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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

THE HINDU ANALYSIS

Current Affairs & Editorial

10 JULY 2026

Prelims · Mains · Editorials · Practice MCQs

COMPILED BY

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UPSC / State PCS | The Hindu Analysis

TODAY'S BRIEF

Snapshot of Coverage

Five stories, one thread. Two of them — the Performance Grading Index and the Special Intensive Revision in Manipur — are both exercises in counting people and institutions. One is designed so that its numbers improve governance; the other is designed in a way that may cost people their place in the polity. Read them together, and the essay at the end of this booklet writes itself.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 01 Performance Grading Index 2.0
GS-2 · Governance | No State or UT reaches the top four grades; Punjab & Chandigarh lead at Prachesta-1. |
| 02 ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement
GS-2 · IR | 13th Joint Committee meets in New Delhi to rewrite an asymmetric tariff framework. |
| 03 PIL Against the Wildlife Board
Prelims · Environment | 97% clearance rate alleged; the full NBWL met in 2025 after a 13-year gap. |
| 04 India–Australia Indo-Pacific Cooperation
GS-2 · IR | Defence declaration, uranium supply, critical minerals and the launch of PACTS. |
| 05 SIR in Manipur
GS-2 · Editorial | An enumeration exercise meeting a displaced population without documents. |

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Prelims: 10 statement-based MCQs with a reasoned answer key immediately after the analysis.

Mains: One 8-mark and one 12-mark descriptive question with structured pointers with structured pointers.

Essay: A full five-part outline linking today's stories to a single argument to close the booklet.

01 Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0

GS-2 · GOVERNANCE & EDUCATION

Ministry of Education / PIB



Union Education Minister releasing the PGI 2.0 reports for States/UTs and Districts, 2025-26.

The Department of School Education & Literacy has officially released the detailed performance reports for the Performance Grading Index 2.0 for States/UTs (PGI-S) and the Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) for the 2025-26 academic year.

What It Is

The PGI 2.0 is an advanced, data-driven analytical model designed to evaluate and score the performance of school education across sub-national administrative units in India.

Moving away from standard, competitive league-table numerical rankings, the system groups states, UTs and districts into specific performance **bands (grades)** to encourage collaborative and targeted systemic upgrades.

Established in: The index framework was originally introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2018 (covering data from 2017-18).

Aim: To provide a comprehensive, multidimensional picture of school education performance.

The Two Instruments

PGI-S (States and Union Territories): Evaluates the high-level macro education environment and policy frameworks across all **36 States and UTs** on a **1,000-point matrix**, tracking 70 indicators divided into two major categories — Outcomes, and Governance & Management.

PGI-D (Districts): Pinpoints the implementation efficiency of localized district administrations across **784 districts** on a tailored **600-point matrix**, using 70 localized indicators.

The Six Domains — Compared

PGI-S (States/UTs) — 1,000 points	PGI-D (Districts) — 600 points
Learning Outcomes and Quality	Outcomes
Access Outcomes	Effective Classroom Transaction
Infrastructure & Facilities	Infrastructure Facilities & Student Entitlements
Educational Equity	School Safety & Child Protection
Governance Processes	Digital Learning
Teacher Education & Training	Governance Process

Absolute Grading Band Hierarchy

Instead of assigning individual ranks, PGI 2.0 uses a strict multi-tier grading matrix based on percentage scores:

Utkarsh — the highest achievable grade (scores exceeding 90%).

Uttam (Tiers 1-3) — for scores ranging from 61% to 90%.

Prachesta (Tiers 1-3) — for scores ranging from 31% to 60%.

Akanshi (Tiers 1-3) — the base tier, for the lowest scores.

The 2025-26 Verdict

Punjab and Chandigarh have once again emerged as the top performers among PGI 2.0 report released by the Union Ministry of Education.

However, both have achieved only the **fifth-highest grade, “Prachesta-1”**. No State or UT has achieved the top four grades — Utkarsh, Uttam-1, Uttam-2 and Uttam-3.

Punjab has been placed above Delhi, Kerala and neighbouring states Haryana and

Punjab has remained a top performer in the PGI since 2019-20.

Table 4.1- Grades attained by States/UTs – 2024-25

Grade	Names of States/ UTs attaining the respective Grades
Utkarsh	None
Uttam-1	None
Uttam-2	None
Uttam-3	None
Prachesta -1	Chandigarh, Punjab
Prachesta -2	DNH&DD, Kerala, Delhi, Odisha, Maharashtra & Himachal Pradesh
Prachesta -3	Goa, A&N Islands, Sikkim, Assam, Lakshadweep, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu & Gujarat
Akanshi-1	Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tripura, Manipur, Telangana, Ladakh, Nagaland, Jharkhand & Arunachal Pradesh
Akanshi-2	Mizoram, Bihar & Jammu & Kashmir
Akanshi-3	Meghalaya

Table 4.1 — Grades attained by States/UTs. The top four bands are unfilled.

ANALYTICAL NOTE

An index that produces no winners is doing something unusual. By retiring the league table, PGI 2.0 gives up the one thing that generated headlines — a rank — in exchange for something more useful: a threshold that a State either crosses or does not. The result this cycle is uncomfortable and therefore credible. Punjab and Chandigarh lead, but they lead from the fifth band, which means the best-administered school systems in the country are still scoring somewhere between 51 and 60 per cent against the framework's own benchmark. The district-level instrument matters even more. A State average can hide a collapsing district; a 784-district matrix cannot. The policy question the report quietly poses is whether the Centre is willing to fund remediation where PGI-D locates failure, or whether the grades will remain a diagnostic without a prescription.

EXAM POINTERS

The headline is not who topped the list — it is that **nobody cleared 61%**. An index that refuses to flatter its subjects is doing its job.

Distinguish carefully: **Teacher Education & Training** is a PGI-S domain; **Digital Learning** and **School Safety & Child Protection** are PGI-D domains.

Prelims trap: Punjab & Chandigarh = **Prachesta-1**, not Utkarsh or Uttam-1.

HP angle: Himachal Pradesh sits in **Prachesta-2**, alongside Kerala, Delhi, Odisha, Maharashtra and DNH&DD.

A note on the source deck. The source deck describes Akanshi as covering "scores under 40%" while placing Prachesta at 31–60%. These two ranges overlap. The internally consistent reading is **Akanshi = below 31%**.

02 ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)

GS-2 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Ministry of Commerce & Industry

India hosted the 13th ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Joint Committee and related sub-committee meetings at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi.



Delegates at the 13th Meeting of the Joint Committee of AITIGA, Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi (9–10 July 2026).

The Agreement

AITIGA is a comprehensive, multilateral **free trade agreement (FTA)** signed between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It establishes a legal and tariff framework governing merchandise trade, cutting import duties on thousands of products to deepen regional supply chains and economic integration.

Signing and Enforcement: The initial agreement was signed on **13 August 2009**, and officially came into force on **1 January 2010**.

Objectives of the Ongoing Review

To rewrite trade codes to create a more balanced and sustainable trade ecosystem, directly addressing the concerns of domestic Indian manufacturers who face **asymmetric tariff structures**.

To lower cross-border transaction costs for businesses by making the rules of trade simpler, more user-friendly, and highly trade-facilitative.

ASEAN — The Static Facts

A regional group that promotes economic, political and security cooperation.

Established in **1967 in Bangkok** with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration). Its secretariat is in **Jakarta, Indonesia**.

11 member countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and **Timor-Leste** (a newly joined member).

India is not a member of ASEAN.

ASEAN led the creation of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**, now the world's largest free trade agreement.

ANALYTICAL NOTE

The review, not the agreement, is the story. AITIGA was negotiated when India was courting ASEAN and was content to trade tariff concessions for strategic goodwill. Sixteen years on, the trade balance has moved decisively against India, and a substantial volume of goods enters under ASEAN preference that did not originate in ASEAN. Hence the twin demands now on the table: symmetry in tariff schedules, and tighter rules of origin. The negotiating difficulty is that ASEAN bargains as a bloc while its members have divergent stakes — Vietnam and Thailand gain from the status quo, Singapore is indifferent, and the newer members have little to concede. India's leverage lies less in tariffs than in market access and its refusal, since 2019, to join RCEP.

EXAM POINTERS

The single most examinable fact: **India is not an ASEAN member** — it is a dialogue partner. Every year a statement tries to sneak India in as an “observer” or “associate” member.

Timor-Leste taking membership from 10 to **11** is a recent change that older textbooks will get wrong.

Signed **2009**, in force **2010**. Do not conflate the two dates.

India walked out of RCEP negotiations (2019). ASEAN led RCEP; India is not a party to it.

03

PIL Against the Functioning of the Wildlife Board

PRELIMS · PAGE 14 · ENVIRONMENT

The Hindu, Page 14

A group of retired forest and wildlife officials and conservationists on Wednesday moved the Delhi High Court with a public interest litigation (PIL) petition challenging the functioning of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and its Standing Committee, alleging that the two bodies have become a “clearing house” that routinely diverts protected areas to roads, mining, industry and other non-conservation projects.

PIL plea in Delhi HC against functioning of Wildlife Board

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A group of retired forest and wildlife officials and conservationists on Wednesday moved the Delhi High Court with a public interest litigation (PIL) petition challenging the functioning of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and its Standing Committee, alleging that the two bodies have become a “clearing house” that routinely diverts protected areas to roads, mining, industry and other non-conservation projects.

The 10 petitioners – led by retired Indian Forest Service officer Prakriti Srivastava, and including M.K. Ranjitsinh, the 88-year-old former civil servant widely regarded as the principal drafter of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, are seeking binding guidelines on how the two bodies take decisions.

They claim that the

The petitioners claim it approved over 97% of proposals between 2014 and 2026

Standing Committee approved more than 97% of proposals for diverting, reducing or de-notifying protected land between 2014 and 2026, often considering over 100 proposals in a single day. The petition says the full NBWL, meant to meet annually, convened in 2025 after a 13-year gap, leaving the Standing Committee as its de facto operational arm.

The NBWL is the apex statutory authority on wildlife under the 1972 Act, chaired by the Prime Minister with the Environment Minister as vice-chairperson.

The government is expected to file its reply in court by August 18, with the next hearing scheduled on September 18.

“PIL plea in Delhi HC against functioning of Wildlife Board” — The Hindu, 10 July 2026, Page 14.

The Allegations

The petitioners claim the Standing Committee approved **more than 97% of proposals** for de-notifying protected land between **2014 and 2026**, often considering over 100 proposals in a single day.

The petition says the full NBWL, meant to meet **annually**, convened in 2025 after a 13-year gap, leaving the Standing Committee as its *de facto* operational arm.

The 10 petitioners — led by retired IFS officer **Prakriti Srivastava**, and including M.K. Ranjitsinh, the principal drafter of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 — seek binding guidelines on how the two bodies take decisions.

The government is expected to file its reply by 18 August, with the next hearing scheduled on September 18.

The National Board for Wildlife — Structure

The NBWL is the **apex statutory authority** on wildlife under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.

Composition: A **47-member** committee headed by the **Prime Minister**, who serves as *ex-officio* Chairperson, while the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change serves as **Vice-Chairperson**.

Members include officials involved in wildlife conservation; the **Chief of Army Staff**, Defence Secretary and Expenditure Secretary; and **ten eminent conservationists**, ecologists and environmentalists nominated by the Central Government.

Functions: It is mandated to promote conservation and development of wildlife and forest.

Role in Tiger Reserves: It ensures that no tiger reserve is diverted to unsustainable use without its approval, with advice from the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.

ANALYTICAL NOTE

The petition is not really about any single road or mine. It is about what happens to a delegated committee when its parent body stops meeting. The NBWL was designed with the Prime Minister at its head precisely so that decisions to shrink a protected area would carry political cost. When the full board lapses for thirteen years, that cost disappears, and a Standing Committee designed for routine business inherits questions it was never meant to answer alone. A 97% approval rate is not proof of wrongdoing — proposals may be filtered before they arrive — but a body clearing a hundred files in a sitting is not deliberating, it is processing. The remedy the petitioners seek is procedural, and that is the right instinct: courts cannot decide which forest to save, but they can decide how the decision must be made.

EXAM POINTERS

The institutional lesson: when a **parent body goes dormant**, its delegated Standing Committee stops being supervised and becomes an unsupervised one. Volume displaces deliberation.

Memorise the chain: **PM (Chair) – MoEFCC Minister (Vice-Chair) – 47 members – 10 nominated conservationists.**

Tiger reserve diversion requires NBWL approval **on the advice of the NTCA** — not the Central Zoo Authority, not the Forest Advisory Committee.

NBWL is **statutory** (WLPA 1972), not constitutional and not merely advisory-executive.

04

India–Australia: Deepening Indo-Pacific Cooperation

GS-2 · PAGE 1 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Hindu, Page 1

India and Australia on Thursday adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, committing to significantly deepen military engagement, strengthen defence industrial collaboration, and expand maritime security cooperation amid growing geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries also sealed pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals sectors.

India, Australia move to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Amid geostrategic uncertainties, Prime Minister Modi, his Australian counterpart, Albanese, adopt declaration to expand maritime security ties and defence collaboration; the countries also seal pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Thursday adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, committing to significantly deepen military engagement, strengthen defence industrial collaboration, and expand maritime security cooperation amid growing geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries also sealed pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals sectors.

The declaration, adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, outlines an ambitious road map to elevate defence ties through closer strategic consultations, enhanced

interoperability between the armed forces, expanded military exercises, and greater collaboration in defence science, technology, and industrial supply chains.

A statement released by the office of the Australian Prime Minister mentioned that, under the declaration, the two sides agreed to hold regular consultations on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific affecting their shared interests, increase the complexity of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, accelerate efforts to improve interoperability and information sharing between their armed forces, and expand aircraft deployments from each other's territories.

The agreement also envisages deeper personnel



Tactical ties: PM Narendra Modi being greeted by his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, in Melbourne on Thursday. AP

exchanges through education, training, and liaison appointments, while exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting skilled personnel for their respective defence workforces.

Mr. Modi emphasised the importance of a free and stable Indo-Pacific and highlighted the growing

engagement between the two countries in the defence domain. "The Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two oceans. It also symbolises the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia," he said.

The agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of

uranium from Australia to India to fuel nuclear power projects came nearly 12 years after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

"Today, we have signed an important agreement in the field of nuclear energy. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give new impetus to our clean energy objectives," Mr. Modi said.

He also announced the launch of the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains and said both sides will also work together on a critical minerals corridor.

CONTINUED ON

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CALL FOR DIALOGUE

» PAGE 12

"India, Australia move to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" — The Hindu, 10 July 2026, Page 1.

What Was Signed

The agreement envisages deeper personnel exchanges through education, training and liaison appointments, while exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting skilled personnel for their respective defence workforces.

The agreement on **civil nuclear energy**, to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel nuclear power projects, came nearly **12 years** after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

The summit launched the **Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS)**, while reaffirming the complementarity to the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership, focused on building resilient technology partnerships through flexible **minilateral** arrangements.

Both sides agreed to work together on a **critical minerals corridor**.

The Social Media Regulation Signal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Australia's ban on social media access for teenagers — the clearest indication so far that the Union government is mulling similar curbs.

Australia's **Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024**, requires social media platforms to detect and block access to children **below the age of 16**.

Union Minister of Electronics and IT, Ashwini Vaishnaw, had confirmed discussions for similar curbs in India during the AI Impact Summit earlier in February.

Why the Convergence Is Real

Australia's dependence on China, and its alliance dependence on an unpredictable Washington, have come under visible strain.

India is running its parallel diversification across energy suppliers, defence platforms and critical minerals processing, driven by a similar instinct.

New Delhi wants to limit its exposure; the Iran and Ukraine conflicts have driven home that any **single-point dependency**, however longstanding, is now a liability.

No country can single-handedly balance China or hedge against American unpredictability. Together, and alongside partners such as Japan, they improve their odds. *That is genuine convergence.*

AUKUS is the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S. — India is not a member.

Indian-origin Australians are now the country's largest immigrant-born community, ahead of the U.K.-born population for the first time.

ANALYTICAL NOTE

Read this as two states hedging against the same two uncertainties from opposite directions. Canberra is over-exposed to Chinese demand and to American consistency; New Delhi is over-exposed to Russian platforms and West Asian energy. Neither can fix its problem alone, and neither is asking the other for a security guarantee. What they are building instead is optionality — uranium that does not come through a chokepoint, minerals that do not need Chinese processing, and technology arrangements flexible enough to survive a change of government in either capital. The limitation is embedded in that same flexibility: minilateralism asks for nothing and therefore promises nothing. India remains outside AUKUS, and the diaspora, however large, is not a foreign policy.

EXAM POINTERS

Frame the relationship as **mutual de-risking**, not alignment. Both states are hedging against the same two uncertainties from opposite directions.

Uranium: the 2014-era civil nuclear *cooperation pact* is distinct from this *commercial supply* agreement roughly 12 years later.

New acronym to file away: **PACTS** (Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains).

Age threshold in the Australian law: **16**, not 13 or 18.

05 SIR in Manipur: A Pathway to Exclusion

GS-2 · PAGE 8 · EDITORIAL

The Hindu, Page 8 — Gautam Mukhopadhyay

Manipur is one of the States covered under Phase III of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls being implemented by the Election Commission of India. The author argues that the SIR's design, applied to a State in the middle of ethnic conflict and mass displacement, risks producing not a cleaner roll but a statelessness pipeline.

SIR in Manipur is a pathway to exclusion

Manipur is one of the States covered under Phase III of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls being implemented by the Election Commission of India (ECI) currently. The SIR has already drawn adverse criticism from civil society organisations and the Opposition, particularly after the recent Bihar and West Bengal elections, due to its **hasty, disproportionate and summary deletion** of voters from voters' lists, resulting in the disenfranchisement of large sections of politically "undesirable" communities and voters. Concerns have been expressed by informed citizens about the lack of transparency and often blatant bias of the State and the ruling party in relation to the SIR, and its relationship with the planned delimitation, the 2029 elections and perhaps even an oddly timed Census. These concerns apply to Manipur as well. In addition, there are features of the situation in Manipur that are little known outside – and even within – the State, making the implementation of the SIR in Manipur even more egregious.

Fractured social fabric

First, Manipur has been in the throes of an intense ethnic conflict involving the majority Meiteis (54% of the population, inhabiting the dense Imphal Valley), the Kuki-Zo peoples (15%, inhabiting the surrounding hills) and, more recently, the Manipuri Nagas (26%, mainly in the northern part of Manipur). It has resulted in over 260 deaths in pogroms, attacks, and retaliatory violence; displaced some 60,000 people within and outside Manipur; led to the burning of hundreds of villages and places of worship; and witnessed unimaginable atrocities, including beheadings, dismemberment, and rapes as forms of collective punishment, disproportionately inflicted on the Kuki-Zo.

It has led to a demand by the Kuki-Zo for a "Separate Administration" for themselves – and an equally stout opposition by the Meiteis to it – while many Manipuri Nagas led by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), or NSCN-IM, remain committed to their decades old demand for integration of Naga-inhabited areas in a sovereign "Nagaland". Many are locked by political, militant and proscribed insurgent groups of these persuasions.

Three years after the start of the conflict, not a single case of violence has been brought to book through the courts. An Inquiry Commission



Gautam Mukhopadhyaya

Former Ambassador of India to Myanmar, Afghanistan and Syria, and engaged in issues facing the northeast of India

formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has yet to present its report. Thousands of internally displaced persons languish in camps with little relief.

Ethnic divisions have worsened and spread. Long-standing Naga-Kuki hostilities have been added to the three-year-old Meitei-Kuki conflict marked by the burning of villages (mostly Kuki), ambushes, and recently in May, the killing of three Thado-Kuki pastors, and, in retaliation, tit-for-tat hostage-taking and the horrific killing of six Nagas in Kuki custody that has in turn set off a full economic blockade of Kangpokpi district. In response, State and central security forces have appeared passive, paralysed and at times, biased.

The conduct of the State government has been widely viewed as partisan, but the role of the Centre and even courts cannot be said to be above board. Conducting the SIR under these conditions, under a pretence of normalcy, is irreparable.

Narratives driving electoral exclusion

Second, unlike the rest of the country, where the SIR is being driven by the central government through the ECI with the partisan support of the ruling party, in Manipur the demand to "cleanse" the State of alleged "illegal migrants" – a code word for Kuki-Zo – is in line with perceptions of politically radicalised Meiteis and Manipuri Nagas, who together constitute about 80% of the population. These allegations have no basis in Census figures for over a century, and are based on recent distortions of history, fake narratives and loud propaganda that feed directly into the SIR exercise. They create a very negative environment for a fair SIR, particularly in mixed areas, that is itself, *ipso facto*, biased against certain communities.

Third, there are several features peculiar to the Kuki-Zo themselves that lend themselves to their victimisation by the SIR. The first reason is that close to 50,000 Kuki-Zo remain displaced and scattered in Manipur and outside. There does not seem to be any provision in place for their fair enumeration.

The second reason is that together with their displacement, many are known to have lost many of their identity, residence, election, education and other documents that could have helped establish their voter credentials. There are visual records of Kuki-Zo educational certificates, Aadhaar cards, and driving licences in Imphal being destroyed after the violence of May 2023.

The third reason is that customary naming systems – where names are derived from the last syllable of complex parental names, nicknames often substitute formal names, and names are converted from tribal names to English orthography – create vast scope for "logical discrepancies", making people far more vulnerable to exclusion than in States such as West Bengal. Possibly, more than 90% of Kuki-Zo people are unlikely to be able to produce a single, consistent spelling of their own names, let alone maintain consistency across generations.

The fourth reason is that by some historical anomaly, Manipuri tribals, both Kuki-Zo and Naga, do not enjoy Sixth Schedule status, although they enjoy some measure of autonomy under Article 371C and very weak Autonomous Councils.

This served them well during periodic bouts of violence and displacement, most recently during the Naga-Kuki violence of the 1990s, which again disproportionately affected the Kukis. Village chiefs and local authorities were then able to certify the identities of villagers under their jurisdiction. Such arrangements are unlikely to be recognised in the present exercise and prevailing atmosphere.

Finally, the Kuki-Zo leadership appears, for some reason, unaware of the nature, motivations, and implications of the SIR exercise. They seem to believe, perhaps naively, that as Indian citizens who have lived here all their lives and in possession of necessary documents, including voter ID cards, they have nothing to fear, and that opposing the exercise would amount to an admission of guilt. The dangers of the SIR now appear to be dawning on them, with some Kuki-Zo civil society organisations issuing statements highlighting its shortcomings, although opposition has yet to take a political form.

Safeguarding belonging

A nationwide SIR is now a *fait accompli* following the ruling by the Supreme Court of India in its favour. However, the process can still be made fairer and more sensitive to the risks of exclusion. Unless measures are adopted to limit its potential harm, by 2029 we may see a pathway to statelessness not only for the Kuki-Zo but also for other tribal communities in the Northeast, with their plight obscured amid the broader exclusion and disenfranchisement of Muslims labelled as "illegal migrants".

"SIR in Manipur is a pathway to exclusion" – Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, The Hindu, 10 July 2026, Page 8.

The General Critique

The SIR has already drawn adverse criticism from civil society organisations and the Opposition, particularly after the recent Bihar and West Bengal elections, due to its **hasty, disproportionate and summary deletion** of voters from voters' lists, resulting in the disenfranchisement of large sections of politically "undesirable" communities and voters.

A Fractured Social Fabric

Manipur has been in the throes of an intense ethnic conflict involving the majority **Meiteis (54% of the population, inhabiting the dense Imphal Valley)**, the **Kuki-Zo peoples (15%, inhabiting the surrounding hills)** and, more recently, the **Manipuri Nagas (26%, mainly in the north)**.

The conflict has resulted in over **260 deaths**, displaced some **60,000 people**, led to the burning of hundreds of villages and places of worship, and witnessed atrocities disproportionately inflicted on the Kuki-Zo.

Ethnic divisions have worsened and spread. Long-standing Naga-Kuki hostilities have been added to the three-year-old Meitei-Kuki conflict.

Three years after the start of the conflict, **not a single case of violence** has been brought to book through the courts.

Four Reasons the SIR Falls Hardest on the Kuki-Zo

Displacement: Close to **50,000 Kuki-Zo** remain displaced and scattered within Manipur and outside. There does not seem to be any provision in place for their fair enumeration.

Lost documents: Many are known to have lost documents of identity, residence, election and education that could have established their voter credentials. There are visual records of Kuki-Zo educational certificates, Aadhaar cards, and driving licences in Imphal being destroyed after the violence of May 2023.

Customary naming systems: Names derived from the last syllable of complex parental names, nicknames substituting formal names, and tribal names converted into English orthography create vast scope for **"logical discrepancies"**. Possibly more than **90%** of Kuki-Zo people are unlikely to produce a single, consistent spelling of their own names across generations.

No Sixth Schedule status: Manipuri tribals, both Kuki-Zo and Naga, do **not** enjoy Sixth Schedule status, although they enjoy some measure of autonomy under **Article 371C** and very weak Autonomous Councils. During the Naga-Kuki violence of the 1990s, village chiefs and local authorities were able to certify the identities of villagers under their jurisdiction — an arrangement unlikely to be recognised in the present prevailing atmosphere.

Safeguarding Belonging

A nationwide SIR is now a *fait accompli* following the ruling by the Supreme Court of India in its favour.

However, the process can still be made fairer and more sensitive to the risks of exclusion.

Unless measures are adopted to limit its potential harm, **by 2029 we may see a pathway to statelessness** not only for the Kuki-Zo but also for other tribal communities in the Northeast, with their plight obscured amid the broader exclusion and disenfranchisement of Muslims labelled as “illegal migrants”.

ANALYTICAL NOTE

Every electoral roll revision assumes a citizen who can prove continuity — same name, same spelling, same address, same papers. Manipur’s hills contain a population for whom none of those assumptions currently hold, and not through any fault of its own. When a form treats a variant transliteration as a discrepancy, and a burnt Aadhaar card as an absence, the instrument has stopped measuring belonging and started manufacturing its opposite. The Supreme Court has settled the question of whether the SIR may proceed. It has not settled the question of what a fair SIR looks like in a State where 50,000 people cannot go home. Between those two questions lies the entire administrative burden, and it falls on the Election Commission.

EXAM POINTERS

The sharpest analytical point in the editorial: an enumeration instrument **presumes a documentary stability** that a displaced population no longer possesses. Technique meets identity, and identity loses.

Constitutional hook: Manipur’s hill areas fall under **Article 371C**, not the Sixth Schedule. This is a very high-probability prelims statement.

Population shares to retain: Meitei **54%** · Naga **26%** · Kuki-Zo **15%**.

The SIR itself is judicially settled; the live question is **procedural safeguard design**, not legality.

PRACTICE — OBJECTIVE

HPAS-Style Multiple Choice Questions

Prelims · 10 Questions · Statement-based pattern

1. Consider the following statements regarding the Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0:

1. The index framework was originally introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2018, covering data from 2017-18.
2. PGI-S evaluates 36 States and UTs on a 1,000-point matrix, while PGI-D evaluates 784 districts on a 600-point matrix.
3. Both PGI-S and PGI-D track 70 indicators each.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| A) 1 and 2 only | B) 2 and 3 only |
| C) 1 and 3 only | D) 1, 2, and 3 |

2. With reference to the grading structure of PGI 2.0, consider the following:

1. It replaces competitive numerical league-table rankings with absolute performance bands.
2. “Utkarsh” is awarded for scores exceeding 90%, and “Uttam” tiers cover scores from 61% to 90%.
3. In the 2025-26 report, Punjab and Chandigarh secured the “Uttam-1” grade.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| A) 1 and 2 only | B) 2 only |
| C) 1 and 3 only | D) 1, 2, and 3 |

3. Which of the following are domains of the district-level index (PGI-D), and *not* of PGI-S?

1. School Safety & Child Protection
2. Effective Classroom Transaction
3. Teacher Education & Training
4. Digital Learning

Select the correct answer:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| A) 1, 2 and 4 only | B) 1 and 3 only |
| C) 2, 3 and 4 only | D) 1, 2, 3 and 4 |

4. Consider the following statements about the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA):

1. It was signed in August 2009 and came into force on 1 January 2010.
2. India is an observer member of ASEAN under the AITIGA framework.
3. The 13th AITIGA Joint Committee meeting was hosted at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| A) 1 and 2 only | B) 1 and 3 only |
| C) 2 and 3 only | D) 1, 2, and 3 |

5. With reference to ASEAN, consider the following statements:

1. It was established in 1967 through the Bangkok Declaration, with its secretariat at Jakarta.
2. Timor-Leste is its most recent member, taking the total membership to eleven.
3. ASEAN led the creation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| A) 1 and 2 only | B) 2 and 3 only |
| C) 1 and 3 only | D) 1, 2, and 3 |

6. Consider the following statements regarding the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):

1. It is a statutory body constituted under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. It is a 47-member body chaired ex-officio by the Prime Minister, with the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as Vice-Chairperson.
3. Its composition includes the Chief of Army Staff and ten eminent conservationists nominated by the Central Government.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| A) 1 and 2 only | B) 2 and 3 only |
| C) 1 and 3 only | D) 1, 2, and 3 |

7. With reference to the diversion of land in tiger reserves, the NBWL exercises its approval function with the advice of:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| A) The Central Zoo Authority | B) The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) |
| C) The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau | D) The Forest Advisory Committee |

8. Consider the following statements regarding recent India-Australia engagements:

1. The two countries adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, alongside pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals.
2. The civil nuclear agreement facilitating commercial uranium supply came nearly 12 years after the two nations signed their civil nuclear cooperation pact.
3. The summit launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

9. Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024, recently praised by the Indian Prime Minister, requires social media platforms to detect and block access to children below the age of:

- A) 13 years B) 14 years
C) 16 years D) 18 years

10. With reference to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Manipur, consider the following statements:

1. Manipur is covered under Phase III of the SIR being implemented by the Election Commission of India.
2. The Meiteis constitute roughly 54% of the population, the Manipuri Nagas about 26%, and the Kuki-Zo peoples about 15%.
3. Both the Kuki-Zo and Naga tribes of Manipur enjoy Sixth Schedule status, though with limited autonomy.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

PRACTICE — OBJECTIVE

Answer Key with Reasoning

Q	Ans	Explanation
1	D	All three are stated in the report. Both indices track 70 indicators; only the point matrices and units differ.
2	A	Statement 3 is wrong. Punjab and Chandigarh were placed in Prachesta-1 , the fifth-highest grade; no State/UT reached the top four grades.
3	A	Teacher Education & Training is a PGI-S domain. School Safety & Child Protection, Effective Classroom Transaction and Digital Learning are PGI-D categories.
4	B	Statement 2 is wrong. India is not a member of ASEAN in any capacity — observer, associate or otherwise.
5	D	All correct. 1967 Bangkok Declaration, Jakarta secretariat, 11 members with Timor-Leste, and ASEAN led RCEP.
6	D	All correct as per the composition and mandate of the NBWL under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
7	B	The NBWL ensures no tiger reserve is diverted to unsustainable use without its approval, acting on the advice of the NTCA.

Q	Ans	Explanation
8	D	All correct. The Joint Declaration, the uranium supply agreement (~12 years after the cooperation pact), and PACTS were all part of the summit outcomes.
9	C	The Act requires platforms to detect and block access to children below the age of 16 .
10	A	Statement 3 is wrong. Manipur tribals, both Kuki-Zo and Naga, do not enjoy Sixth Schedule status; they have limited autonomy under Article 371C and weak Autonomous Councils.

A note on the source deck. Question 2 depends on a fact the deck itself states plainly and which students routinely misread: no State or UT reached Utkarsh or any Uttam tier this cycle. If a statement offers you Punjab at Uttam-1, it is wrong on its face.

PRACTICE — DESCRIPTIVE

HPAS Mains Questions

Pointer-based model answers

8 Marks

GS-3: ENVIRONMENT / GS-2: STATUTORY BODIES

Question. “Statutory bodies mandated to conserve wildlife risk becoming clearance mechanisms when procedural safeguards weaken.” Critically examine this in the context of recent litigation concerning the National Board for Wildlife.

Key Pointers for the Answer

The Institutional Design. NBWL as apex statutory authority under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; PM as ex-officio Chair, MoEFCC Minister as Vice-Chair; 47 members including independent conservationists — a design premised on high-level political accountability.

The Clearing-House Critique. PIL allegation that the Standing Committee cleared over 97% of proposals for diverting, reducing or de-notifying protected land (2014–2026), sometimes taking over 100 proposals in a single sitting — volume displacing deliberation.

Delegation Without Oversight. The full NBWL, meant to convene annually, met in 2025 after a 13-year gap, leaving the Standing Committee as the *de facto* operational arm. Parent-body dormancy converts a delegated committee into an unsupervised one.

The Development–Conservation Tension. Roads, mining and industry in protected areas serve legitimate public purpose; the question is whether ecological cost is *assessed* or merely *processed*.

Way Forward. Binding decision-making guidelines; mandatory annual full-board sittings; published reasoned orders; site-inspection requirements; and a strengthened NTCA advisory role for tiger reserves.

12 Marks

GS-2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Question. India's partnership with Australia has moved from transactional trade to structural strategic convergence. Analyse the drivers of this shift and evaluate its limitations.

Key Pointers for the Answer

The Convergence Logic. Both states are de-risking. Australia is straining under dependence on China and alliance dependence on an unpredictable Washington; India is diversifying across energy suppliers, defence platforms and critical minerals processing. Iran and Ukraine demonstrated that any single-point dependency is now a liability.

The Institutional Architecture. Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation — interoperability, expanded exercises, defence industrial and science collaboration, aircraft deployments from each other's territories, liaison appointments and personnel exchange.

The Resource and Technology Pillars. Civil nuclear pact enabling commercial uranium supply (arriving ~12 years after the earlier cooperation agreement); critical minerals corridor; PACTS on cyber, critical technologies and supply chains; complementarity with the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership.

The Human Bridge. Indian-origin Australians are now the largest immigrant-born community, ahead of the UK-born population for the first time — a durable domestic constituency for the relationship.

Policy Diffusion. Indian interest in Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024 — evidence that convergence now extends to domestic regulatory learning, not just security.

The Limitations. India remains outside AUKUS; neither state can singly balance China; economic complementarity is narrower than strategic rhetoric suggests; and minilateral flexibility can also mean minilateral fragility, since flexible arrangements carry no binding commitment.

PRACTICE — ESSAY

Essay Topic & Outline

TOPIC

Measurement as Governance: When Numbers Include, and When They Exclude

I. Introduction

The modern state governs through enumeration — it can only distribute what it can count.

Thesis: Measurement is never neutral. The same instinct that produces the Performance Grading Index as a tool of collaborative improvement can, under different design choices, produce electoral revisions that operate as pathways to exclusion. The ethics lie in the design, not the data.

II. Measurement as an Instrument of Improvement

PGI 2.0's deliberate architectural choice: abandoning competitive league tables for absolute grading bands (Utkarsh, Uttam, Prachesta, Akanshi) to encourage targeted systemic upgrades over rank-chasing.

Granularity as fairness: PGI-D's 784-district, 600-point matrix locates implementation failure where it actually occurs rather than averaging it away at the State level.

The humility of honest metrics: that *no* State or UT reached the top four grades is not an indictment of the index but a vindication of it.

III. Measurement as an Instrument of Exclusion

The SIR in Manipur: hasty, disproportionate and summary deletion producing disenfranchisement of politically “undesirable” communities.

Where technique meets identity: customary naming systems in which names derive from parental names, nicknames substitute for formal names, and tribal names transliterate inconsistently into English orthography — creating “logical discrepancies” for an algorithm and statelessness for a person.

Documentation as a prerequisite for citizenship: ~50,000 Kuki-Zo displaced with no enumeration provision; documentary records destroyed in the violence of May 2023. The instrument presumes a stability the population no longer possesses.

IV. What Separates the Two

Consent and Consequence: PGI grades an administration; the SIR grades a person’s existence in the polity. Error tolerance must scale with stakes.

Design for the Margin: Instruments should be validated against their hardest cases — the displaced, the undocumented, the differently named — not their easiest.

Institutional Perception: Legitimacy requires that conduct be seen as impartial. Where enumeration is perceived to serve one community’s demand to “cleanse” the State of another, the arithmetic is already compromised.

V. Conclusion & Way Forward

A nationwide SIR is *fait accompli* after the Supreme Court’s ruling; the remaining question is not whether to enumerate but how.

Recommend: procedural safeguards proportionate to consequence; special enumeration protocols for displaced populations; tolerance for orthographic and customary naming variation; and transparent published methodology.

Final Thought: A state that measures well is a state that can govern justly. A state that measures carelessly does not merely produce bad data — it produces non-persons.

WRITING THE ESSAY

Open with the counting/governing paradox, not with a dictionary definition. Examiners reward a live thesis in sentence two.

Use PGI and the Manipur SIR as a matched pair. The comparison is the argument; do not let them sit in separate silos.

Bring in one non-Indian anchor if you can — Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*, or the Aadhaar exclusion literature — but earn it, never name-drop.

Close on consequence, not on hope. The last line should land.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE BOOK

One-Minute Revision Card

PGI 2.0	Introduced 2018 (data 2017-18). PGI-S: 36 States/UTs, 1,000 points. PGI-D: 784 districts, 600 points. Both track 70 indicators.
PGI grades	Utkarsh (>90%) · Uttam 1-3 (61-90%) · Prachesta 1-3 (31-60%) · Akanshi 1-3 (lowest). Top four grades: empty .
PGI toppers	Punjab & Chandigarh at Prachesta-1 . Himachal Pradesh at Prachesta-2. Punjab a top performer since 2019-20.
AITIGA	India-ASEAN FTA. Signed 13 Aug 2009; in force 1 Jan 2010. 13th Joint Committee at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi.
ASEAN	1967 Bangkok Declaration · Secretariat at Jakarta · 11 members (Timor-Leste newest) · led RCEP · India is not a member .

NBWL	Statutory, Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972. 47 members. PM = ex-officio Chair; MoEFCC Minister = Vice-Chair; 10 nominated conservationists.
NBWL & PIL	97%+ of diversion proposals cleared 2014-2026. Full board met in 2025 after a 13-year gap. Tiger reserves: NBWL acts on NTCA advice.
India-Australia	Joint Declaration on Defence & Security Cooperation; commercial uranium supply ~12 years after the civil nuclear pact; critical minerals corridor.
PACTS	Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains. AUKUS = Australia, UK, US (India not a member).
Australia social media	Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024 — blocks users below 16 .
Manipur SIR	Phase III. Meitei 54% · Naga 26% · Kuki-Zo 15%. ~50,000 Kuki-Zo displaced; ~60,000 displaced overall; 260+ deaths.
Manipur autonomy	Hill areas covered by Article 371C and weak Autonomous Councils — not the Sixth Schedule.

Sources for This Issue

The Hindu, 10 July 2026 — Page 1 (India-Australia Joint Declaration), Page 8 (Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, “SIR in Manipur is a pathway to exclusion”), Page 14 (Jacob Koshy, “PIL plea in Delhi HC against functioning of Wildlife Board”).

Ministry of Education, Department of School Education & Literacy — Performance Grading Index 2.0 reports for States/UTs and Districts, 2025-26; Table 4.1, Grades attained by States/UTs.

Ministry of Commerce & Industry — 13th Meeting of the AITIGA Joint Committee, Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi, 9-10 July 2026.

Statutory reference: Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 · Constitution of India, Article 371C · Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024 (Australia).

“A state that measures well is a state that can govern justly. A state that measures carelessly does not merely produce bad data — it produces non-persons.”