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THE HINDU

ANALYSIS



*Daily Current Affairs & Editorial Analysis for the UPSC Civil Services
Examination — Prelims & Mains Value Addition*

17 AUGUST 2026

NEWSPAPER-BASED · GS PAPER I · II · III

Mahadayi River Diversion

One Nation, One Election

Unity vs Uniformity

Aviation Safety & DGCA

India & West Asia

AI in Healthcare

Girls & Unpaid Domestic Work

COMPILED BY

Sapna Chauhan

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7 Topics · 2 Mains Questions · 10 Prelims MCQs with Answer Key



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WHY IN NEWS

The Centre told the Lok Sabha that there is **no proposal before the Union government from Karnataka** seeking Environmental Clearance (EC) for diversion of the Mahadayi river, in reply to a question by a Goa MP. While read in Goa as a setback to the project, Karnataka maintains EC is not relevant for a **drinking-water** project.

‘No proposal seeking green nod for Mahadayi diversion’

Rishikesh Bahadur Desai
BELAGAVI

There is no proposal before the Union government from Karnataka seeking Environmental Clearance (EC) for diversion of the Mahadayi river for various projects, the Centre recently told the Lok Sabha in reply to a question posed by an MP from Goa.

While this is being interpreted as a setback for the project by sections in Goa, officials in the know in Karnataka, however, maintain that EC is not relevant for a drinking water project.

Kirti Vardhan Singh, Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in response to a question on EC by Captain Viriato Fernandes, MP



The Centre responded to the question raised by a Goa MP.

from South Goa, said that no proposal seeking an EC for any river diversion project involving the Mahadayi river is presently under consideration in the ministry.

The reply further said that the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has not approved Karnataka's proposal to use 10.6852 hectares

of forest land for the Kalasa Nala Diversion Scheme in the tiger corridor between the Kali and Sahyadri Tiger Reserves.

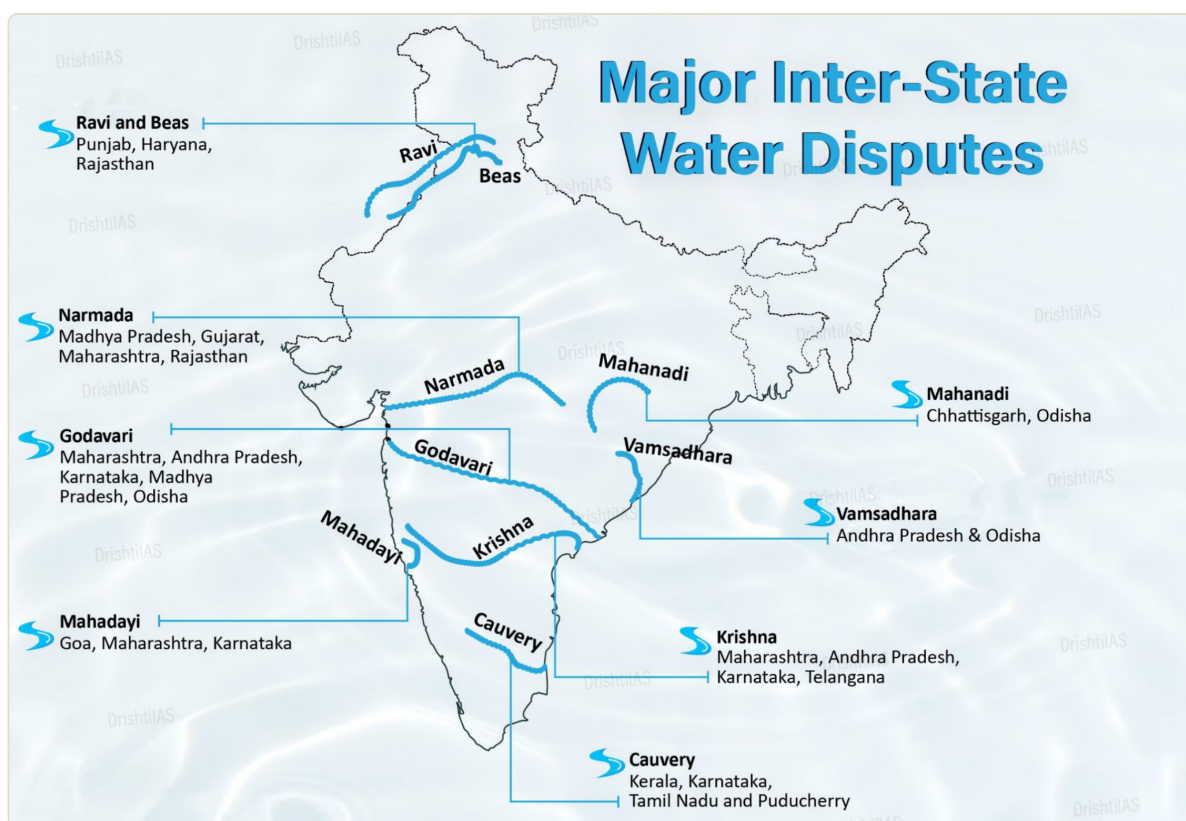
The Minister said that no proposal or river basin details for conducting a Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) and Carrying Capacity Study (CCS) of the Mahadayi basin have been submitted by the State governments concerned.

In his question, the MP had highlighted concerns voiced by civil society groups, scientific institutions and experts regarding the proposed diversion of the Mahadayi, claiming that it could affect Goa's drinking water security, lead to potential saline ingress and freshwater aquifers in the river basin.

- Union MoS (Environment, Forest & Climate Change) **Kirti Vardhan Singh** replied to a question on EC by **Captain Viriato Fernandes**, MP from South Goa; no EC proposal for any Mahadayi diversion is presently under consideration.
- The **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** has **not approved** Karnataka's proposal to use **10.6852 hectares** of forest land for the **Kalasa Nala Diversion Scheme**, located in the tiger corridor between the **Kali** and **Sahyadri Tiger Reserves**.
- No proposal or river-basin details for a **Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA)** and **Carrying Capacity Study (CCS)** of the Mahadayi basin have been submitted by the States concerned.
- The MP flagged concerns of civil-society groups and scientists that diversion could hit **Goa's drinking-water security**, cause **saline ingress**, and damage **freshwater aquifers** in the basin.

★ MAHADAYI RIVER — PRELIMS FACT FILE

- ◆ **Source:** Western Ghats — **Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary**, Karnataka; drains into the **Arabian Sea**.
- ◆ **Basin share:** Goa (~78%), Karnataka (~18%), Maharashtra (~4%).
- ◆ **Tributaries:** Kalasa, Banduri, Mapusa, Ragada, Nanuz, Valvoti, Nerul, St. Inez Creek, Dudhsagar, Kotrachi Nadi, Rio de Ourém.
- ◆ Linked to the **Zuari river** via the **Cumbarjua Canal**.
- ◆ Features: **Dudhsagar Falls** (Mollem NP & Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary) and **Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary** on Chorao Island.



Reference: Major inter-State river water disputes in India — Mahadayi involves Goa, Karnataka & Maharashtra.

★ NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE (NBWL)

- ◆ Statutory body under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**; apex body for wildlife conservation & development.
- ◆ **47-member** body: **Prime Minister** is ex-officio Chairperson; **Union Environment Minister** is Vice-Chairperson.
- ◆ Members include the Chief of Army Staff, Defence Secretary, Expenditure Secretary and **10 eminent conservationists/ecologists** nominated by the Centre.
- ◆ No tiger reserve can be diverted to unsustainable use without NBWL approval, on the advice of the **NTCA**.

Syllabus Linkage: GS I (Geography — peninsular rivers, drainage), GS III (Environment — forest clearance, tiger corridors, EIA/CIA), and Prelims (statutory bodies, protected areas).

2 One Nation, One Election — India's Democracy Needs Different Electoral Rhythms

GS II · Polity

Federalism

Editorial

WHY IN NEWS

The editorial argues the **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)** proposal — a uniform, synchronised timeline for national and State polls — misreads the mechanics of the parliamentary system and threatens the **federal architecture** designed by the Constitution's framers.

- Aligning the distinct political rhythms of dozens of States with the Centre, in the name of uniformity, prioritises **administrative convenience over democratic substance**.
- A parliamentary executive exists at the **pleasure of the legislative majority** — a PM or CM governs only while commanding the confidence of the House; terms are not rigidly fixed, so no-confidence or coalition collapse must trigger a democratic reset.
- A **fixed-term electoral calendar** artificially binds the legislature and short-circuits accountability; the fallback of **President's Rule** when a State government falls is even more undemocratic than a fresh election.
- Under strict synchronisation, if Parliament dissolves prematurely, **stable State assemblies with robust majorities could be terminated by operation of law** just to keep the 'one election' clock on course.
- The claim that continuous elections cause **policy paralysis via the Model Code of Conduct** is called an administrative myth; the MCC bars fresh sops, not routine governance.
- The **cost-saving argument** is said to conflate minimal State administrative costs with the unregulated private campaign spending of parties.

India's democracy needs different electoral rhythms

The "One Nation, One Election (ONOE)" proposal to enforce a uniform, synchronised timeline for national and State elections across India represents a profound misapprehension of the structural mechanics of the parliamentary system, and poses an existential threat to the federal architecture designed by the framers of the Constitution.

To align the distinct political rhythms of dozens of individual States with the central government, in the name of national uniformity, is to prioritise administrative convenience over democratic substance. The argument for synchronisation relies heavily on a superficial calculation of financial expenditure and an overblown narrative of policy paralysis. Yet, it ignores the fundamental constitutional friction that occurs when presidential mechanisms are clumsily grafted onto a parliamentary democracy.

Flexibility at democracy's core
At the very heart of the parliamentary form of government is the principle that the executive branch derives its legitimacy directly from, and remains continuously accountable to, the legislature. Unlike a presidential system, where the executive is elected independently for a strict, unalterable calendar term, a parliamentary executive exists entirely at the pleasure of the legislative majority. A Prime Minister or a Chief Minister rules only as long as they command the confidence of the house. Consequently, the parliamentary system is inherently built around flexibility; terms are not rigidly fixed because the collapse of a governing coalition, a successful motion of no confidence, or a shifting legislative realignment must naturally trigger a democratic reset. That is why India's elections, which ran on the same timetable from 1952 to 1967, no longer do: governments at the State and the Centre fell at different times when they lost their legislative majorities, and were elected accordingly thereafter, leading to the current situation where some State or the other is going to the elections every year.

Imposing a fixed-term electoral calendar artificially binds the legislature, completely short-circuiting this parliamentary accountability mechanism. If a government falls, forcing a fixed timeline means that the electorate is stripped of its sovereign right to choose a new government for a full five-year mandate. Instead, the system must resort to truncated midterm Assemblies elected merely to serve out the unexpired remainder of the original calendar. This introduction of variable, short-term governance undermines the stability it claims to protect, creating weak, insecure "time-shock" administrations whose bureaucrats, police forces and political opponents will simply run down the clock rather than engage in decisive long-term policymaking.

The alternative, of resorting to President's Rule when a State government falls, rather than



Shashi Tharoor
Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including 'Our Living Constitution'

holding a fresh election, is even more undemocratic. This would inevitably force a domino effect of constitutional crises that severely erodes the value of a citizen's vote. Under a synchronised system, the democratic leverage of the electorate is fundamentally distorted. A citizen voting in a midterm election to fill a two-year unexpired term is structurally handed less political bargaining power than a voter casting a ballot at the dawn of the five-year cycle. If full-term and midterm governments wield identical constitutional powers, it is a violation of democratic equity that their corresponding popular mandates carry unequal temporal weight. Furthermore, the logic of synchronisation dictates that if the national Parliament dissolves prematurely due to a fractured coalition in New Delhi, stable State legislative assemblies possessing absolute, robust majorities would be abruptly terminated by operation of law, simply to keep the national "one election" clock on course. To dissolve a functional, democratically elected State government because of a political realignment in New Delhi is a direct assault on the political sovereignty of that state's electorate, subordinating regional democratic choices to national political dynamics.

National politics will overshadow States
This subordination exposes the deeply anti-federal undercurrents of the synchronisation agenda. India is fundamentally a union of States, a vast pluralistic landscape where regional identities, local economic contexts, and historical trajectories demand distinct political expressions. Federalism is not a mere administrative arrangement; it is a vital mechanism for cultural and political accommodation.

By confining State and national elections into a single mega-event, the distinct boundaries between localised issues and national narratives are blurred. In a synchronised ballot, national parties with vast financial apparatuses and dominant media presence naturally tend to overshadow regional players. Local grievances regarding regional infrastructure, provincial welfare, and cultural preservation risk being entirely subsumed by overarching national rhetoric or geopolitical theatre. Electorates are subtly coerced into prioritising national alignment over regional suitability, a phenomenon captured by the majoritarian push for uniform alignment under the guise of developmental efficiency. This dynamic pressures voters to install identical parties at both the State and centre, penalising States that choose independent political paths and starving them of federal resources if they dissent from the national ruling party.

The financial justifications used to defend this centralisation of power are equally flawed. The claim that simultaneous elections will drastically cut public spending deliberately conflates the minimal, necessary administrative costs incurred

by the State with the unregulated, private campaign expenditures of political parties. The official funds spent by the Election Commission of India to manage independent cycles are a drop in the ocean for an economy of India's scale, a small and necessary price to pay for maintaining a responsive democracy. Conversely, the vast sums of money circulated by political parties during campaigns actually function as a form of informal economic redistribution, temporarily generating widespread employment and shifting capital back down to printers, local transport networks, artisans, and working-class citizens. To restrict this economic circulation to once every five years under the banner of austerity is an argument that privileges elite fiscal preferences over the periodic economic stimuli that campaigns provide to the informal sector.

Moreover, the complaint that the continuous cycle of elections creates a perpetual state of policy paralysis due to the Model Code of Conduct is an administrative myth. The electoral code is designed strictly to prevent the ruling executive from announcing opportunistic, brand-new financial handouts or executing politically-motivated bureaucratic transfers during the immediate run-up to a vote. It does not freeze the wheels of the State, nor does it halt the execution of ongoing public works, routine governance, or essential administrative duties. The narrative of paralysis is often deployed by executives to excuse structural inefficiencies that have nothing to do with the electoral calendar. In reality, the frequency of independent State elections serves as a critical check on executive hubris, forcing political representatives to regularly return to the doormats of their constituents with folded hands. This continuous accountability cycle keeps political parties responsive to shifting public sentiment, whereas a single, synchronised event leaves a five-year void where representatives are essentially insulated from the popular will.

Diminishing the voter's voice
Ultimately, the drive toward uniform elections is an attempt to transform the organic, messy vitality of a decentralised parliamentary democracy into the rigid, totalising efficiency of an authoritarian state model. It reduces the sovereign voter to a cog in an administrative machine, strips States of their distinct political timelines, and creates dangerous vacuums where insecure, short-term governments cannot effectively rule. By treating elections as an expensive administrative burden to be minimised rather than the primary lifeblood of public accountability, the ONOE model devalues the constitutional spirit of the republic. True democratic strength does not lie in forced conformity or synchronised clocks, but in the enduring resilience of a federal compact that allows its many distinct regions to live, breathe, and vote according to their own unique conditions.

★ ONOE — VALUE ADDITION

- ♦ India held simultaneous elections from **1952 to 1967**; the cycle broke as Assemblies/Lok Sabha were dissolved early.
- ♦ The **High-Level Committee** on simultaneous elections was chaired by former President **Ram Nath Kovind**.
- ♦ Implementation would need amendments touching Articles **83** (duration of Houses of Parliament) and **172** (duration of State legislatures), among others.
- ♦ Core tension: **administrative efficiency** vs **federalism & accountability** of the parliamentary form of government.

Syllabus Linkage: GS II — Indian Constitution (federalism, basic structure), functioning of the legislature, and the Representation of the People framework; a live debate for both Prelims and Mains.

3

Independence Day Address — ‘India Needs Unity, not Uniformity’

GS II · Polity

GS I · Society

Editorial

WHY IN NEWS

Reviewing the Prime Minister's Independence Day speech (his thirteenth), delivered amid a new political context after student protests and the Education Minister's resignation, the editorial welcomes the reform promises but argues that **dissent should not be framed as divisive**.

- Key announcements: **skill training for one crore youth** for the AI era; **free online coaching** for competitive exams; a renewed push on **innovation, quantum technology, space, robotics and data centres**.
- Reiterated commitment to **self-reliance in defence production**, including drones and next-generation defence systems — promises the editorial says all Indians would welcome.
- The speech built a new '**dimagi naxals**' label for critics said to influence policymaking — the editorial reads this as seeing 'an enemy in every critic'.
- As India enters its **80th year** as a free nation, the argument is that progress is a **continuum** that should compound year on year, not be measured as before/after a single point.
- The prescription: an **all-hands-on-the-deck**, unified political will across parties, and an **indigenous philosophy of development** rather than mimicking techno-capitalism — a point also underlined by the RSS chief.

United and free

India needs unity, not uniformity;
dissent must not be seen as divisive

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech, his thirteenth, was delivered within an entirely new political context, shaped by the recent student protests and the resignation of his Education Minister. Protests may have waned, but their urgent and lingering reasons for the unrest remain a matter of serious concern for the country. Modi sought to offer hope, inspiration and confidence on the one hand while, on the other, a new phantom labelled '*dimagi* naxals', he said, influenced policymaking and re-purging. The speech was specifically addressed to the young citizens of the nation. Mr. Modi repeatedly stressed the need for big dreams, firm resolve and rapid execution, arguing that India could no longer think in increments. He promised skill training for one crore over the next year to prepare India for the digital intelligence era; free online coaching for competitive examinations to reduce the burden of coaching fees and improve access to opportunities; renewed the government's emphasis on innovation, quantum technology, space, robotics, electronics and other emerging sectors. Mr. Modi reiterated his commitment to self-reliance in production, including advanced technology such as drones and next-generation defence systems. All Indians would naturally apprehend these promises and the statement of e.

Whether Mr. Modi wanted, or tried, to build a unified national approach towards these challenges and their management is doubtful. India's progress is a continuum that should ideally have a compounding effect with each subsequent year. Comparing, in absolute terms, achievements before and after 2014, when he became Prime Minister, is neither statistically relevant nor politically prudent. The fact about India as it enters the 80th year as a free nation that fought off colonialism is that its challenges are unprecedented. It has a massive young population entering the workforce even as technology is disrupting life and work as never before. What India needs is an all-hands-on-the-deck approach, requiring a unified political will among parties and stakeholders that is unaffected by electoral contests. India also needs an indigenous understanding and philosophy of development rather than trying to mimic the techno-capitalism that is rattling advanced economies. This is a point that was underlined by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat in his Independence Day speech. Mr. Modi clearly sees the challenges; but he also sees, unfortunately, an enemy in every critic. As he leads the country into a new year of independence, perhaps he could consider new ideas, including those from his critics, instead of amplifying divisive ones.

★ ANALYTICAL HOOKS

- ◆ **Unity vs uniformity:** India's strength lies in accommodating diversity, not enforcing sameness — a federal, pluralist idea.
- ◆ **Role of dissent:** constructive criticism is intrinsic to a healthy democracy; delegitimising critics narrows the democratic space.
- ◆ **Demographic dividend:** a young population entering the workforce amid rapid technological disruption demands skilling and jobs at scale.

Syllabus Linkage: GS II (governance, role of civil society and dissent), GS I (Indian society — diversity, unity) and Essay/Ethics (idea of nationhood, tolerance of dissent).

4

Aviation Safety — 'Not Just Turbulence': The AI 2379 Incident

GS II · Governance

GS III · Sci-Tech

Editorial

WHY IN NEWS

The **4 August 2026** Air India flight **AI 2379** (Phuket–Delhi, 137 passengers, 8 crew) has been **reclassified from an 'event of turbulence' to a 'serious incident'** after in-flight technical faults and a sharp altitude deviation injured 20+ people. The editorial warns India's aviation safety cannot rest on luck.

- Two tracks are under probe. First, multiple technical anomalies on the **Airbus A320N**: hydraulic-system fault warnings, elevator flight-control faults, autopilot disconnection, emergency-exit door indications and an engine anti-ice warning.
- The **Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)**, France's **BEA** and Airbus technical representatives are investigating; Airbus's initial data reportedly supports evidence of **technical errors**.

- Second track: the pilot-in-command's **post-flight screening for psychoactive substances**, which has drawn wide attention and prompted mandatory screening of flight-deck crew.
- It exposed a weak link — a heavier emphasis on **alcohol breathalyser checks** than on testing for psychoactive substances under **Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) Section 5, Air Safety Series F, Part V** (which also covers Air Traffic Controllers).
- The **DGCA Medical Circular No. 02 of 2021** on OTC drugs and self-medication flags pilot cognitive/psychomotor impairment, drawing on the **Mangaluru (2010)** and **Kozhikode (2020)** fatal accidents; even small impairment can degrade judgement, reaction time and coordination.

Not just turbulence

India's aviation should not have to depend on chance for safety

The August 4, 2020, incident involving Air India flight AI 2379, from Phuket to Delhi, with 137 passengers and eight crew, now has two tracks. The first concerns its reclassification: the initial 'event of turbulence' is now a "serious incident" after inflight technical issues and significant deviation in aircraft altitude caused injuries to more than 20 passengers and crew, officially drawing in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The subsequent probe by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, along with France's investigation authority, BEA, and technical representatives from Airbus, should unravel the multiple anomalies that briefly overtook the Airbus A320XLR – fault warnings across hydraulic systems, elevator flight-control inputs, autopilot disconnection, emergency-exit door indications and an engine anti-ice warning. Airbus's initial data is said to support the evidence of technical errors. However, it is the second track that has received much attention: the fault of the pilot-in-command's post-flight screening for psychoactive substances. The Tata Group-Singapore Airlines joint venture airline has been prodded into commencing the immediate and mandatory screening of its flight deck crew 'for any substances or unprescribed medications'. But the deeply discomfiting discovery has exposed the weak link in crew screening – the greater emphasis on pre- and post-flight breathalyser checks for alcohol than on testing for psychoactive substances, which falls under the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) Section 5-Air Safety Series F Part V. In fact, the CAR – which applies to Air Traffic Controllers also – leans more towards random and post-flight/post-shift testing, with graded disciplinary action. With India's air carriers expanding operations, crew citing stress-related issues, and, separately, the availability of substances for medicinal or recreational use, the regulator must ensure stringent psychoactive substance testing and operational compliance. The DGCA's Medical Circular No. 02 of 2021, on 'over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and self-medication', highlights pilot cognitive/psychomotor skills impairment, drawing on the Mangaluru (2010) and Kozhikode (2020) fatal air accidents. Further, documented cases from the West reveal that even small levels of impairment can affect crew judgement, reaction time, coordination, and decision-making, the critical skills needed in the flight deck. Ensuring that fit crew are behind the controls is an aviation industry bedrock, and every Indian operator, large or growing, must uphold the highest standards. This was a lucky escape, but luck cannot be allowed to become a safety strategy.

The Tata Group-Singapore Airlines joint venture airline has been prodded into commencing the immediate and mandatory screening of its flight deck crew 'for any substances or unprescribed medications'. But the deeply discomfiting discovery has exposed the weak link in crew screening – the greater emphasis on pre- and post-flight breathalyser checks for alcohol than on testing for psychoactive substances, which falls under the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) Section 5-Air Safety Series F Part V. In fact, the CAR – which applies to Air Traffic Controllers also – leans more towards random and post-flight/post-shift testing, with graded disciplinary action. With India's air carriers expanding operations, crew citing stress-related issues, and, separately, the availability of substances for medicinal or recreational use, the regulator must ensure stringent psychoactive substance testing and operational compliance. The DGCA's Medical Circular No. 02 of 2021, on 'over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and self-medication', highlights pilot cognitive/psychomotor skills impairment, drawing on the Mangaluru (2010) and Kozhikode (2020) fatal air accidents. Further, documented cases from the West reveal that even small levels of impairment can affect crew judgement, reaction time, coordination, and decision-making, the critical skills needed in the flight deck. Ensuring that fit crew are behind the controls is an aviation industry bedrock, and every Indian operator, large or growing, must uphold the highest standards. This was a lucky escape, but luck cannot be allowed to become a safety strategy.

★ DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION (DGCA)

- ◆ India's apex civil-aviation regulator for air safety, licensing and international-standards compliance.
- ◆ Originally set up in **1978** as an attached office; became a **statutory body** under the **Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020**; works under the **Ministry of Civil Aviation**.
- ◆ Functions: registers aircraft; licenses pilots, ATCs, engineers & crew; certifies airports; sets airworthiness standards; investigates incidents.
- ◆ Enforces safety oversight of licensed entities under the **Aircraft Rules, 1937**.

Syllabus Linkage: GS II (statutory & regulatory bodies, governance) and GS III (science & technology, disaster/safety management, indigenisation of aviation safety oversight).

WHY IN NEWS

The editorial contends that India is **losing ground in West Asia** even as the region undergoes a once-in-a-generation shift in its security architecture, and that New Delhi lacks a clear strategy for it.

- A decade ago India was expanding its footprint: in **2016** Saudi Arabia conferred its highest civilian honour on the PM; in **2021** the **I2U2** grouping (India, Israel, US, UAE) was formed; in **2024** Iran leased **Chabahar** port to India.
- A US–Israel war with Iran has escalated into wider conflict with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**; Gulf states are rethinking reliance on the US security umbrella and perceive threats from both Iran and Israel.
- **Pakistan’s new diplomatic moment**: its role as a mediator in the US–Iran conflict is earning reputational capital; a new collective defence pact in Mecca binds **Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan**.
- Risks for India: a future Israel–Pakistan war could draw India in given close India–Israel ties; greater Turkish backing for Pakistan cannot be ruled out.
- Way forward: appoint a **Special Envoy for West Asia**; rebuild trust between Arab states and Iran; safeguard Indian shipping from the **Suez Canal to Bab-el-Mandeb**; explore roles in Red Sea security and UN peacekeeping in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

India is losing West Asia, but it is not too late

is losing West Asia, one country at a time. Even as the region undergoes a once-in-a-generation shift in its security architecture and political battle lines, it is unclear if India’s strategy is ...or whether New Delhi is all in.

It is not supposed to be this way. Just 10 years ago, India was rapidly remaking its place in West Asia. In 2016, Saudi Arabia conferred its highest civilian honour on India’s Prime Minister. In 2021, the I2U2 agreement was signed between India, Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) together. In 2024, Iran leased Chabahar to India. All these successes are now memories from the past.

India’s new diplomatic moment came in the last four months, the U.S.-Israel war with Iran escalating into a catastrophic regional conflict. With Iran attacking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Saudis hitting Iraqis, and the Israelis attacking Saudi ships and Israel launching strikes in multiple countries. Now, all countries are rethinking the efficacy of the US security umbrella. They see a threat from Iran and Israel.

In the Gulf countries there is a schism on how to handle this threat – through engagement (the U.S. is doing) or through deterrence (as India and Pakistan are contemplating).

In this context, Pakistan’s role as mediator in an Israel-Palestine conflict is gaining it reputational capital in the region. Irrespective of Pakistan’s role, analysts in the region see that Pakistan is at the centre of the conflict at a time when it seemed it could bring U.S. President Donald Trump to the table despite the Iranians to the table despite Türkiye, Qatar and Egypt.

India’s best collective defence pact in Mecca is with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan in this context. This pact may mean less in the event of a U.S.-Iran war as none of these



Raja Karthikeya
Adjunct Fellow and
Lead for West Asia
Studies at the
Takshashila
Institution

countries is likely to directly take on Iran alongside the U.S. The pact is thus aimed less at Iran and more at deterring Israel. All three countries see themselves as the next target of Israel after Iran. They thus want to pool Saudi capital, Pakistan’s military strength, and Türkiye’s technological advances.

This is a challenge for India. A future war between Israel and Pakistan will inevitably draw in India given the close partnership between Israel and India. Similarly, even greater Turkish support for Pakistan in a future conflict that Pakistan might have with India cannot be ruled out.

The choices before India

What then is India’s strategy? It appears to be confident of Israel’s victory in its various battles in the region given its proximity to the U.S. But U.S. politics are changing rapidly, with both ‘Make America Great Again’ Republicans and Democratic Socialists questioning the once-unquestioned U.S. support for Israel. Can Israel then emerge triumphant alone?

India has cultivated a special relationship with the UAE given the importance of remittances from Indian expat workers in the country, the investments by the Indian elite in the UAE and the UAE’s strategic investments in India. But the UAE’s mounting differences with Saudi Arabia are a cause for concern, as are its positions against UN-recognised governments in conflicts as far as Sudan. Can the UAE emerge unscathed in all these conflicts?

India can choose to sign military alliances with Israel and the UAE. But this would hurt what is left of India’s relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia. India can choose to do nothing as it is doing now. And its merchant mariners may keep getting killed in the Strait of Hormuz while more Indian ships may sink in the Bab-el-Mandeb.

A great power in the making risks appearing humbled and hobbled in its immediate maritime neighbourhood.

Or, India can pick a third way. It can devise an active regional political strategy. Re-engage the Saudis with whom it has no explicit differences.

It can start playing a role of rebuilding trust between the Arab countries and Iran, starting with the UAE-Iran relationship. It can engage in Jordan’s security offering Jordan defensive technologies at a time when U.S. munitions are running low. It can engage in the future UN peacekeeping role in Lebanon, which is now under a cloud, with the forecast being an end to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). It can even run a back-channel with Türkiye sharing its red lines about its relationship with Pakistan. If India cannot join the new Saudi-led maritime force for the Red Sea, it can work with Egypt on a parallel effort to safeguard India-bound shipping, from the Suez Canal to Bab-el-Mandeb. It can look into setting up a military presence in the Red Sea region whether in Somaliland or Socatra. Building on current military training exchanges, it can start drills and military exercises with a range of countries in the region.

Think of bridge-building

India can also appoint a new Special Envoy for West Asia – not one focused on the Israel-Palestine peace process necessarily, but one who can draw all the threads together to secure India’s interests in the region at a time of unprecedented turbulence. All of this can be part of one pro-active vision for India to support a new security architecture for West Asia – one that does not draw new battle lines but instead contributes to trust-building.

India cannot afford to be a stranger to West Asia. India has both the capacity and the responsibility to help restore peace and predictability in the region.

West Asia is
changing rapidly
and India must
act before its
influence fades

★ GEO-STRATEGIC FACT FILE

- ◆ **I2U2:** India–Israel–UAE–US grouping (2021) for cooperation in food security, water, energy, space, health and transport.
- ◆ **Chabahar (Iran):** gives India access to Afghanistan & Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan; anchors the INSTC.
- ◆ **Chokepoints:** **Strait of Hormuz** (Gulf oil) and **Bab-el-Mandeb** (Red Sea–Suez route) are vital to India's energy security and trade.
- ◆ India has **capacity and responsibility** to help restore peace and predictability in the region.

Syllabus Linkage: GS II — India and its neighbourhood, bilateral/regional groupings, and effect of policies of developed & developing countries on India's interests.

6

AI in Healthcare — Optimising Expertise, Not Just Deploying Systems

GS III · Sci-Tech

Health

Editorial

WHY IN NEWS

With India expanding healthcare capacity amid a more complex disease burden, the piece argues Artificial Intelligence can help **carry medical expertise to the point of care** — a **January 2026 McKinsey** analysis estimates AI in revenue-cycle operations could cut the cost-to-collect by **30–60%**.

- Reach of expertise has depended on the number and distribution of clinicians, their institutions, and connecting systems — all hard to scale quickly, especially in India.
- Global signals: the **US FDA** had authorised over **1,000 AI-enabled medical devices** (radiology, cardiology, diagnostics) by January 2025; the UK **NHS** issued guidance on AI-enabled ambient scribing (April 2025).
- India's digital foundation: over **100 crore health records** linked to **Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts (ABHA)** by May 2026; the **ABDM Scan-and-Share** service cut OPD registration waits from about an hour to **2–5 minutes**.
- AI can extend the same friction-cutting to scheduling, clinical documentation, claims, inventory and discharge — freeing clinicians and reducing administrative fatigue.
- Caution: models need **clinical validation, representative data and human oversight**; the FDA's September 2025 call for real-world evaluation reflects that launch performance may not hold over time.

How AI can be optimised for better healthcare

Modern medicine has built an extraordinary depth of knowledge. However, how much of that knowledge can reach the patient who needs it now? The answer has traditionally depended on the number and distribution of trained clinicians, the institutions in which they work, and the systems that connect them to patients. All three are difficult to expand quickly. For India, which is still expanding its healthcare capacity while its disease burden becomes more complex, the question of how far health expertise can reach is particularly consequential.

Here, Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces a new dimension. It offers a way of taking the accumulated knowledge and making more of it available at the point of care. The change is visible across major health systems. In January 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it had authorised more than 1,000 AI-enabled medical devices. These include tools used in radiology, cardiology, and other areas of diagnosis. In the U.K., the NHS issued a guidance in April 2025 for the use of AI-enabled ambient scribing. By January 2026, the country was developing a national programme to support wider adoption, with early evidence suggesting that the technology could give doctors up to a quarter more time with their patients.

These examples point to a wider change. AI is moving out of innovation teams and into consultations, diagnostic workflows, and hospital operations. The real work now lies in making it dependable enough for routine use.

The economic benefits India has its own set of challenges. Specialist care remains concentrated in larger cities, while chronic conditions require patients to be monitored over many years. Hospitals are also managing rising volumes without being able to increase clinical



Suneeeta Reddy
Managing Director,
Apollo Hospitals
Enterprise Ltd.

capacity at the same pace. An AI tool that helps prioritise a radiology scan, alerts a care team to a deteriorating patient or supports a physician handling a complex case in a smaller city can make existing capacity work more efficiently.

The country has already built much of the digital foundation required for this shift. By May 2026, more than 100 crore health records had been linked to the Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts, twice the number recorded in February 2025. A July 2026 government update reported that the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) Scan and Share service had reduced outpatient registration waits at participating hospitals from around an hour to between two and five minutes. These improvements did not require a dramatic reinvention. It came from removing friction from a familiar hospital process. AI can extend the same principle to appointment scheduling, clinical documentation, claims, inventory planning, and discharge management. Each task takes time away from care if handled poorly.

Additionally, the financial benefits from using AI is becoming harder for healthcare providers to ignore. A January 2026 McKinsey analysis estimated that applying AI across healthcare revenue-cycle operations could reduce the cost to collect by 30% to 60%. For hospitals, these gains can free resources for clinical teams, equipment and capacity. They can also reduce administrative work that contributes to staff fatigue.

There is yet another part related to the business side that receives less attention. AI can help providers offer services that were previously difficult to deliver at scale. Remote monitoring can extend care beyond discharge. Risk-based preventive programmes can identify people who need attention before symptoms become severe. Virtual specialist support can connect smaller hospitals with expertise located elsewhere. Diagnostics can

be taken closer to communities, while hospitals maintain an ongoing relationship with patients managing diabetes, cardiac disease or cancer.

Judicious use

These models create revenue, but their value does not come from selling more technology. It comes from reaching patients earlier and avoiding preventable deterioration. This is also where restraint matters. A system that performs well in one hospital or population may not work equally well across India's States, disease patterns, and care settings. Clinical validation, representative data, and human oversight also need to be seriously considered. The FDA's September 2025 call for better methods to evaluate AI-enabled devices in real-world settings reflects a concern that every health system will have to confront. The tools' performance at launch does not guarantee performance over time.

Healthcare does not need AI everywhere. It needs it where delays can be reduced, clinicians can make better informed decisions, and more patients can receive appropriate care. As India marks another year of independence, there is a larger dimension to this conversation. The economic strength of a nation ultimately rests on the capabilities of its people. Healthcare therefore belongs within the architecture of economic development. India has built considerable physical and digital infrastructure over the decades; the next phase of development will depend increasingly on the health, longevity and productivity of its population. AI can contribute by making expertise widely available and by shifting healthcare towards earlier detection and continuous management.

The economic return on AI in healthcare will be measured not by the number of systems deployed, but by the number of lives touched and its impact on human life and happiness.

★ DIGITAL HEALTH FACT FILE

- ◆ **ABDM** (Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission): creates a national digital health ecosystem via unique **ABHA** IDs and interoperable records.
- ◆ AI should be deployed where it **reduces delays**, improves decisions and reaches more patients — not 'everywhere'.
- ◆ Healthcare sits within the **architecture of economic development** — health, longevity and productivity underpin national strength.
- ◆ The true return: measured by **lives touched**, not the number of systems deployed.

Syllabus Linkage: GS III — science & technology (AI applications), and GS II (health governance, digital public infrastructure & welfare delivery).

7 Girls Conditioned from Childhood to Take Up the Domestic Burden

GS I • Society

GS II • Social Justice

Data Point

WHY IN NEWS

Drawing on **India's Time Use Survey (2025)**, the analysis shows the adult gender division of unpaid work begins in childhood: girls start sharing domestic chores far earlier and more heavily than boys, reproducing the **gender gap in invisible, unpaid work** across generations.

- Women's time on housework rises from around age 10 and peaks at nearly **460 minutes a day (7.5+ hours) around age 30**; the male curve **never crosses 65 minutes** at any age between 6 and 75.
- At **age 6**, boys and girls spend almost the same time on domestic/care work (~5 minutes/day). From **age 10 the girls' curve pulls away**: ~15 min at 10, **75 min at 15**, and ~130 min by 17.

- Boys move only from ~5 minutes at age 6 to about **17 minutes** by the end of childhood — a dramatic widening of the gap.
- The **girl-to-boy ratio** in unpaid work rises from **1.6** (ages 6–9) to **4.5** (10–14) to **7.5** (15–17).
- Cost is borne in **leisure and learning**: for girls, more time on chores crowds out sport, rest and discretionary time that build confidence and career trajectories.
- In the **2025 PLFS**, childcare and domestic responsibilities were the single most-cited reason for staying out of the labour force — by **52.5% of urban women** and **40% of rural women**, far above men.

Girls conditioned from childhood to take up domestic burden

The time women spend on housework begins to rise around the age of 10 and reaches a peak of nearly 460 minutes a day around age 30

DATA POINT
Tanu M. Goyal
Mohit, Talwar
Shravan Prakash

In a recent interaction with women aspiring to become entrepreneurs in rural Haryana, it was found that other than social and cultural norms, the biggest practical problem constraining the women's ability to do more paid work was that a large share of their time was tied up in cooking and completing household chores. Strikingly, their daughters, rather than their sons, were already sharing this burden by helping them in the kitchen and other chores. The next generation, it seemed, is already learning to reproduce the gender gap in invisible, unpaid work.

India's Time Use Survey (2025) highlights that the division of labour that emerges in adulthood begins much earlier, through childhood conditioning. What starts in childhood widens with age, reaching its peak in the prime working years (Chart 1).

The time women spend on housework begins to rise around the age of 10 and continues through the late teens and twenties, reaching a peak of nearly 460 minutes (7.5 hours) a day around age 30. The male curve, however, never crosses 65 minutes at any age between six and 75. Adolescence, in this sense, is not separate from adulthood; it is when the adult pattern begins to take shape (Chart 1). Data shows that at age six, Indian boys and girls spend almost the same amount of time on domestic and care work at about five minutes a day (Chart 2). Their trajectories remain relatively close through early childhood. Thereafter, however, they diverge sharply.

Around age 10, the girls' curve begins to pull away. Girls spend about 15 minutes a day on domestic and care work at age 10, 75 minutes at 15, and around 150 minutes by age 17. Boys, meanwhile, move from roughly five minutes at age six to only about 17 minutes by the end of childhood. The result is a dramatic widening of the gender gap. The girl-to-boy ratio in unpaid work rises from 1.6 among children aged 6–9, to 4.5 among those aged 10–14, and to 7.5 among adolescents aged 15–17.

Little control over time

The cost is leisure. Between ages six and 17, girls' housework rises by roughly 124 minutes a day, while their leisure time falls by around 115 minutes. For boys, the decline in leisure is much smaller but the time they spend on housework changes relatively little.

This matters because the cost of girls' domestic work is often framed primarily as a trade-off with schooling and education. But data shows that girls, in fact, are spending slightly more time on learning than boys at most ages. They, therefore, remain in school but still pay a substantial price in leisure time that could be spent on sport, friendships, rest, exploration and simply having discretionary control over their own time. These are not economically irrelevant activities. They are part of how children build confidence, social networks, physical capability and even a sense of agency, all of which influence their ability to build career trajectories later in life (Chart 2).

Cooking lies at the centre of this divergence (Chart 3). Among adolescents aged 15–17 years, 42.4% of girls report cooking, compared with only 2.9% of boys. Girls in this age group spend close to an hour cooking, while boys spend just two minutes. Cleaning and laundry also become increasingly gendered, with wide gaps in both participation and time spent. The only tasks where adolescent boys match or exceed girls are farm work and shopping; activities that are more outward-facing (the field and market), rather than inward-facing into the kitchen.

Between childhood and adulthood, therefore, girls are being trained for the household while boys are being trained for the world outside. This helps explain why childhood conditioning can later appear as an "efficient" gendered allocation of household work.

One of the clearest manifestations of these gendered expectations is women's absence from the labour force. In the 2025 PLFS, childcare and domestic responsibilities were the single most-cited reason women gave for staying out of the labour force, reported by 52.5% of urban women and 40% of rural women, compared with less than 1% of men.

Most policy interventions address women's unpaid work in adulthood through childcare, community kitchens, safe mobility infrastructure, flexible work and social protection, among others. But the Time Use Survey suggests that policy must also start much earlier, by addressing the unequal assignment of domestic work between boys and girls.

The objective is not to remove domestic work from children's lives, but to remove its gender assignment. Schools can help by giving every child, boy or girl, equal opportunities to learn practical life skills, from cooking and home management to stitching, carpentry and financial management.

India has invested heavily in keeping girls in school and improving their educational outcomes, but equal attention must be paid to what happens to their time outside school. Otherwise, by the time young women enter the labour market, years of gendered conditioning and unpaid work may already have narrowed their choices. If we want a different workforce tomorrow, we may need to start by giving boys and girls a different childhood today.

Authors work at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). Views expressed are personal

Disproportionate burden

The data for the charts were sourced from India's Time Use Survey (2025) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

CHART 1: Time spent on housework (unpaid domestic and caregiving services)

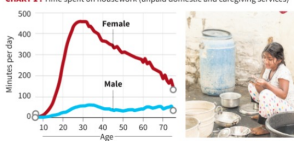


CHART 2: Time spent by children on domestic work, leisure and learning

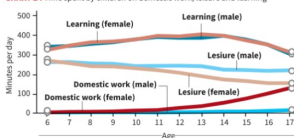
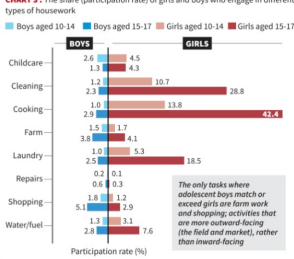


CHART 3: The share (participation rate) of girls and boys who engage in different types of housework



The only tasks where adolescent boys match or exceed girls are farm work and shopping; activities that are more outward-facing (the field and market), rather than inward-facing

★ DATA & POLICY HOOKS

- Time Use Survey:** conducted by the **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI/NSO)**; captures paid, unpaid & care work by sex and age.
- The objective is not to remove domestic work from children but to **remove its gender assignment**.
- Interventions: childcare & community kitchens, safe mobility, flexible work — plus teaching **both boys and girls** chores, cooking and financial literacy.
- Links to **Female Labour Force Participation (FLFPR)**, SDG-5 (gender equality) and the care-economy debate.

Syllabus Linkage: GS I (role of women & women's organisations, social empowerment), GS II (social justice, welfare schemes) and GS III (labour, care economy & FLFPR).



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Mains Practice Questions

GS PAPER II · ANSWER APPROACH IN POINTERS

“The case for ‘One Nation, One Election’ rests on administrative convenience, but its costs are borne by federalism and democratic accountability.” Critically examine.

ANSWER APPROACH

- **INTRO:** define ONOE (synchronised Lok Sabha & State polls); note India held simultaneous elections 1952–67 and the Kovind committee’s recent push.
- **CASE FOR:** lower expenditure, reduced Model Code disruption, administrative & security bandwidth, less ‘permanent campaign’ mode.
- **CASE AGAINST:** parliamentary executive survives on legislative confidence — fixed terms clash with no-confidence/coalition collapse; risk of premature termination of stable State assemblies; over-reliance on President’s Rule; national narratives overshadowing regional issues.
- **CONSTITUTIONAL ANGLE:** amendments to Arts. 83 & 172; federalism & basic structure concerns.
- **BALANCE:** weigh efficiency vs accountability; suggest phased/partial synchronisation, consensus and safeguards.
- **CONCLUSION:** reforms must strengthen, not flatten, India’s federal and democratic diversity.

The gendered division of unpaid domestic work in India begins in childhood, not adulthood. Discuss, using recent survey evidence, and suggest measures to break the cycle.

ANSWER APPROACH

- **EVIDENCE:** Time Use Survey 2025 — girls’ domestic work diverges from boys around age 10; women peak at ~460 min/day near age 30 while men stay under 65 min; girl-to-boy unpaid-work ratio rises 1.6 → 7.5 by adolescence.
- **CONSEQUENCES:** lost leisure/learning for girls, weaker career trajectories, low FLFPR (52.5% urban / 40% rural women cite domestic duties for staying out of work, PLFS 2025).
- **CAUSES:** social norms, early conditioning, lack of care infrastructure and safe mobility.
- **MEASURES:** childcare & community kitchens, flexible/safe work, recognising the care economy, gender-neutral socialisation of chores, financial literacy for both sexes.
- **CONCLUSION:** removing the *gender assignment* of domestic work — not the work itself — is key to real equality (SDG-5).



Prelims Practice — MCQs

10 QUESTIONS WITH EXPLANATIONS · ANSWER KEY FOLLOWS

Q1. With reference to the Mahadayi river, consider the following:

- 1. It originates in the Western Ghats and drains into the Bay of Bengal.
- 2. The largest share of its basin lies in Goa.
- 3. It is connected to the Zuari river through the Cumbarjua Canal.

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

Ans: (b) — The Mahadayi rises in the Western Ghats but empties into the **Arabian Sea**, not the Bay of Bengal (1 wrong). Goa holds the largest basin share (~78%) and the Cumbarjua Canal links it to the Zuari (2 & 3 correct).

Q2. Consider the following about the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):

- 1. It is a statutory body under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- 2. The Prime Minister is its ex-officio Chairperson.
- 3. No tiger reserve can be diverted without its approval, on the advice of the NTCA.

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

Ans: (d) — All three are correct. The NBWL is a 47-member statutory body chaired by the PM; the Environment Minister is Vice-Chair; tiger-reserve diversion needs NBWL nod on NTCA advice.

Q3. The Kalasa-Banduri project, seen in the news, is associated with which river?

- (a) Krishna (b) Mahadayi
(c) Cauvery (d) Godavari

Ans: (b) — The Kalasa (Nala) Diversion Scheme is part of the Kalasa-Banduri works on the **Mahadayi** basin, involving Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Q4. Simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies ('One Nation, One Election') would most directly require amendments to which Articles?

- (a) Articles 83 and 172 (b) Articles 14 and 21
(c) Articles 275 and 280 (d) Articles 356 and 365

Ans: (a) — Article **83** governs the duration of the Houses of Parliament and Article **172** the duration of State legislatures — both central to synchronising terms.

Q5. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) became a statutory body under which law?

- (a) Aircraft Rules, 1937 (b) Airports Authority of India Act, 1994
(c) Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020 (d) BNS, 2023

Ans: (c) — Set up in 1978 as an attached office, the DGCA was given statutory status by the **Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020**, under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Q6. The I2U2 grouping consists of:

- (a) India, Iran, UAE, USA (b) India, Israel, UAE, USA
(c) India, Indonesia, UK, USA (d) India, Israel, UK, UAE

Ans: (b) — I2U2 (2021) links **India, Israel, the UAE and the USA** for cooperation in water, energy, food security, transport, space and health.

Q7. Consider the following straits/chokepoints:

- 1. Strait of Hormuz — gateway to the Persian Gulf.
- 2. Bab-el-Mandeb — connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.
- 3. Chabahar — an Indian-operated port in Iran.

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d) — All correct. Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb are key oil/trade chokepoints; Chabahar is an Iranian port operated by India, giving access to Central Asia via the INSTC.

Q8. The Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) is a component of which mission?

(a) National Health Mission

(b) Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)

(c) PM-JAY only

(d) Poshan Abhiyaan

Ans: (b) — ABHA (a unique health ID enabling interoperable digital records) is central to the **ABDM**; the 'Scan-and-Share' service has sharply cut OPD registration waits.

Q9. India's Time Use Survey is conducted by:

(a) NITI Aayog

(b) Ministry of Women & Child Development

(c) MoSPI / National Statistical Office

(d) Census of India

Ans: (c) — The Time Use Survey is carried out by the **National Statistical Office under MoSPI**; it measures how people allocate time across paid, unpaid and care work.

Q10. The Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, associated with the Mahadayi/Goa region, is located on:

(a) Chorao Island

(b) Divar Island

(c) St. George Island

(d) Majuli Island

Ans: (a) — The Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary lies on **Chorao Island** along the Mandovi (Mahadayi) estuary in Goa; the river is also known for the Dudhsagar Falls.

ANSWER KEY · Q1–Q10

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
(b)	(d)	(b)	(a)	(c)
(b)	(d)	(b)	(c)	(a)

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For classroom use — verify current data before the examination.