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How U.S. midterms could shape geopolitics for India

Republicans have faced losses but it is unclear whether Trump will seek an early exit from the Iran war; the victory of candidates from immigrant families could temper anti-immigrant rhetoric

NEWS ANALYSIS

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The dramatic results of the U.S. midterm elections will probably have less impact on India-U.S. bilateral relations than on geopolitics and, as a result, India's "operating environment" in the world. The elections gave the Democrats a majority in the House of Representatives and a comfortable edge in the Senate, which means U.S. President Donald Trump will face restraints on both domestic and foreign policy.

In interviews given after the results began to come in, Mr. Trump said he stood by his decision to attack Iran in February 2026, but acknowledged that Iran was "part" of the reason for Republican losses. It isn't clear whether this means he will give talks with Iran a greater chance and look for an early exit from the war, but New Delhi will watch closely.

Since the U.S.-Israel strikes on Iran began, at least 24 Indians have been killed, including 15 seafarers, who died in attacks by the U.S. and Iran on vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman.



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, left, had made positive comments on the FTA when he visited Mumbai last month. ANI

The Hormuz blockade has had a choking effect on India's energy and fertilizer imports and goods trade, and any cessation of hostilities would come not a day too soon for India.

On ties with Russia

The results could have a mixed, or even negative, effect on India's ties with Russia and its import of Russian oil. Mr. Trump's decision on October 16, 2026, to waive all tariffs on countries importing Russian oil under the Lindsey Graham sanctions Act (SRIA) has given India a temporary reprieve.

However, the SRIA had widespread bipartisan support, and New Delhi will need to work both sides of the aisle if it wants the Act calling for tariffs of up to 100% on Russian oil imports to remain waived.

Ministry of External Affairs officials have said India will not bow to unilateral U.S. sanctions in this case. However, compared with July 2026, when India imported about 51% of its oil needs from Russia, the figure dropped to 44% in August and 33% in September.

Another area where India would benefit from constraints on Mr. Trump's "adventurism" is tariffs and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the U.S.

Despite positive comments from U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who travelled to Mumbai last month and met top Indian industry leaders, there is some doubt about whether the FTA can be ready in time for Mr. Modi's visit to North America and Europe in mid-December 2026, when he will attend the G-20 summit in Florida.

The rise of Democratic governors, senators and Congress members from immigrant families in these elections could mean a reduction in the anti-immigrant rhetoric that has worried Indians and persons of Indian origin in the U.S.

However, it is unlikely to change the administration's stance on curbing visas, restricting the naturalisation of professionals and deporting undocumented migrants, as these have widespread support.

1. U.S. MIDTERM ELECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

GS Paper II – International Relations; Indian Constitution and Political System

Context: The November 3, 2026 US midterm elections resulted in Democrats gaining control of both chambers of Congress, while Republican President Donald Trump remained in office, creating a divided government with implications for US policymaking and India's strategic interests.

1. Midterm Election Outcome and Political Significance

1. **House of Representatives:** All 435 seats were contested, with Democrats gaining a majority. The entire House is elected every two years.
2. **Senate:** 33 regular seats and two special-election seats were contested out of 100. Democrats gained control of the Senate; Senators otherwise serve staggered six-year terms, with approximately one-third of seats contested every two years.
3. **Presidency:** Trump continues his fixed four-year presidential term; midterm elections do not elect or automatically remove the President.
4. **Divided Government:** With Democrats controlling Congress and Republicans holding the Presidency, legislative deadlock, budgetary disagreements and stronger congressional oversight may constrain the President's policy agenda.

2. How Congress Checks Presidential Power

1. **Legislative control:** Congress can reject, amend or delay presidential legislative proposals.
2. **Financial control:** Control over appropriations gives Congress influence over government expenditure and policy implementation.
3. **Executive oversight:** Congressional committees can investigate administration decisions and policies.
4. **Senate powers:** The Senate confirms key presidential appointments and provides consent to treaty ratification.
5. **Impeachment:** The House initiates impeachment proceedings, while the Senate conducts the trial. However, loss of congressional majority alone cannot remove the President.

3. Presidential System (USA) vs Parliamentary System (India)

Dimension	USA	India
Executive	Separately elected President	Prime Minister leads the government

Tenure	Fixed term	Depends on Lok Sabha confidence
Relationship	Separation of powers	Fusion of executive and legislature
Accountability	Congressional checks and balances	Collective responsibility under Article 75(3)
Loss of majority	President remains in office	Government must resign if it loses Lok Sabha confidence

Key distinction: In the USA, legislative opposition can constrain the President without ending the presidential tenure. In India, the government must retain the confidence of the Lok Sabha; Rajya Sabha majority does not determine its survival.

4. Implications for India

1. **West Asian geopolitics:** US policy towards Iran and the ongoing conflict affect India's energy security, fertiliser supplies and maritime trade through the Strait of Hormuz. Attacks on vessels have also endangered Indian seafarers.
2. **Russian oil and sanctions:** Bipartisan congressional support for sanctions legislation creates uncertainty over tariff relief for countries importing Russian oil, requiring India to engage with both political parties.
3. **Trade relations:** Tariff-related uncertainty may affect India–US trade negotiations and the proposed bilateral trade agreement.
4. **Indian diaspora:** Immigration restrictions, visa policies and deportations remain concerns for Indian professionals and students.
5. **Strategic continuity:** Defence, technology and Indo-Pacific cooperation remain important pillars of the bilateral relationship despite changes in Washington's domestic political balance.

5. UPSC Mains PYQs

UPSC 2018 | GS Paper II | 15 Marks

“India and USA are two large democracies. Examine the basic tenets on which the two political systems are based.”

UPSC 2021 | GS Paper II | 10 Marks

“To what extent, in your view, the Parliament is able to ensure accountability of the executive in India?”

Union Cabinet clears two-year service extension for Agniveers, opens path to regular service

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved an additional two-year engagement period for a section of Agniveers, creating a pathway for all cadets under the Agnipath scheme to join the armed forces as regular soldiers, subject to their willingness and fulfilment of selection criteria.

Significant revision

The move marks a significant revision of the original Agnipath framework, under which only up to 25% of each batch of Agniveers were eligible for retention in the regular cadre after four years, while the remaining personnel were to be released from service. Under the revised arrangement, 25% of Agniveers will continue to be offered regular employment while the remaining 75% would be given an opportunity to serve for another two years, following which they would be eligible for consideration for enrolment as regular soldiers, Chief of Defence Staff, General N.S. Raja Subramani, told mediapersons on Wednesday.

The second engagement period will come with higher remuneration, an enhanced Seva Nidhi package, and seniority benefits.

Career trajectory



The revised arrangement creates a pathway for all Agniveers to eventually become regular soldiers

- 25% of Agniveers to be offered regular employment on the basis of merit, as envisaged under the Agnipath scheme
- Remaining 75% to get opportunity for a 2-year extension and subsequent enrolment

Performance review

The decision follows an assessment of the performance of Agniveers in terms of organisational requirements and operational efficiency.

The evaluation found that they had demonstrated outstanding performance in skills, motivation, physical fitness and technological prowess, according to the government, he added.

The additional engagement period was approved on the recommendations of the three services following an elaborate evaluation and feedback process, the Chief of Defence Staff added.

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ADDRESSING DISCONTENT
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2. AGNIPATH SCHEME: TWO-YEAR EXTENSION AND PATHWAY TO REGULAR SERVICE

GS Paper III – Defence Reforms, Internal Security and Human Resource Management

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved an additional two-year engagement period for Agniveers, revising the original four-year recruitment framework and creating an extended pathway towards regular service.

1. Agnipath Scheme: Basic Features

Introduced in **June 2022**, the Agnipath Scheme provides for short-term recruitment of personnel below officer rank in the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force. Recruits are called Agniveers.

1. **Service tenure:** Initial engagement of four years, including training.
2. **Eligibility:** Originally, candidates aged 17.5–21 years, subject to service-specific educational and medical requirements.
3. **Regular retention:** Up to 25% of each batch could be selected for regular cadre enrolment based on merit and organisational requirements.
4. **Seva Nidhi:** One-time exit package comprising the Agniveer's contribution and matching government contribution, with applicable interest.
5. **Other benefits:** Monthly remuneration, applicable risk and hardship allowances, and ₹48 lakh non-contributory life insurance during the original engagement.
6. **Pension:** No pension or gratuity under the original four-year engagement.

2. Why Was the Original Scheme Criticised?

1. **Short service tenure:** Four years was considered insufficient to acquire experience, specialised skills and operational expertise.
2. **Uncertain career prospects:** Only 25% could enter regular service, leaving the remaining 75% to seek civilian employment after four years.
3. **Military preparedness:** Concerns were raised about the loss of trained personnel, institutional experience, unit cohesion and the development of military ethos.
4. **Social security concerns:** Agniveers leaving service lacked regular pensionary benefits and faced uncertainty regarding long-term employment and rehabilitation.
5. **Unequal service conditions:** Concerns emerged regarding differences in remuneration, benefits and career security between Agniveers and regular soldiers performing comparable duties.

3. Major Cabinet Revision – November 2026

Following a four-year performance assessment and recommendations from the three armed services, the Union Cabinet approved an additional two-year engagement for the remaining 75% of Agniveers.

1. **First 25%:** Continue to be offered regular employment based on merit, as under the original arrangement.
2. **Remaining 75%:** Offered an additional two-year engagement, subject to willingness.

3. **Regular enrolment:** After the extended period, they will be offered enrolment as regular soldiers, subject to willingness and fulfilment of selection criteria.
4. **Enhanced benefits:** Higher remuneration, an enhanced Seva Nidhi package and seniority benefits during the additional engagement.

Important: The revision creates a potential six-year service pathway for the remaining 75%; regular enrolment is subject to selection criteria and willingness, not automatic.

4. Significance and Way Forward

1. **Operational continuity:** Retains trained manpower and reduces the loss of institutional knowledge.
2. **Military preparedness:** Longer service can strengthen specialised skills, unit cohesion and operational experience.
3. **Career security:** Provides an extended opportunity for military employment and regular enrolment.
4. **Transparent implementation:** Clearly defined selection criteria, service benefits and career progression are essential to maintain confidence among Agniveers.
5. **Balanced reform:** Periodic assessment should ensure that a youthful force is balanced with experience, operational effectiveness and personnel welfare.

Falling fertility has made laws penalising violation of two-child norm outdated: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday held that laws penalising having more than two children have lost their relevance due to the falling fertility rate in India.

"We are of the strong opinion that laws that penalise having more than two children have lost their relevance. The foundation of such laws, that is, the fear of overpopulation, has crumbled due to demographic changes in the past few decades," a Bench headed by Justice P.S. Narasimha observed.

The court said its 2003 judgment (in *Javed v. State of Haryana*) which upheld such penal laws, needed a revisit by a larger Bench.

India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) had fallen from 3.02 to 1.9. A TFR of 2.1, known as the replacement rate, would allow one generation to completely replace itself.

"Even though India's population is not yet declining, the TFR falling below the replacement rate will soon result in a demographic transition towards an older population with a declining share of the working-age population. Therefore, laws aimed at limiting population growth have now lost their significance," Justice Narasimha observed.

The 2003 judgment had referred to the situation that existed in China as of 2000 and drew inspiration from the measures that it had undertaken to control the population.

Healthy growth

"The earlier perception that population has a negative impact on development does not hold water any more. Rather than society and the courts being concerned about the negative consequences of high population, it should instead focus on the need to encourage a healthy growth of population," the judgment, by a Bench including Justice Alok Aradhe, said.

The judgment pointed out that the share of persons aged 60 and above had risen from about 8.3% in 2014 to 9.7% in 2024, and government projections place that share at nearly 15% by 2036.

India's falling fertility rate, the court said, would necessarily mean a smaller proportion of younger persons in the future. The court said the failure to take notice of demographic changes would lead to only serious consequences. Failure to adapt not only produced injustice, but was also an abuse of power.

The judgment was based on a petition filed by Mangala Bhimrao Ingle, whose election as sarpanch of the Kakoda gram panchayat in Maharashtra was set aside on the ground that she had more than two children.

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3. TWO-CHILD NORMS: SUPREME COURT QUESTIONS THEIR CONTINUED RELEVANCE

GS Paper I – Population and Associated Issues | GS Paper II – Judiciary and Governance

Context: The Supreme Court has questioned the continued relevance of two-child restrictions in view of India's declining fertility rate and changing demographic profile.

1. Supreme Court's Observations

1. **Declining fertility:** India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9, below the replacement level of approximately 2.1.
2. **Reconsideration of precedent:** The Court has sought reconsideration by a larger Bench of *Javed v. State of Haryana (2003)*, which upheld Haryana's two-child restriction for contesting Panchayati Raj elections.

3. **Changing priorities:** Population policy must account for declining fertility, population ageing and regional demographic differences rather than focus exclusively on population control.

2. India's Demographic Transition

1. **Ageing population:** The share of people aged 60 and above increased from 8.3% in 2014 to 9.7% in 2024 and is projected to reach nearly 15% by 2036.
2. **Emerging challenges:** Increasing elderly-care requirements, pension expenditure and changes in the working-age population necessitate sustainable demographic planning.

3. Two-Child Norm in Government Employment: State Examples

1. **Assam:** Under the Assam Public Services (Application of Small Family Norms in Direct Recruitment) Rules, 2019, candidates with more than two living children born on or after January 1, 2021, are ineligible for direct recruitment to State government services.
2. **Maharashtra:** The Maharashtra Civil Services (Declaration of Small Family) Rules, 2005, prescribe a two-child norm for appointment to State government services, covering Groups A, B, C and D.
3. **Local governance:** Several States have also used family-size restrictions as eligibility conditions for Panchayati Raj elections.

Policy significance: These examples demonstrate how population-control objectives have been linked with public employment and political participation. However, their continued relevance requires assessment against changing fertility patterns and individual rights.

4. Concerns Associated with Coercive Two-Child Norms

1. **Reproductive autonomy:** Restrictions on family size interfere with individual reproductive choices and personal liberty.
2. **Gender discrimination:** Women may disproportionately face disqualification, abandonment and coercive reproductive practices.
3. **Sex-selective practices:** Family-size restrictions combined with son preference may encourage sex selection.
4. **Democratic exclusion:** Disqualification from local elections can restrict political participation, particularly among disadvantaged communities.
5. **Limited effectiveness:** Penalising larger families does not necessarily address the underlying causes of high fertility, including poverty, inadequate education and limited healthcare access.

5. Way Forward: From Population Control to Demographic Management

1. **Rights-based approach:** Promote voluntary family planning and accessible reproductive healthcare.

2. **Women's empowerment:** Strengthen female education, economic participation and reproductive autonomy.
3. **Ageing preparedness:** Expand pensions, geriatric healthcare and social protection.
4. **Regional approach:** Frame demographic policies according to State-specific fertility rates and population structures.
5. **Demographic dividend:** Improve education, skills and employability to utilise India's working-age population productively.

6. UPSC Mains PYQ Linkages

UPSC 2024 | GS Paper I | 10 Marks

"What is the concept of a 'demographic winter'? Is the world moving towards such a situation? Elaborate."

UPSC 2019 | GS Paper I | 10 Marks

"Empowering women is the key to control population growth." Discuss.

7. UPSC Prelims PYQ

UPSC Prelims 2024

The Total Fertility Rate in an economy is defined as:

(a) The number of children born per 1,000 people in the population in a year.

(b) The number of children born to a couple in their lifetime in a given population.

(c) The birth rate minus death rate.

(d) The average number of live births a woman would have by the end of her child-bearing age.

Answer: (d)

Anaemia burden — iron alone is no solution



Chandrakant Lahariya

A practising physician and author of the recent book, 'Pill-Free: You Don't Need Everything You Have Been Prescribed'

India's anaemia burden is not in doubt. The fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) found that more than half of women and about two-thirds of young children are anaemic. In this context, double-fortified salt (DFS) – fortified with iodine and iron – is often proposed as a potentially transformative solution. However, the case for DFS rests on convenience: everyone consumes salt, so why not add iron to it? But convenience is not efficacy, and a policy that asks the country to continue consuming salt to deliver iron deserves closer scrutiny.

Iron fortification of salt is a vehicle that cuts against public health. Indians consume, by most estimates, roughly twice the five grams of salt a day recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). About one in three adults has hypertension, and India's own non-communicable disease (NCD) action plan commits to a 30% relative reduction in salt intake.

DFS pulls in the opposite direction: its logic depends on steady, generous salt consumption. Households that reduce salt also reduce their iron intake, while the label 'double fortified' invites the belief that more is fine. Calling DFS compatible with sodium reduction is a gesture, not a design.

The claim that salt is consumed in predictable quantities regardless of income also needs qualification. Intake varies by age, sex and region. Adult men typically consume the most, while young children and women consume the least. The groups with the greatest need for iron may therefore receive the smallest doses, while those least likely to be anaemic get the most.

Iron is not a harmless nutrient

The body has no regulated way to excrete iron. Iron can accumulate, promote oxidative stress and has been linked to metabolic disease. In the landmark 2006 Pemba trial in Tanzania, Africa, iron and folic acid supplementation in children in a malaria-endemic setting was associated with increased hospitalisations and deaths. A Kenyan trial published in 2015 found that iron-fortified foods shifted infants' gut flora toward pathogenic bacteria and increased diarrhoea. India has large malaria-endemic and poorly sanitised areas.

Haemoglobinopathies are a further concern. Millions of Indians carry beta-thalassaemia, while sickle cell disease is concentrated in tribal belts. People with thalassaemia, especially those who receive blood transfusions, are prone to iron overload. In this population and settings such as India, screening is not a very good safeguard, nor is it practical. The Public Distribution System (PDS), for example, reaches about 800 million people; screening that many people before they consume salt is simply unrealistic.

There is also the problem of stacking. Fortified rice is already distributed through multiple platforms, including the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. Iron-folic acid tablets are also distributed to several groups. Adding DFS could mean that a child or adolescent receives iron through three or four government programmes at once. There does not seem to be any published analysis of cumulative iron intake across these programmes. Without one, a 'central flagship' rollout would be premature.

There is another dimension to consider: what happens when iron interacts with food. The iron in DFS is non-haem iron, whose absorption depends heavily on the rest of the meal. The typical Indian meal of cereals, millets and pulses is rich in phytates, which bind iron. Polyphenols in tea and coffee, as well as calcium in milk, further reduce absorption. Non-haem iron absorption from such meals is often low, compared with the much higher absorption of haem iron or iron consumed with vitamin C on an empty stomach.

Salt is added during cooking and at the table, so DFS is by definition taken with food. Much of the iron fortificant remains unabsorbed and reaches the colon, where it can feed the wrong microbes. Efficacy trials with supervised delivery and validated specifications do not show what happens with household cooking losses, uneven dosing and variable diets. Absorption is also blunted in people with infection or inflammation, because the hormone hepcidin blocks iron uptake. Fortification therefore works least well where infection burdens are highest.

Iron deficiency only in half of anaemia cases

Anaemia is not the same thing as iron deficiency. Globally, roughly half of anaemia cases are attributed to iron deficiency. India's Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (2016-18) measured biomarkers and found that iron deficiency explained only part of the anaemia in children and adolescents.

The rest comes from many causes: folate and vitamin B12 deficiency, which are common in vegetarian populations; chronic inflammation and recurrent infections; hookworm; malaria; poor sanitation; haemoglobinopathies; and overall undernutrition, including low protein and vitamin A. Early marriage and pregnancy, adolescent undernutrition and menstrual losses add to the picture. Measurement matters too, since capillary haemoglobin readings and the cut-offs used affect the prevalence figures, and these are debated.

The Indian diet is certainly monotonous and low in haem iron, but diet is only one pathway. A single-nutrient fix applied to a multi-causal condition will under-deliver, and may distract from the diagnostics and sanitation investments that matter. While a single nutrient solution is unlikely to work, India's revised strategy for tackling anaemia – 7x7x7 approach – deserves credit for inclusion of additional measures, to the ongoing strategies.

But gaps remain. The programme still leans on iron-folic acid tablets, despite well-documented compliance challenges and gastrointestinal side effects. Haemoglobin testing alone cannot establish the cause of anaemia, while routine testing for ferritin, vitamin B12 and inflammation markers remains largely absent. "Eating Right" risks becoming an awareness slogan unless it addresses the affordability of foods for households such as eggs, dairy, greens and millets. Digital tracking tends to count tests and tablets rather than health outcomes. Deworming, malaria control, and water, sanitation and hygiene remain at the margins. Making DFS a flagship scheme would reintroduce the one-solution thinking that the 7x7x7 framework is meant to move beyond.

A better pathway

Peru reduced child anaemia by double digits in the early 2010s. It made anaemia a political priority, tracked children by name through health contacts, combined iron supplements and micronutrient powders with cash transfers, and held regions accountable. Progress reversed when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted service delivery, a reminder that outcomes depend on sustained service delivery rather than a product.

Vietnam is often cited for sharp declines in anaemia among women through weekly iron-folic acid supplementation, deworming and fish sauce fortified with sodium iron ethylenediaminetetraacetate (NaFeEDTA), a form of iron that is better absorbed in phytate-rich diets. These measures were accompanied by rising incomes and greater dietary diversity. Even Vietnam's fortification strategy was carefully matched to local diets and paired with other measures. Neither case shows that a one fortified food can tackle anaemia on its own.

India should not scale up DFS nationally without more groundwork. It should first conduct monitored district-level pilots that measure ferritin, haemoglobin and inflammation, assess cumulative iron exposure across programmes, and monitor potential harm in malaria-endemic and haemoglobinopathy-prone areas.

Fortification should be targeted rather than universal and use better-absorbed iron forms. Meanwhile, greater investment should go towards diagnostics to identify the causes of anaemia, deworming, sanitation and affordable access to diverse foods. Anaemia has multiple causes and cannot be solved by an additive in the salt bottle.

India must tackle its anaemia burden through targeted nutrition, better diagnostics and comprehensive public health measures, not salt fortification alone

4. ANAEMIA BURDEN IN INDIA: WHY IRON FORTIFICATION ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

GS Paper II – Health and Social Justice | GS Paper III – Nutrition and Public Health

Context: India's persistent anaemia burden requires a comprehensive strategy combining accurate diagnosis, dietary diversification, targeted supplementation and public-health interventions rather than excessive dependence on iron fortification.

1. Magnitude and Nature of Anaemia

1. **NFHS-5:** More than half of women and approximately two-thirds of children are anaemic.
2. **Multiple causes:** Anaemia may result from iron, folate and Vitamin B12 deficiencies, chronic inflammation, infections, worm infestation, malaria and haemoglobin disorders.
3. **Vulnerable groups:** Children, adolescent girls, women of reproductive age and pregnant women face a disproportionate burden.

2. Why Iron Fortification Alone Is Insufficient

1. **Double-Fortified Salt (DFS):** Combines iron and iodine, but its universal use must be considered alongside India's efforts to reduce sodium consumption and cardiovascular risks.
2. **Excess iron risks:** Unnecessary iron intake can cause accumulation and organ damage, particularly in individuals with certain haemoglobin disorders.
3. **Poor absorption:** Phytates in cereals and pulses, and polyphenols in tea and coffee, reduce non-haem iron absorption; Vitamin C improves absorption.
4. **Programme overlap:** Iron is supplied through the Public Distribution System (PDS), PM POSHAN, POSHAN Abhiyaan and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), requiring assessment of cumulative intake.
5. **Uniform approach:** Iron requirements differ according to age, sex and physiological conditions; uniform fortification may not address individual nutritional needs.

3. Major Gaps in India's Anaemia-Control Strategy

1. **Diagnostic limitations:** Haemoglobin testing alone cannot establish the underlying cause; ferritin, Vitamin B12 and inflammation markers may also be required.
2. **Poor dietary diversity:** Inadequate consumption of iron-rich foods, protein and micronutrients contributes to nutritional deficiencies.
3. **Infection burden:** Malaria, worm infestation, poor sanitation and recurrent infections aggravate anaemia.
4. **Haemoglobin disorders:** Thalassaemia and sickle-cell disease require appropriate screening and cause-specific management.
5. **Implementation challenges:** Gastrointestinal side effects, poor adherence and inadequate follow-up reduce the effectiveness of iron-folic acid supplementation.

4. Government Initiatives

1. **Anaemia Mukt Bharat (2018):** Uses the 6×6×6 strategy covering six beneficiary groups, six interventions and six institutional mechanisms.
2. **National Iron Plus Initiative:** Provides age-specific iron and folic acid supplementation.
3. **PM POSHAN:** Improves nutritional outcomes among schoolchildren through cooked meals.
4. **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** Promotes nutritional awareness, inter-sectoral convergence and monitoring.
5. **Double-Fortified Salt:** Combines iron and iodine to address micronutrient deficiencies.

5. International Best Practices

1. **Peru:** Integrated iron supplementation, micronutrient powders, healthcare follow-up and social protection.
2. **Vietnam:** Adapted iron fortification to local dietary practices, including fortified fish sauce, alongside dietary diversification.

6. Way Forward: Comprehensive Anaemia Management

1. **Cause-specific diagnosis:** Strengthen testing for haemoglobin, ferritin, Vitamin B12, inflammation and haemoglobin disorders.
2. **Targeted supplementation:** Provide iron and folic acid according to age, nutritional requirements and clinical assessment.
3. **Dietary diversification:** Improve access to affordable iron-rich foods, pulses, green leafy vegetables, protein and Vitamin C-rich foods.
4. **Integrated public health:** Combine nutrition interventions with deworming, malaria control, safe drinking water and sanitation.
5. **Evidence-based fortification:** Undertake district-level studies to assess cumulative iron exposure, safety and effectiveness before expanding universal fortification.

7. UPSC Prelims PYQ

UPSC Civil Services Prelims 2023 | GS Paper I

Consider the following statements in the context of interventions being undertaken under Anaemia Mukt Bharat Strategy:

1. It provides prophylactic calcium supplementation for pre-school children, adolescents and pregnant women.
2. It runs a campaign for delayed cord clamping at the time of childbirth.
3. It provides for periodic deworming to children and adolescents.
4. It addresses non-nutritional causes of anaemia in endemic pockets with special focus on malaria, haemoglobinopathies and fluorosis.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

Answer: (c) Only three

Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because the strategy provides prophylactic Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, not calcium. Statements 2, 3 and 4 are correct.

Indian universities slip in QS Asia rankings again: No IIT, IISc in top 50

Gayathri Mani
New Delhi, November 4

FOR THE second year in a row, Indian universities failed to secure a position in the top 50 of QS World University Rankings: Asia 2027.

The drop in the rankings of India's leading institutions stands in contrast to country's performance in research output and doctoral capacity, where several universities continue to feature among Asia's strongest. India leads the region in the number of universities featuring in the top 10 for research output per faculty member and doctoral-qualified staff.

The strong research output, however, has not translated into a comparable performance in terms of research impact. India has only three universities in Asia's top 50 for Citations per Paper, which measures the citation impact of published research, the report says.

IIT Delhi remains India's highest-ranked institution at 66th position, down from 59th last year. India's overall representation in this year's list has risen to 325 from 294 last year. According to the rankings released by international higher education experts QS Quacquarelli Symonds on Wednesday, India is Asia's second most represented higher education system, with 34 new entrants.

Since 2016, the number of ranked Indian institutions has risen over thirteenfold, from just 24 to 325. This represents an increase of over 1,250%, or an average of around 27% a year, outpacing Asia's other major higher education systems over the same period — mainland China grew by around 315%, Indonesia by 164%, Japan by 44% and South Korea by just 30%.

In the expanded edition featuring 195 new entrants across Asia, all six of India's highest-ranked universities have slipped. IISc Bengaluru has fallen from 64th to 79th, IIT Bombay is down from 71st to 83rd. IIT Madras has moved from 70th to 85th, IIT Kharagpur from 77th to 90th, and IIT Kanpur from 77th to 99th.

Delhi University's ranking has fallen out of the top 100, from 95th to 106th. Chandigarh University, Lovely Professional University and Jamia Millia Islamia are among the Indian institutions that have improved their positions, the report shows.

India leads Asia in research output relative to academic staff, as measured by QS' Papers per Faculty indicator. As many as 27 Indian universities feature in the regional top 50 on this measure, including five in the top 10 and two in the top five, more than any other higher education system. The country's strength in doctoral education is another notable finding. Fifteen Indian universities share first place in Asia for staff with PhD, which measures the proportion of academic staff holding doctoral qualifications.

QS Senior Vice-President Ben Sowter said India has built remarkable research capacity. "The challenge now is to translate this strength more consistently into research impact and international recognition. Although several leading institutions have fallen in this year's rankings as competition grows across Asia, India has a strong foundation on which to build," Sowter said.

QS RANKINGS: ASIA 2027

Top 10 Indian universities in regional top 200

Institution	2026 rank	2027 rank
IIT Delhi	59	66
IISc Bangalore	64	79
IIIT Bombay	71	83
IIT Madras	70	85
IIT Kharagpur	77	90
IIT Kanpur	77	97
Chandigarh University	109	104
Delhi University	95	106
IIT Guwahati	115	120
IIT Roorkee	114	124

325 universities ranked, including **34 new entrants;** second only to China **(448)**

71% of Indian universities slipped in rankings, while 18% improved

India leads Asia in research output per faculty, with 27 universities in the top 50 and five in the top 10 for Papers per Faculty


IIT Delhi

5. QS ASIA UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2027: INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGE

GS Paper II – Education

Context: India's expanding presence in Asian university rankings has not translated into global competitiveness, highlighting the gap between institutional growth and academic excellence.

1. India's Performance

1. India has **325 institutions** in the rankings, up from 294 in 2026, making it the second most represented country after China (448).
2. Despite this expansion, no Indian university features in the Asian top 50 for the second consecutive year; 71% of Indian institutions declined in ranking.
3. IIT Delhi leads India at 66th, followed by IISc Bengaluru (79th) and IIT Bombay (83rd).
4. India leads Asia in research papers per faculty, but only three Indian universities feature in the top 50 for citations per paper. This reflects the gap between research quantity and impact.
5. Fifteen Indian universities share the regional first position for the proportion of academic staff holding PhDs, indicating progress in academic capacity.

2. Core Challenges and Reforms

1. **Research quality:** Move beyond publication volume towards high-impact, interdisciplinary research through sustained funding and stronger research infrastructure.
2. **Faculty development:** Address faculty shortages through recruitment, doctoral education and international academic collaboration.
3. **Industry–academia linkages:** Strengthen technology transfer, patents, innovation and commercialisation of research.
4. **Global competitiveness:** Expand international partnerships, faculty and student mobility, and global research networks.
5. **Institutional autonomy:** Promote academic freedom, innovation and accountability in universities.

3. Mains PYQ Linkages

UPSC CSE Mains 2015 – GS II (12.5 marks)
"The quality of higher education in India requires major improvements to make it internationally competitive. Do you think that the entry of foreign educational institutions would help improve the quality of higher and technical education in the country? Discuss."

UPSC CSE Mains 2014 – GS II (12.5 marks)
"Should the premier institutes like IITs/IIMs be allowed to retain premier status, allowed more academic independence in designing courses and also decide mode/criteria of selection of students? Discuss in light of the growing challenges."

Critical mineral processing gets Rs 2,814 cr boost



• How the scheme will work

THE SCHEME will provide a 30% capital subsidy on eligible investment for setting up processing plants

IN ALL, four plants will be set up. Two plants will be for lithium processing with a minimum capacity of 30 kilotonnes each

THE OTHER two will be nickel processing plants with a minimum capacity of 50 kt each

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, November 4

TO DEVELOP domestic critical mineral processing capacity, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a new scheme to provide capital expenditure (capex) support for critical mineral processing. With an outlay of Rs 2,814 crore, the scheme will be focused on establishing an ecosystem for lithium and nickel processing.

The scheme aims to provide a 30% capital subsidy on eligible investment for setting up four processing plants — two lithium processing plants with a minimum capacity of 30 kilotonnes (kt) each and two nickel processing plants with a minimum capacity of 50 kt each.

Cabinet's scheduled meeting on Wednesday.

The government has already identified four states — Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat and Maharashtra — to promote setting up of critical mineral processing plants. It plans to develop every park as a complete ecosystem for a particular mineral. Accordingly, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh are looking at rare earth processing, while Odisha and Maharashtra are set to focus on nickel and lithium, respectively.

Gujarat has been identified for rare earth processing given the availability of heavy rare earth elements in the state and its existing beneficiation and processing capabilities. Andhra Pradesh, meanwhile, has also

At the same time, China controls 90% of global critical mineral processing and often uses it as leverage during times of trade tensions.

Given India's limited critical mineral processing capacity and China's dominance in the sector, the country remains vulnerable to supply disruptions.

The proposed scheme can be seen as a part of the government's broader efforts to address this strategic vulnerability, build domestic processing capabilities and reduce dependence on China.

Building buffer

As part of similar efforts, the government is also working on a new policy for stockpiling

6. CRITICAL MINERAL PROCESSING: ₹2,814 CRORE BOOST

GS Paper III – Economy, Energy Security and Technology

Context: The Union Cabinet approved a ₹2,814 crore scheme to develop domestic critical mineral processing capacity and reduce dependence on imports.

1. Key Features

1. **30% capital subsidy** on eligible investment for four processing plants.
2. Two lithium plants (30 kt each) and two nickel plants (50 kt each).
3. Maximum subsidy: ₹500 crore per lithium beneficiary and ₹900 crore per nickel beneficiary.
4. Processing opportunities identified in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Maharashtra.

2. Strategic Significance

1. **Supply-chain security:** China controls around 90% of global critical mineral processing, creating strategic vulnerabilities for India.
2. **Energy transition:** Lithium, nickel and cobalt are essential for electric vehicle batteries and energy storage.
3. **Industrial growth:** Supports electronics, semiconductors, defence and renewable energy.
4. **Domestic value addition:** Reduces import dependence and strengthens India's mineral processing ecosystem.

3. Government Initiatives

- **National Critical Mineral Mission (2025):** Promotes exploration, mining, processing, recycling and overseas acquisition.
- **Strategic stockpiling:** ₹500 crore allocation under NCMM for critical mineral reserves.
- **Recycling:** Recovery of minerals from batteries and electronic waste.

4. Way Forward

Indigenous processing technology, diversified imports, domestic exploration, mineral recycling and strategic reserves.

5. Prelims Pointers

- **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** 17 elements – 15 lanthanides, scandium and yttrium.

- **Lithium:** Batteries; **Nickel:** Stainless steel and batteries; **Cobalt:** Batteries and superalloys; **Graphite:** Battery anodes.
- **Beneficiation:** Improving ore quality by removing impurities.
- **Urban mining:** Recovering minerals from electronic waste.

6. UPSC Prelims PYQs

2026 – Rare Earth Elements and Critical Minerals

Statements included the applications of REEs, China's dominance, the National Critical Mineral Mission and the number of REEs.

Answer: 1 and 3 only.

2012 – Rare Earth Metals

Why was there concern over the short supply of rare earth metals?

1. China's export restrictions.
2. Their limited occurrence in only a few countries.
3. Growing demand for electronic applications.

Answer: 1 and 3 only.

Govt nod to Rs 17.5K cr scheme to promote energy storage systems

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, November 4

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday approved a new viability gap funding (VGF) scheme to promote grid-scale energy storage systems with a financial outlay of Rs 17,500 crore from 2026-27 to 2030-31.

Under the scheme, the government plans to promote energy storage capacity of 92 gigawatt-hour (GWh).

Out of this, 30 GWh will be Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), 60 GWh will be pumped hydro storage (PHP) and another 2 GWh will focus on emerging storage system technologies.

The government estimates that developing the 92 GWh of storage capacity will require a total investment of around Rs 97,600 crore, including VGF support of Rs 14,500 crore.

BESS is an energy storage technology which stores elec-

e EXPLAINED

What is an energy storage system?

An energy storage system converts electricity from renewable sources such as solar and wind, when it is available, into forms that can be stored. Later, it converts these back into electricity when need arises

capacity to meet its climate goals. However, a key challenge is emerging for its power system — electricity supply that is abundant in some hours but insufficient in others.

Energy storage systems can store excess renewable electricity during periods of high generation and discharge it when demand rises but power generation remains low.

7. ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS: ₹17,500 CRORE SCHEME TO BOOST GRID CAPACITY

GS Paper III – Infrastructure, Energy Security and Environment

Context: The Union Cabinet approved a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme to promote 92 GWh of grid-scale energy storage capacity during 2026–27 to 2030–31.

1. Key Features of the Scheme

1. **Target capacity: 92 GWh**
    - Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS): 30 GWh
    - Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS): 60 GWh
    - Emerging storage technologies: 2 GWh
2. **Financial support:** Scheme outlay of ₹17,500 crore; reported VGF support of ₹14,500 crore.
3. **Total investment:** Estimated ₹97,600 crore.
4. **Domestic manufacturing:** Minimum 40% Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) for BESS projects.
5. **Implementation:** Tariff-based competitive bidding, with public and private sector participation.

2. Energy Storage Technologies

A. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

- Store electricity chemically and release it when required.
- Lithium-ion batteries, particularly Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP), are important for grid-scale storage.

B. Pumped Hydro Storage (PHS)

- Surplus electricity pumps water from a lower reservoir to an upper reservoir.
- During peak demand, water is released through turbines to generate electricity.

3. Significance for India

1. **Renewable energy integration:** Stores surplus solar and wind electricity for use when generation declines.
2. **Grid stability:** Balances electricity demand and supply and manages peak loads.

3. **Energy security:** Improves reliability of electricity supply and reduces dependence on conventional generation.
4. **Domestic manufacturing:** Encourages battery manufacturing, technological innovation and domestic value addition.
5. **Climate commitments:** Facilitates large-scale renewable energy adoption and decarbonisation.

4. India's Energy Storage Gap

- Existing grid-scale storage capacity: approximately **54 GWh**.
- Target requirement: **411 GWh by 2031–32**.
- Proposed 92 GWh addition is equivalent to around 170% of existing capacity.

5. Challenges and Way Forward

1. **High capital costs:** Improve project viability through VGF and innovative financing.
2. **Technology dependence:** Promote indigenous battery research and manufacturing.
3. **Environmental concerns:** Ensure sustainable mineral sourcing, battery recycling and responsible water use.
4. **Infrastructure gaps:** Strengthen transmission networks and grid management systems.

6. Mains Relevance – GS III

Energy storage is a critical link between renewable energy generation and reliable electricity supply.

- **Energy security:** Ensuring reliable and affordable electricity.
- **Renewable transition:** Addressing the intermittency of solar and wind power.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Strengthening domestic battery manufacturing and reducing import dependence.
- **Infrastructure resilience:** Improving grid flexibility and peak-load management.
- **Green growth:** Promoting clean-energy investment, innovation and employment.

7. UPSC Prelims Previous Year Questions

UPSC Prelims 2024 – Pumped-Storage Hydropower

Recently, the term "pumped-storage hydropower" is actually and appropriately discussed in the context of which one of the following?

(a) Irrigation of terraced crop fields
(b) Lift irrigation of cereal crops
(c) Long duration energy storage
(d) Rainwater harvesting system

Answer: (c) Long duration energy storage.

UPSC Prelims 2024 – Distributed Energy Resources

Consider the following:

1. Battery storage
2. Biomass generators
3. Fuel cells
4. Rooftop solar photovoltaic units

How many of the above are considered “Distributed Energy Resources”?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

Answer: (d) All four.