations and cybersecurity audits.
5. **Incident response:** Strong monitoring, timely reporting and coordinated response mechanisms involving banks, technology vendors and regulators.

5. UPSC Mains PYQ

GS Paper III – 2017 (10 Marks)

“Discuss the potential threats of Cyber attack and the security framework to prevent it.”

Mechanism in place to deal with Ganga treaty: India

Bilateral treaty signed between India, Bangladesh in 1996 set to expire next month; no 'update' on renewal or on the dates for a visit by Bangladeshi Prime Minister, says External Affairs Ministry

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI



High level treaty: The Ganga Water Treaty is a 30-year bilateral water-sharing agreement between India and Bangladesh. FARAKKA BARRAGE PROJECT

With the Ganga Water Treaty between India and Bangladesh set to expire in December, the External Affairs Ministry on Tuesday reiterated that the two countries have a "structured mechanism" to deal with the treaty's requirements.

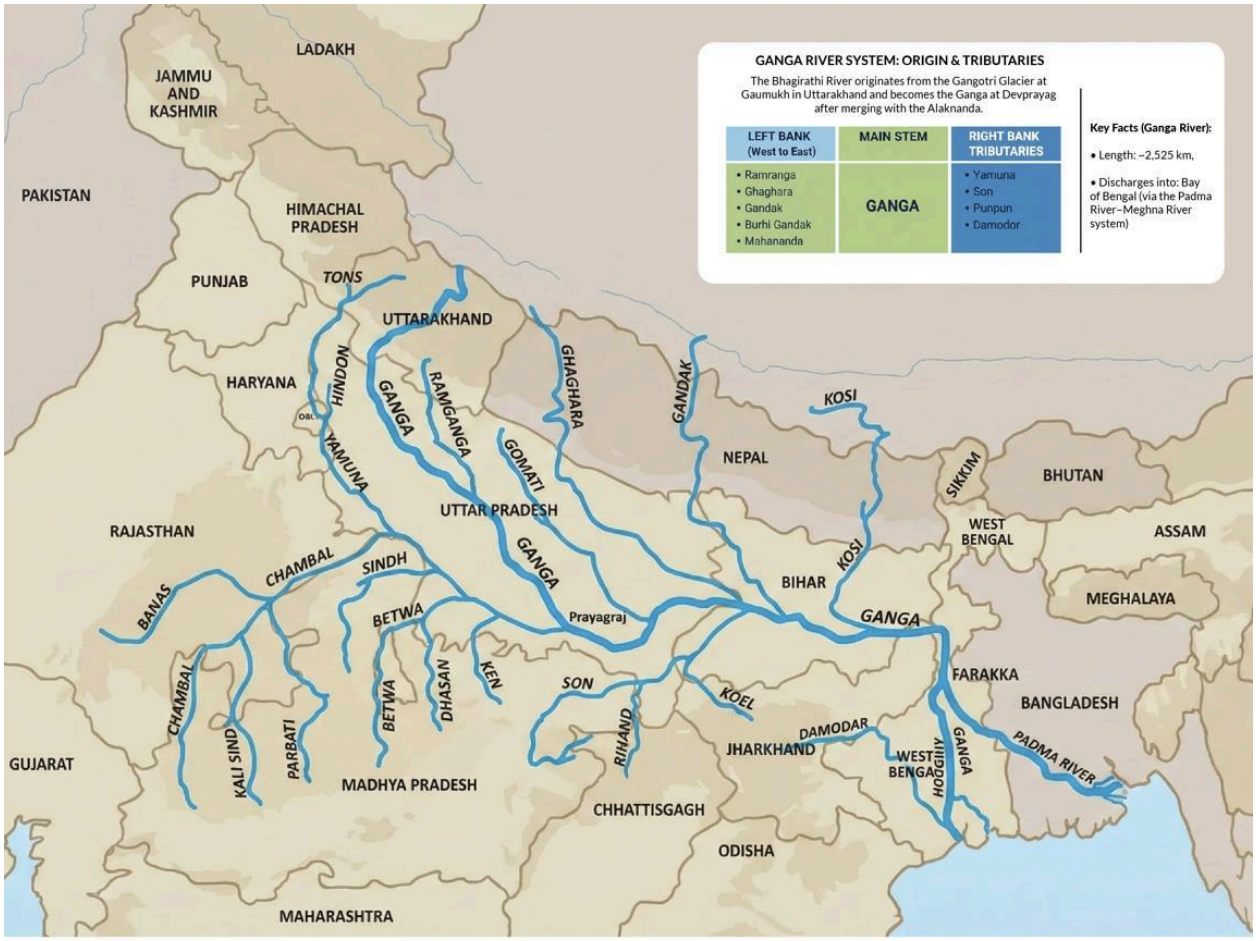
Addressing the bi-weekly media briefing, official spokesperson of the Ministr, Randhir Jaiswal, reiterated that India has invited Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to visit New Delhi but that there is neither any "update" on the treaty's renewal nor on the dates for the trip. "Between India and Bangladesh, we have a Joint Rivers Commission which is the structured mechanism for discussion on all cross-boundary rivers, including the Ganga," said Mr. Jaiswal, adding that India wishes to have a "positive relationship" with Bangladesh.

The bilateral Ganga Water Treaty is set to expire on December 12. It was signed in 1996 when Sheikh Hasina of Awami League became Bangladesh's Prime Minister for the first time. The three-decade old agreement for river water sharing requires expert-level and political consultations for a renewal.

It is understood that since the treaty was signed at the level of Prime Ministers, a renewal of the agreement would happen at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Rahman. However, Mr. Rahman, who has visited China, Japan, Malaysia and the United States so far, has not yet responded to the invites from India.

The two sides had earlier commenced consultations for a possible visit by Mr. Rahman, however the contacts were disrupted when Ms. Hasina, who is on exile here since August 5, 2024, held a virtual press interaction in August. Mr. Jaiswal on Tuesday maintained that there is no update about the visit. "As far as India-Bangladesh relationship is concerned we want to work towards a positive, forward looking and constructive relation," said Mr. Jaiswal reiterating India's invites to Prime Minister Rahman. Diplomatic sources from the Bangladeshi side had informed earlier that they are expecting an automatic short-term renewal of the treaty after the expiry on December 12, though the Indian officials have not indicated at that till now.

Mr. Jaiswal also took note of the protests by the readymade garment industry workers in Bangladesh who have been hitting the streets demanding fair wages as the country faces high inflation and electricity crisis. "Yes, we have been following the situation in Bangladesh. There have been developments there and we will continue to follow the developments," he said in response to a question on the protests by the workers in the garments sector.



2. INDIA–BANGLADESH GANGA WATER TREATY: RENEWAL AND HYDRO-DIPLOMACY

GS Paper II – International Relations: India–Bangladesh Relations | Neighbourhood First Policy | Transboundary River Cooperation

Context: The 30-year Ganga Water Treaty, signed in December 1996, expires on **12 December 2026**, making its renewal crucial for bilateral relations and regional water security.

1. Ganga Water Treaty, 1996: Key Provisions

1. **Signatories:** India and Bangladesh signed the treaty in December 1996.
2. **Duration:** 30 years, ending on 12 December 2026.

3. **Objective:** Equitable sharing of Ganga waters, particularly during the dry season.
4. **Institutional mechanism:** The Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) facilitates bilateral discussions on shared rivers and water-related concerns.
5. **Renewal:** Requires technical consultations and political consensus between the two countries.

2. Current Developments

1. **Treaty renewal:** India has stated that an established bilateral mechanism exists to discuss the Ganga and other transboundary rivers; no formal renewal update has been announced.
2. **Diplomatic engagement:** India has invited Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to New Delhi, but the proposed visit and renewal process remain uncertain.
3. **Political context:** Political developments in Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina's stay in India since August 2024 have complicated bilateral engagement.
4. **India's position:** India has expressed its commitment to a positive, constructive and forward-looking relationship with Bangladesh.

3. Major Challenges

1. **Water-sharing disputes:** Equitable distribution during lean seasons and competing water requirements.
2. **Political uncertainty:** Changes in leadership and bilateral political relations can delay negotiations.
3. **Hydrological concerns:** Seasonal variations, inadequate data-sharing and changing river flows.
4. **Livelihood security:** Dependence of agriculture, fisheries and riverine communities on water availability.
5. **Ecological sustainability:** Balancing human requirements with riverine ecosystem conservation.

4. Way Forward: From Hydro-Politics to Hydro-Cooperation

1. **Institutional dialogue:** Strengthen the Joint Rivers Commission and expedite treaty-renewal negotiations.
2. **Scientific cooperation:** Share hydrological data and undertake joint river-basin assessments.
3. **Equitable water management:** Adopt a mutually acceptable framework that considers the needs of both countries.
4. **Climate resilience:** Cooperate on floods, droughts, sediment management and changing river flows.
5. **Neighbourhood diplomacy:** Make shared rivers a platform for trust-building and regional cooperation.

5. UPSC Prelims PYQs

Q1. (UPSC Prelims 2017) With reference to river Teesta, consider the following statements:

1. The source of river Teesta is the same as that of Brahmaputra but it flows through Sikkim.
2. River Rangeet originates in Sikkim and is a tributary of river Teesta.
3. River Teesta flows into the Bay of Bengal on the border of India and Bangladesh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 only

Q2. (UPSC Prelims 2020) Consider the following statements:

1. The value of Indo-Sri Lanka trade has consistently increased in the last decade.
2. Textile and textile articles constitute an important item of trade between India and Bangladesh.

3. In the last five years, Nepal has been the largest trading partner of India in South Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 only

Need for a unified urbanisation plan

The Union Budget, Economic Survey and Finance Commission recognise that India is urbanising across a rural-urban continuum. Yet Census 2027 will use the 2011 definitions, deepening the undercount of urban India; a National Urbanisation Policy can recognise this gap and build the institutional and fiscal mechanisms to bridge it

ECONOMIC NOTES

Sudeshna Chatterjee
Jaya Dhindaw

India's 2027 Census, happening after 16 years, will classify a settlement as urban if it is either notified by a State as a statutory town or meets three census-town criteria: a population of at least 5,000, a density of at least 400 persons per sq km, and at least 75% of male workers engaged in non-agricultural work. Everything else will be counted as rural.

This preserves comparability across Census years, but it also means the Census will measure urban India with a yardstick that our own economic and fiscal institutions have begun to move beyond.

Measuring urbanisation

In 2011, India had 377 million urban residents across ~8,000 cities and towns. Since then, States have notified another 1,000 statutory towns. The United Nations estimates that 44% of Indians live in urban areas today, projecting the urban population to cross 720 million by 2050.

The growth has been extraordinarily uneven. Greater Mumbai had close to 12 million residents in 2011, while statutory towns like Gangotri Nagar Panchayat in Uttarakhand have a population of 110.

Around 94% of India's urban settlements are small towns, while ~60% of the urban population lives in Class I cities—which includes cities with populations ranging from 1 lakh to 20 million. It lumps together megacities like Mumbai and Delhi with non-metropolitan cities like Mangaluru and Amravati, obscuring radically different needs and capacities. Meanwhile, the fastest growth is unfolding beyond cities: peri-urban areas are expanding at ~4.15% a year, compared to 2.9% growth occurring within administrative boundaries.

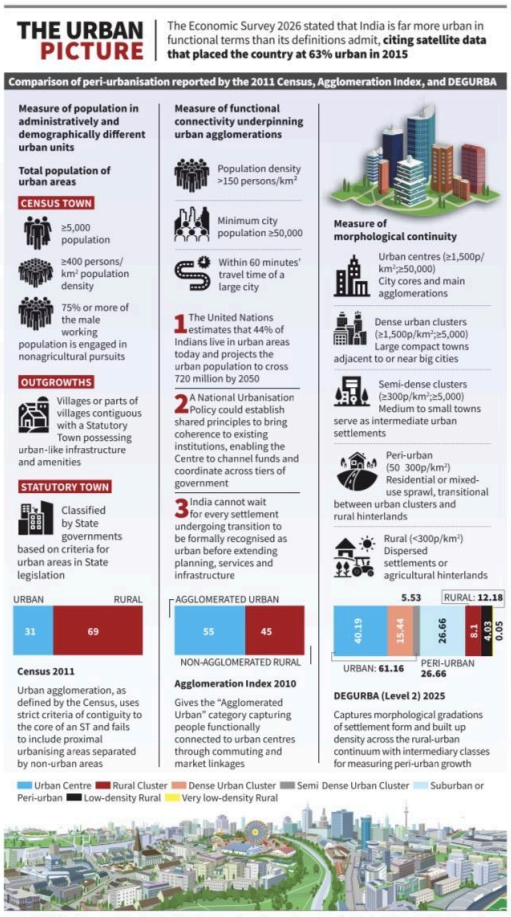
The Economic Survey 2026 stated that India is far more urban in functional terms than its definitions admit, citing satellite data that placed the country at 63% urban in 2015. The 2026 Union Budget allocated ₹5,000 crore each to City Economic Regions, shifting the focus from individual cities to wider economic geographies. The 16th Finance Commission raised the share of local grants earmarked for urban local bodies to 45%. It also created a ₹10,000-crore 'urbanisation premium' to encourage States to merge peri-urban villages into adjoining municipal areas and develop rural-to-urban transition policies.

These measures signal a critical shift, but they do not constitute a coherent framework for recognising transitioning settlements, planning across administrative boundaries or aligning fiscal incentives across India's system of cities. That is the missing link which a National Urbanisation Policy could bridge.

Rethinking the rural-urban binary

Firstly, why does a classification carry so much weight? In India, classification is a gateway. Master plans, municipal finance, Finance Commission grants, building regulation, environmental clearance thresholds and scheme eligibility all depend, in different ways, on how a settlement is classified. This classification is also politically reversible. Article 243Q(2) leaves the notification of an area as urban to the discretion of States, with no standard criteria or requirement to publish reasoning behind the decision.

The law treats rural and urban as mutually exclusive and not a continuum.



Note: DEGURBA = Degree of Urbanisation. ST = Statutory Town. Source: Conceptualised by the WRI India Cities Research, Knowledge and Engagement (RKE) Team based on ORGI (2011c, 2011e); Schiavina et al. 2023; European Commission 2020

Consider Bhiwandi region near Mumbai that spans 60 villages and nine census towns. Here, 91.8% of employment is non-agricultural, yet it is still governed as rural, leaving Panchayats responsible for land use, waste, water and air quality, without a mandate or technical capacity.

The planning consequences are stark. Around 52% of statutory towns and 76% of census towns have no master plan. Nine States have not updated their planning legislation since the 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992. Meanwhile, the model law most States rely on dates from 1985, and says nothing about the rural-urban continuum, the 74th Amendment, the 2013 Land Acquisition Law, and the emergence of climate adaptation as a planning imperative.

The necessity of national guidance

National guidance on urbanisation already exists, although unacknowledged. Census classification rules, Finance Commission formulae and scheme eligibility criteria, collectively determine which settlements count as urban and what they receive. Because these were not designed as a coherent policy framework, no single institution is answerable for their combined effects.

A National Urbanisation Policy would not prescribe a one-size-fits-all blueprint or a parallel delivery system. Grounded in subsidiarity, it could establish shared principles to build coherence across existing institutions, letting the Centre channel funds, build capacity and coordinate across tiers of government.

The need for a National Urbanisation Policy

WRI India's report '*Equitable, Productive, Low-carbon and Resilient System of Cities in India - Recommendations for a National Urbanisation Policy*' proposes seven systems transformations:

Standardise the definition and classification of statutory urban settlements; modernise spatial and regional planning; reorient public and private finance flows into urbanisation; embed a tiered coordination architecture, anchored by a National Urbanisation Council; build sectoral reforms on functional foundations; align urban politics with reform incentives; and support knowledge exchange and local innovation.

The first three are foundational and their sequence matters. Article 243W makes devolution permissive rather than mandatory, so notification does not automatically transfer all 18 municipal functions listed in the Twelfth Schedule, to newly notified urban areas. A settlement that has not been classified as urban cannot even begin the transition towards receiving critical municipal services. Therefore, settlement status should be reviewed at fixed intervals against set criteria, not only during the Census, using satellite and geospatial data on built-up growth and economic activity, as the Economic Survey recommends.

Spatial planning comes second because every other reform, from housing and infrastructure to climate adaptation and finance, must ultimately be located somewhere. Yet for most Indian settlements, the plans that should guide these decisions do not exist.

The institutional foundations for better coordination do exist. Metropolitan and District Planning Committees have existed under Articles 243ZE and 243ZD of the Constitution for over three decades. Guidance must acquire statutory force to drive change: regional planning must extend below the million-plus threshold as most of the growth is unfolding there. In such areas, peri-urban zoning cannot be optional.

Finance comes third because implementation requires monetary resources. India's municipal revenue is ~1% of GDP, compared with 7.4% in Brazil and 6% in South Africa, while property tax yields only 0.15% of GDP. Piecemeal, scheme-specific transfers leave cities unable to predict cash flow. India has developed a sophisticated set of blended financing instruments, but access is limited. Own-source revenue and formula-based transfers should become the fiscal pillars of urban governance, besides project preparation capacity.

Coordination comes next. The Inter-State Council dates from 1990 and the Central Council of Local Government from 1954. While NITI Aayog routinely brings States together, a National Urbanisation Council could better connect institutions and mechanisms.

The fifth transformation is about jurisdictional fit. Sectoral reforms are generally designed around administrative jurisdictions that do not match the geography of the problem. For instance, 65% of Delhi's PM 2.5 originates outside the city, so a municipal air quality plan cannot succeed, however well-funded. Reforms should be built on functional units – the airshed, the basin, the city region – with institutions empowered at that scale.

The final two transformations concern incentives and learning. Untied grants should reach municipalities directly through a published formula, paired with the knowledge and innovation support that cities need to meet benchmarks.

In most cases, the institution, criterion or instrument already exists. What is missing is regularity, enforceability, reach and accountability for non-performance. India cannot wait for every transitioning settlement to be formally recognised as urban before extending planning, services and infrastructure. A National Urbanisation Policy addresses this by shifting the unit of planning from administrative boundaries to functional areas.

(Sudeshna Chatterjee is Director of Research and Jaya Dhindaw is Executive Director of WRI India's Sustainable Cities Program.)

THE GIST

- The 2027 Census will classify a settlement as urban if it is either notified as a statutory town or meets three census town criteria. This means the Census will measure urban India using a yardstick that the country's own economic and fiscal institutions have begun to move beyond
- Around 94% of India's urban settlements are small towns, while about 60% of its urban population lives in Class I cities. The classification lumps together megacities with non-metropolitan cities, obscuring their radically different needs and capacities
- Grounded in subsidiarity, a National Urbanisation Policy could establish shared principles to build coherence across existing institutions

3. NEED FOR A UNIFIED NATIONAL URBANISATION POLICY

GS Paper I – Indian Society: Urbanisation, Rural–Urban Continuum
GS Paper II – Governance: Decentralisation, Urban Local Bodies and Institutional Reforms
GS Paper III – Economy: Urban Infrastructure and Sustainable Development

Context: India's urban growth is increasingly extending beyond officially notified municipal boundaries. The absence of an integrated urbanisation framework has created gaps in planning, governance, infrastructure and financing.

1. India's Urbanisation: The Changing Reality

1. **2027 Census:** Urban classification will continue to use the 2011 framework:
    - Statutory towns: settlements notified as urban by the government.
    - Census towns: population of at least 5,000; density of at least 400 persons per sq. km; and at least 75% of male main workers engaged in non-agricultural activities.
2. **2011 Census:** India had 377 million urban residents, 4,041 statutory towns and around 1,000 census towns.
3. **Functional urbanisation:** The Economic Survey 2026 estimates that satellite-data-based assessment placed India at 63% urban in 2015, highlighting the gap between administrative classification and actual urban growth.
4. **Future trajectory:** The United Nations projects India's urban population could reach 720 million by 2050.
5. **Emerging pattern:** Peri-urban areas and smaller towns are expanding, while urban agglomerations increasingly extend beyond municipal boundaries.

2. Why Is a Unified Policy Necessary?

1. **Outdated urban classification:** Administrative definitions fail to capture functional urban regions and the rural–urban continuum.
2. **Peri-urban governance gap:** Settlements experiencing urban growth often remain under Panchayati Raj Institutions without adequate urban infrastructure or planning.
3. **Fragmented institutional structure:** Municipalities, development authorities and panchayats frequently function without effective coordination.
4. **Infrastructure pressure:** Unplanned expansion increases demand for affordable housing, public transport, water supply, sanitation and waste management.
5. **Inadequate municipal finance:** Weak own-source revenues and limited fiscal capacity restrict infrastructure development.
6. **Uneven regional development:** Excessive concentration in metropolitan cities creates pressure on major urban centres while smaller towns remain underdeveloped.

3. Constitutional and Institutional Framework

1. **74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:** Granted constitutional recognition to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
2. **Article 243Q:** Provides for Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Municipal Corporations.
3. **Article 243W:** Provides for the powers and responsibilities of municipalities.
4. **Article 243ZD:** Provides for District Planning Committees to consolidate rural and urban development plans.
5. **Article 243ZE:** Provides for Metropolitan Planning Committees to prepare development plans for metropolitan areas.
6. **Implementation gap:** Inadequate devolution of functions, funds and functionaries, alongside overlapping jurisdictions, weakens decentralised urban governance.

4. Key Recommendations for a National Urbanisation Policy

1. **Unified urban framework:** Develop common principles for identifying, classifying and planning statutory towns, census towns and functional urban regions.
2. **Integrated spatial planning:** Align municipal boundaries and planning with actual urban expansion, including peri-urban settlements.
3. **Institutional coordination:** Strengthen District and Metropolitan Planning Committees and establish mechanisms for coordination across tiers of government.
4. **Urban financial reforms:** Improve property-tax collection, municipal revenue mobilisation and predictable intergovernmental transfers.
5. **Infrastructure-led development:** Prioritise affordable housing, public transport, water supply, sanitation and climate-resilient infrastructure.
6. **Empower smaller cities:** Promote Tier-II and Tier-III cities as alternative centres of employment, investment and regional growth.
7. **Capacity building:** Strengthen urban planning expertise, local governance institutions and knowledge-sharing.

5. Important Policy Measures Mentioned

1. **Union Budget 2026:** ₹5,000 crore allocated to each City Economic Region to promote integrated economic development.
2. **16th Finance Commission:** Proposed a ₹10,000-crore urbanisation stimulus to encourage the merger of adjoining peri-urban villages.
3. **National Urbanisation Policy:** The proposed framework should build on existing constitutional and institutional structures rather than create another fragmented delivery system.

6. UPSC Mains PYQ Linkages – GS Paper I

Q1. (UPSC 2015 | 12.5 Marks)
"Smart cities in India cannot sustain without smart villages." Discuss this statement in the backdrop of rural–urban integration.

Q2. (UPSC 2023 | 15 Marks)

Does urbanisation lead to more segregation and/or marginalisation of the poor in Indian metropolises?

Q3. (UPSC 2025 | 10 Marks)

How does smart city in India address the issues of urban poverty and distributive justice?

In snails, a mother's hidden genes decide which way her baby spirals

In 2023, after poring through photos posted online by hikers, a researcher found a location in north Japan where there were both left and right-handed snails of a single species; their shells also looked similar, suggesting the snails had interbred; this new population provided important clues about how the myosin gene worked

D.P. Kasbekar

With a bit of penmanship, 'e' and '9' can be made to look like mirror images of each other. While the 'e' swings counter-clockwise, the '9' swings clockwise, written from top to bottom. Snails also can be similarly left- or right-handed depending on which way their shells coil.

But what decides which way the shell turns? Recently, scientists from the U.K. and Japan found the answer for Japanese *Euhadra* snails.

It depends on which variants of the gene for an unconventional myosin protein are present in the mother. Like us, snails possess two copies of every gene, one copy comes from the mother via the egg, and the other from the father via the sperm. When sperm and eggs are made, each receives only one copy of each gene pair.

The findings were published in *Current Biology* on October 16.



Like humans, snails also can be left or right-handed depending on which way their shells coil. KRZYSZTOF NIEWOLNY/UNSPLASH

THEGIST

Like humans, snails possess two copies of every gene, one from the mother via the egg, and the other from the father via the sperm; when sperm and eggs are made, each receives only one copy of each gene pair

The reproductive system in a snail is located close to its head on the right side; thus mating between snails becomes awkward when they are opposite-handed, resulting in only partial mating

A myosin gene mutation is linked to shell handedness in *Euhadra* snails, with distinct variants found in left and right-handed populations

Twisted trysts

Sex is startlingly different in snails than in, say, humans. For one, snails are hermaphrodites: an individual snail makes both sperm and eggs. For another, the outer opening of the reproductive system, called the genital pore, is located close to its head, on the right side. It is, however, almost invisible unless actively in use.

When snails mate, each partner protrudes a penis through the genital pore. Two penises of a mating pair enter each other's vaginal ducts, also in the pore. After exchanging sperm, the pair separates. Like two friends who shake hands, coupling is straightforward between same-handed snails. But if they are opposite handed, coupling becomes awkward, like one person extending their left hand and the other their right. The union can only be partly consummated as a result.

Handedness variants

Most *Euhadra* species are right-handed; four are left-handed. But only one of them, *Euhadra quaesita*, had both right- and left-handed populations. The researchers collected *E. quaesita* snails from three locations in north Japan. Each population was either fully right-handed or fully left-handed. The researchers also sampled the other *Euhadra* species, including all the four left-handed ones.

They sequenced the genomes of all the collected snails and searched for DNA sequences whose alternative versions correlated with left- and right-handedness. This is how they found the same variant of the myosin gene in all left-handed snails. They called it S (for sinistral, which is the Latin for "left-hand side"). All the right-handed snails contained the other variant of the myosin gene, which they called D (for dextral).

In 2023, one of the researchers found a location in north Japan where there were both left- and right-handed *E. quaesita* snails, after poring through photos posted online by hikers. Their shells also looked outwardly similar, suggesting the snails had interbred. This new population provided important clues about how the myosin gene worked.

The left-handed snails from this site included individuals with the myosin gene variants SS, DS, and DD, and right-handed ones included DD and DS, but not SS.

Maternal effect

There are two parts to the explanation.

First, an individual snail's handedness is determined by its mother's genes, not its own. Handedness is decided very early in the baby snail, even before its own genes begin to express themselves.

Second, if the mother has even only a single S variant (i.e. she is SD or SS), the offspring will be left-handed. Right-handedness only emerges if the mother is DD.

One right-handed snail collected from the site found in 2023 produced left-handed offspring in the laboratory. Which means it received its S variant from its father.

Likewise, the populations from the older three locations were uniformly SS or DD. Therefore, the maternal effect and dominance could not be inferred from them alone.

The myosin gene makes a protein of the same name, which helps cells make a complex with the actin protein. In our muscles, this actomyosin complex converts chemical energy into mechanical force and allows our bodies to move. In other cells, the complex drives cell division and cell movement.

'An exceptional model'

Earlier this year, researchers from Chiba University in Japan published a paper in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reporting that filaments made of actin can be made to slide on a glass surface coated with myosin.

When the glass surface was coated with myosin from rabbit skeletal muscle, the actin filaments moved in a roughly straight path. In contrast, when the surface was coated with myosin from a green alga, the actin filaments moved in a clockwise curve. This revealed that some, but not all, myosin proteins can promote actin filament to move in a curved path.

The clockwise curve is an asymmetry at the molecular scale. It can change the axis of cell division relative that of the preceding division. The extent of change can differently impact cell-cell interactions of the daughter cells. This is asymmetry at the cellular scale.

"This paradigm offers a mechanistic basis for how motor-driven molecular asymmetry can give rise to coherent structural chirality at the cellular scale – an essential step in the emergence of cell chirality and asymmetry during development" the authors wrote. Chirality is the difference between left- and right-handedness.

What trajectories might the filament take on glass surfaces coated with *Euhadra* S- or D-myosin? The S version contains eight amino acid changes compared with the D version. One or more of them might contribute to a changed trajectory and thus trigger the change in handedness. The authors of the snail study concluded by saying "testing these ideas experimentally will provide important insight into the evolutionary plasticity of symmetry-breaking systems."

"This discovery deepens our understanding of how molecular-scale asymmetries propagate to the level of the whole body," they added, "and highlights snails as an exceptional model for dissecting the fundamental origins of left and right."

(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist. kasbekardp@yahoo.co.in)

4. SNAIL SHELL COILING: ROLE OF MATERNAL GENES

GS Paper III – Science & Technology: Genetics and Molecular Biology

Context: Research on Japanese *Euhadra* snails shows that shell-coiling direction is determined by the mother's genotype, demonstrating **maternal effect inheritance**.

1. Important Prelims Facts

1. **Shell handedness:**
    - Dextral – clockwise/right-handed coiling.
    - Sinistral – anticlockwise/left-handed coiling.
2. **Myosin gene:** Genetic variants of an unconventional myosin gene influence shell-coiling direction.
3. **Maternal effect:** The mother's genotype determines the offspring's early developmental pattern, rather than the offspring's genotype alone.
4. **Molecular mechanism:** Myosin interacts with actin and influences cellular organisation and the orientation of cell division during embryonic development.
5. **Reproductive significance:** Opposite-handed snails may face difficulty aligning their reproductive organs during mating.

2. UPSC Prelims PYQ Linkage

UPSC Prelims 2021 – Hereditary Diseases

In the context of hereditary diseases, consider the following statements:

1. Passing on mitochondrial diseases from parent to child can be prevented by mitochondrial replacement therapy either before or after in vitro fertilization of egg.
2. A child inherits mitochondrial diseases entirely from mother and not from father.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) Both 1 and 2

Conceptual linkage: Mitochondrial inheritance is generally maternal, while snail shell-coiling illustrates maternal effect inheritance. These are distinct genetic concepts.

How the Supreme Court shaped due process in death penalty cases

In *Bachan Singh*, the apex court upheld the death penalty but laid down guidelines for judicial discretion; in *Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, it prescribed 'practical guidelines', including the submission of mental health evaluations and custody conduct reports of the accused

L. Nageswara Rao

The Day Against the Death Penalty, observed on October 10, offered a fitting moment to look back on how the Supreme Court's 1980 safeguards, laid down when it upheld capital punishment, have fared over the past four decades.

In *Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab* (1980), the Constitution Bench upheld the death penalty, but imposed specific conditions in the shape of guidelines for the exercise of judicial discretion. Following the legislative scheme of Section 354(3) of the CrPC, now Section 393(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, life imprisonment was to be the norm, and death sentence could be imposed only for "special reasons". Courts were to weigh the circumstances of the crime alongside those of the accused, and impose death only where life imprisonment was "unquestionably foreclosed".

The exceptionality principle

This idea of exceptionality of the death sentence in *Bachan Singh* is not quantitative regarding an offence's rarity but rests on "a real and abiding concern for the dignity of human life". The methodology adopted by the Court to ensure that the promise of human dignity is fulfilled is individualised sentencing. It is the idea that the death penalty, while being proportionate, must be imposed after properly considering the individual circumstances of the accused. This allows courts to assess how social, structural and psychological factors shape moral blameworthiness, and whether reformation is truly foreclosed. And it is for the state to prove, by evidence, that the probability of reformation does not exist.

Regrettably, this dignity-oriented jurisprudence was soon made precarious. *Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab* (1983), as the Court later acknowledged in *Sangeet v. State of Haryana* (2013), shifted the inquiry towards the crime, in effect asking whether there were reasons to impose life imprisonment rather than special reasons to impose death. In December 1995, a two-judge Bench went further. *Ravji v. State of Rajasthan* held that the nature and gravity of the offence, not the circumstances of the criminal, was what mattered in deciding punishment. Ravji was hanged in May 1996; Surja Ram, in April 1997. Two men were sent to the gallows on a principle the Supreme Court would later declare contrary to binding law.

A decade later, in *Santosh Kumar Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra* (2009), the Court held that *Ravji* had been decided in ignorance of *Bachan Singh*, and noted that it had been followed in at least six other cases in which the death sentence was awarded. *Bariyar* also clarified that life imprisonment is "unquestionably foreclosed" only when the sentencing aim of reformation is unachievable. In 2012, 14 retired judges called the two executions "the gravest known miscarriage of justice" in independent India.

A focus on reformation

Since then, including in the 262nd Law Commission Report in 2015, reformation has been championed as an important goal in death penalty cases. Yet sentencing, particularly in trial courts, looked much the same. A nationwide study of 306 death sentences imposed between 2018 and 2020 found that 36.1% were pronounced on the same day as conviction, and another 18.4% on the following day. In most cases, the defence neither argued nor presented evidence on mitigation.

It is against this record of crime-centric practice that the Supreme Court has, in recent years, turned to the fairness of the sentencing procedure itself. In *Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2022), it prescribed 'practical guidelines' to operationalise the collection of information on the accused, requiring the state to produce mental health evaluations, reports on conduct in custody, and a probation officer's report. In a *suo motu* Writ Petition, since referred to a Constitution Bench, the court insisted that the defence must have a real and meaningful opportunity to present material on sentence. And in *Vasanta Sampat Dupare v. Union of India* (2025), it held that a sentencing hearing which is compliant to *Manoj* flows from Articles 14 and 21. A death sentence imposed without one is unconstitutional and can be reopened even after it has attained finality.

More recently, in *Waris v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (September 2026), the Court upheld a conviction for the rape and murder of a child but commuted the death sentence, because the State had led no evidence to exclude the possibility of reformation. The gravity of the crime, however extreme, could not by itself establish that life imprisonment was unquestionably foreclosed.

The promise, however, remains unfulfilled where it matters most. In 2025, trial courts sentenced 128 people to death. In 95.18% of the cases where compliance could be assessed, the procedure prescribed in *Manoj* was not followed.

A troubling record

However, the greater worry lies not with the question of sentence but elsewhere. Over the past decade, nearly a third of the death sentences decided by the High Courts and the Supreme Court have ended in acquittals. In 2025 alone, the Supreme Court acquitted the accused in 10 of the 19 death penalty cases it decided, repeatedly noting seriously flawed investigations and prosecutions. In *Dupare*, it acknowledged that investigations often rest on "confessions extracted in opacity" and forensic material "of doubtful rigour". A system so prone to error cannot safely decide an irreversible punishment on the crime alone. *Bachan Singh* left us a warning: "Judges should never be bloodthirsty."

The anguish that brutal crimes provoke is real, and no one is insulated from it. But *Ravji* stands as a stark reminder of what follows when that anguish overwhelms legal reasoning. The safeguards developed from *Bachan Singh* to *Dupare* are not obstacles to justice; they are the conditions on which the constitutionality of the death penalty rests. Fidelity to that process is not mercy. It is what the Constitution mandates.

(The author is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. Views expressed are personal.)

5. DEATH PENALTY IN INDIA: SUPREME COURT GUIDELINES AND DUE PROCESS

GS Paper II – Polity & Governance: Judiciary, Fundamental Rights and Criminal Justice System
GS Paper IV – Ethics: Justice, Human Dignity and Fairness

Context: The Supreme Court has progressively strengthened procedural safeguards in death penalty cases, emphasising individualised sentencing, reformation and human dignity.

1. Constitutional and Legal Framework

1. **Article 21:** No person can be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.
2. **Article 14:** Ensures equality before law and protection against arbitrary sentencing.
3. **Section 354(3), CrPC:** Death penalty must be imposed only for special reasons; life imprisonment is the rule.
4. **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023:** Replaced the CrPC; Section 393(3) retains the requirement of special reasons for awarding death sentences.

2. Evolution of Supreme Court Jurisprudence

1. **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980):** Established the *rarest of rare* doctrine; death penalty should be imposed only when life imprisonment is unquestionably foreclosed.
2. **Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983):** Elaborated the circumstances for applying the rarest-of-rare principle.
3. **Sangeet v. State of Haryana (2013):** Emphasised the need to consider the possibility of reform and rehabilitation.
4. **Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022):** Prescribed practical guidelines, including mental-health evaluations, custody conduct reports and probation officer reports.
5. **Vasanta Sampat Dupare v. Union of India (2025):** Reaffirmed that sentencing hearings must provide a meaningful opportunity to present mitigating circumstances.

3. Major Concerns in Death Penalty Administration

1. **Inadequate mitigation assessment:** Social, psychological and personal circumstances may not receive sufficient consideration.
2. **Mechanical sentencing:** Death sentences may be imposed without meaningful examination of the possibility of reform.
3. **Procedural non-compliance:** The clipping reports that in 95.18% of cases where compliance could be assessed, the procedure prescribed in *Manoj* was not followed.
4. **Wrongful convictions:** Flawed investigations, unreliable confessions and questionable forensic evidence create the risk of irreversible injustice.
5. **Inconsistent sentencing:** Similar cases may receive different punishments, raising concerns about fairness and judicial consistency.

4. Way Forward

1. Ensure individualised sentencing and rigorous assessment of mitigating circumstances.
2. Make mental-health evaluations and custody conduct reports an integral part of sentencing.
3. Provide effective legal representation and meaningful opportunities for defence submissions.
4. Strengthen forensic standards and accountability in criminal investigations.
5. Ensure strict compliance with Supreme Court guidelines before imposing capital punishment.

India to push for predictable climate finance, equitable transition at key UN summit

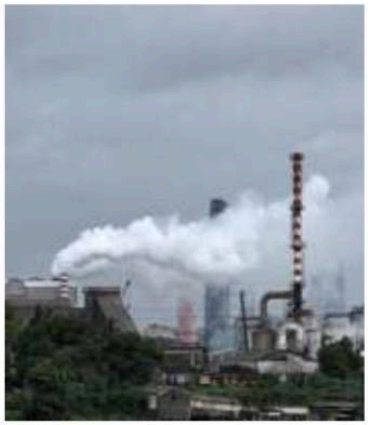
Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Predictable climate finance, technology transfer, and nationally determined approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation will be India's key demands at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkiye, from November 9 to 20.

Underlining a long-standing position, India will reiterate that developed countries must fulfil their financial obligations to developing nations.

India is not inclined towards language suggesting "fossil fuel cuts or phase-out" or restrictions, as it is already on a pathway to ramp up its share of renewable energy, increasing forest cover, and improving energy efficiency.

These emerged at a press conference convened by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday, outlining India's priorities ahead of the conference.



India will seek a decision to commence the Climate Finance Work Programme at COP31. AP

India will seek continuation of the Just Transition Work Programme (JWT) and "oppose attempts" to impose new, top-down mitigation targets on developing countries.

Climate finance will be a central negotiating issue, with India seeking a decision to begin a Climate Finance Work Programme.

Voluntary indicators

Mr. Yadav said finance provided by developed countries under Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement must be "predictable, largely public and concessional", and must not add to the debt burden of developing countries.

India will argue that indicators being developed under the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) should remain voluntary and should not become conditions for accessing climate finance. "Among the successes that we have had is reducing the number of parameters down to 59 from the nearly thousand," Mr. Yadav said.

6. INDIA'S PRIORITIES AT COP31: CLIMATE FINANCE AND JUST TRANSITION

GS Paper III – Environment: Climate Change, Climate Finance and International Climate Negotiations

Context: At COP31 (Antalya, Türkiye; November 9–20, 2026), India will push for predictable climate finance, technology transfer and an equitable transition, emphasising the financial responsibilities of developed countries.

1. India's Key Negotiating Priorities

1. **Predictable Climate Finance:** Developed countries must fulfil their financial obligations towards developing countries.
2. **Climate Finance Work Programme:** India seeks a decision to initiate a dedicated programme at COP31.
3. **Technology Transfer:** Affordable access to climate-friendly technologies for developing countries.
4. **Just Transition Work Programme:** India supports its continuation and opposes uniform, top-down mitigation targets.
5. **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** Climate commitments must reflect national circumstances and developmental priorities.

2. India's Position on Climate Negotiations

1. **Fossil-fuel transition:** India opposes externally imposed fossil-fuel phase-out restrictions that disregard national circumstances.
2. **Article 9.1, Paris Agreement:** Developed countries must provide financial resources to developing countries for mitigation and adaptation.
3. **Nature of finance:** Climate finance should be predictable, largely public and concessional, without increasing developing countries' debt burden.
4. **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA):** Adaptation indicators should remain voluntary and should not become conditions for accessing climate finance.
5. **Simplification of indicators:** India highlighted the reduction of adaptation indicators from nearly 1,000 to 59.

3. Important Prelims Facts

1. **COP31:** 31st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. **Paris Agreement, Article 9:** Deals with climate finance and the financial obligations of developed countries.
3. **NDCs:** Country-specific climate action commitments under the Paris Agreement.
4. **Just Transition:** Ensures that the shift towards a low-carbon economy is fair and protects workers and vulnerable communities.
5. **Global Goal on Adaptation:** Established under Article 7 of the Paris Agreement to enhance adaptive capacity, resilience and reduce vulnerability.

4. UPSC Prelims PYQs

Q1. (UPSC Prelims 2016) With reference to the Agreement at the UNFCCC Meeting in Paris in 2015, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Agreement was signed by all the member countries of the UN, and it will go into effect in 2017.
2. The Agreement aims to limit greenhouse gas emissions so that the rise in average global temperature by the end of this century does not exceed 2°C or even 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
3. Developed countries acknowledged their historical responsibility in global warming and committed to donate $1,000 billion a year from 2020 to help developing countries cope with climate change.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (b) 2 only

Q2. (UPSC Prelims 2018) “Momentum for Change: Climate Neutral Now” is an initiative launched by:

(a) The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
(b) The UNEP Secretariat
(c) The UNFCCC Secretariat
(d) The World Meteorological Organization

Answer: (c) The UNFCCC Secretariat

5. UPSC Mains PYQ Linkages

GS Paper III

1. **2025 | 15 Marks:** Write a review on India’s climate commitments under the Paris Agreement (2015) and mention how these have been further strengthened in COP26 (2021). In this direction, how has the first Nationally Determined Contribution intended by India been updated in 2022?
2. **2021 | 15 Marks:** Describe the major outcomes of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC. What are the commitments made by India at this conference?

GS Paper II

3. **2022 | 15 Marks:** ‘Clean energy is the order of the day.’ Describe briefly India’s changing policy towards climate change in various international fora in the context of geopolitics.

What is the role of Legislative Councils?

What is the constitutional basis for Legislative Councils in the States? What were the arguments for and against? How are members elected and nominated? What powers do Legislative Councils have in relation to Legislative Assemblies? What reforms did the Second Administrative Reforms Commission propose?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

Elections to 28 Legislative Council seats were held last week in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The exchanges among political parties and their leaders, including the Prime Minister, following the election results had piqued public curiosity about Legislative Councils.

Legislative Councils in British India

The Government of India Act, 1935 introduced bicameral legislatures in six large provinces of Madras, Bombay, Bengal, the United Provinces, Bihar and Assam. The electoral college for these councils was highly restricted and elitist, granting voting rights to only a very wealthy or educated minority.

They were to act as a revising chamber to review the work of Provincial Legislative Assemblies. These councils were not subject to dissolution, and the term of individual members was nine years, with one-third of members retiring every three years. Interestingly, these Legislative Councils had equal powers with the Legislative Assemblies with respect to passage of bills. If there was any disagreement, or if a bill was kept pending in the council for 12 months, the Governor may resolve such deadlock only by summoning a joint sitting of the provincial Assembly and Council.

Constituent Assembly debates

The debates around constituting Legislative Councils in States were highly contested in the Constituent Assembly. Some members favoured it on the ground that it would act as a check and balance against hasty legislation by popularly elected Legislative Assemblies. Others viewed it as an unnecessary burden on the public exchequer. There were also objections to leaving out most important aspects of the constitution of Legislative Councils to ordinary legislation of Parliament without clearly specifying them in the Constitution itself. Finally, after considerable debate, the provisions with respect to Legislative Councils were adopted.



BJP leaders celebrate after winning four seats in Karnataka Legislative Council polls, on October 28. PTI

Structure of State councils

Article 168 of the Constitution provides that the State legislature of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka shall have a Legislative Council.

Article 169 stipulates that Parliament may by ordinary law provide for the abolition or creation of a Legislative Council in a State. However, Parliament may pass such a law only if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect by a two-thirds majority.

Article 171 provides that the maximum number of members in a council shall not exceed one-third of the total membership of the Legislative Assembly, subject to a minimum of 40. The members of the council shall be elected as follows: one-third by municipality and local body members; one-twelfth by graduates for at least three years; one-twelfth by secondary school teachers for at least three years; one-third by MLAs of the State; and the remaining one-sixth to be nominated. Article 172 provides that the Legislative Council in a State is not subject to dissolution, and the term of individual members is six years, with one-third of members retiring every two years.

The ministers in a State, including the Chief Minister, can be from its Legislative Council, just like ministers in the Centre can be from the Rajya Sabha.

However, when it comes to legislative procedure, the council does not have significant powers. There is no requirement for a joint sitting to break any deadlock between the Assembly and Council with respect to bills. In case of disagreement, the bill as passed by the Assembly is considered final, with the Council only having the option to delay the passage of a bill for a maximum of four months.

Issues and way forward

The abolition or creation of Legislative Councils in the past has been primarily driven by political considerations. For instance, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council was abolished in 1986 when M. G. Ramachandran was the Chief Minister. There was a resolution in the assembly to re-establish it in 2010 when M. Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister. However, before the Parliamentary law for creation could be notified, the Assembly in 2011 had passed a resolution against the revival of the council when J. Jayalalithaa became Chief Minister. Similarly, the Andhra Pradesh council was abolished in 1985 when N. T. Rama Rao became the Chief Minister, only to be later created again in 2007.

The second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in its report on Local Governance (2007) had proposed that Parliament may, by law, create a Legislative Council in all States as 'Council of local governments'. It argued that, given the country's increased literacy rates, there was no longer a need for a separate electorate of graduates and teachers. Instead, all the members of the council can be elected solely by local body representatives.

The second ARC's recommendation may be deliberated and suitably implemented. Despite limited legislative powers of the council, this arrangement may enable it to function as an effective 'revising house', protecting and empowering the interests of local bodies. Otherwise, they may as well be abolished in the existing six States, rather than remaining as a mere ornament in those State legislatures.

(Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified.' He currently trains at Officers IAS Academy. Views expressed are personal)

THE GIST

- Legislative Councils were envisaged as revising chambers to check hasty legislation by State Assemblies, but their creation and abolition have often been driven by political considerations
- Though the Constitution provides for their composition, tenure, and role, Legislative Councils have limited legislative powers and can only delay the passage of bills
- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended transforming them into councils of local governments, with members elected solely by local body representatives, to strengthen local self-government

7. STATE LEGISLATIVE COUNCILS: ROLE, SIGNIFICANCE AND REFORMS

GS Paper II – Polity: State Legislature, Bicameralism and Federalism

Context: Recent elections to Legislative Councils have revived debate over their relevance, legislative contribution and political utilisation.

1. Constitutional Framework

1. **Article 168:** Provides for bicameral legislatures in certain States.
2. **Article 169:** Parliament can create or abolish a Legislative Council following a special-majority resolution by the State Assembly.
3. **Article 171:** Determines the composition of Legislative Councils.
4. **Article 172(2):** Councils are permanent Houses; one-third of members retire every two years.

2. Composition – Article 171

Electoral category	Share
Local authorities	1/3
MLAs	1/3
Graduates	1/12
Teachers	1/12
Governor’s nominees	1/6

- **Strength:** Minimum 40; maximum one-third of Assembly strength.
- **Tenure:** Six years; one-third retire every two years.
- **Nominated members:** Persons with special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art, cooperative movement and social service.

3. Role and Significance

1. **Legislative scrutiny:** Acts as a revising chamber, allowing reconsideration of Bills and preventing hasty legislation.
2. **Expert participation:** Brings specialised knowledge in literature, science, art, cooperative movement and social service into legislative debates.
3. **Broader representation:** Gives graduates, teachers and local authorities a voice in State-level law-making.

4. **Institutional continuity:** As a permanent House, preserves legislative experience and institutional memory.
5. **Deliberative governance:** Provides an additional forum to scrutinise government policies, question decisions and improve legislative quality.

4. Limitations and Concerns

1. **Limited powers:** Can delay ordinary Bills for a maximum of four months but cannot permanently veto them.
2. **Money Bills:** Can only recommend amendments within 14 days; the Assembly has the final authority.
3. **Political patronage:** May be used to accommodate defeated politicians.
4. **Financial burden:** Creates additional expenditure for State governments.
5. **Institutional duplication:** May repeat legislative discussions without proportionate contribution.

5. Reforms and Way Forward

1. **Second Administrative Reforms Commission:** Recommended transforming Legislative Councils into Councils of Local Governments, with members elected exclusively by local body representatives.
2. **Merit-based representation:** Ensure meaningful participation of experts and professionals.
3. **Strengthen legislative scrutiny:** Improve committee functioning, research support and quality of debate.
4. **Performance accountability:** Assess members' attendance, participation and legislative contribution.
5. **Rational creation:** Establish Councils based on State-specific institutional requirements rather than political considerations.

6. UPSC Previous-Year Questions

Mains – GS Paper II, 2021 (15 Marks)

“Explain the constitutional provisions under which Legislative Councils are established. Review the working and current status of Legislative Councils with suitable illustrations.”

Prelims – 2015

Consider the following statements:

1. The Legislative Council of a State in India can be larger in size than half of the Legislative Assembly of that particular State.
2. The Governor of a State nominates the Chairman of the Legislative Council of that particular State.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d) Neither 1 nor 2.