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CURRENT AFFAIRS & ANALYSIS

Daily UPSC Booklet · Based on The Hindu

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SATURDAY

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COMPILED BY

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GS-3 · INDIAN ECONOMY

₹4,895-cr FDI Projects Cleared Under the Revised Framework

WHY IN NEWS

The Centre received **29 foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals worth ₹4,895.65 crore** under a revised framework that allows firms with up to **10% Chinese (land-border) ownership** to invest through the **automatic route**, the Ministry of Commerce & Industry said on Friday.

- The proposals were submitted by entities based in **Mauritius, the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands**.
- They span **information technology, artificial intelligence, information & communication, manufacturing, transport, pharmaceuticals and data centres** — high value-addition, technology-intensive sectors.
- The relaxation matters because **Press Note 3 (2020)** mandated prior government approval for investments from countries sharing a land border with India (China, Pakistan, etc.). Permitting a **10% de minimis stake** via the automatic route eases genuine, minority, portfolio-style participation while retaining a screen on controlling interests.
- It signals a calibrated balancing act — **attracting global capital and technology** without diluting the national-security rationale behind border-country FDI scrutiny.

PRELIMS POINTERS

FDI vs FPI: an investment of 10% or more of post-issue paid-up capital is FDI; below 10% it is FPI (portfolio).

Prohibited sectors: lottery, gambling & betting, chit funds, Nidhi companies, real-estate business (barring construction-development), tobacco cigars, atomic energy and railway operations.

Route by sector: defence 74% automatic (beyond via Government route); insurance 74%; single-brand retail 100% automatic; multi-brand retail 51% (Government route).

Governing law: FEMA (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019 replaced the earlier FEMA 20(R); DPIIT issues the consolidated FDI Policy; RBI and ED enforce.

₹4,895-cr. FDI projects come in under new framework

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre received a total of 29 foreign direct investment (FDI) projects worth ₹4,895.65 crore under a revised framework allowing firms with up to 10% Chinese ownership to invest via the automatic route, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Friday.

The proposals were submitted by entities based in Mauritius, the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Luxembourg, and the Cayman Islands.

The investments cover sectors such as information technology, artificial intelligence, information and communication, manufacturing, transport, pharmaceuticals, and data centres.

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The Hindu · New Delhi

◆ VALUE ADDITION — THE FDI REGIME, DECODED

- ◆ **What is FDI?** Investment by a person resident outside India through capital instruments, acquiring at least **10% of post-issue paid-up equity** (fully diluted) of a listed company, or any stake in an unlisted company. It is a long-term, **non-debt** capital flow.
- ◆ **Two routes:** the **Automatic Route** (no prior approval; only post-facto intimation to RBI — e.g., agriculture, auto-components, biotechnology greenfield) and the **Government Approval Route** (prior nod from the concerned ministry — e.g., banking public sector, broadcasting content, multi-brand retail, digital news & current-affairs streaming).
- ◆ **Regulatory architecture:** governed by the **FDI Policy 2020** and the **FEMA (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019** under **FEMA, 1999**. The **DPIIT** (Ministry of Commerce & Industry) is the nodal regulator; the **RBI** enforces the rules.
- ◆ **Top sources** — Singapore, Mauritius, UAE, Netherlands and the US together contribute over **75%** of gross FDI inflows.
- ◆ **Outward FDI** by Indian firms surged to **USD 29.2 billion in 2024-25** (up ~75% YoY); leading destinations were Singapore, the US, UAE, Mauritius and the Netherlands.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-3: Indian economy — mobilisation of resources; FDI; effects of liberalisation on the economy; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Centre Notifies the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS)

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) notified the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) — a ₹62,500-crore, Cabinet-approved (July 15) successor to the PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing (2020–FY26) — to deepen domestic assembly and local value addition: “Indian brand, Indian design, Indian IP.”

Centre notifies key scheme to manufacture mobile phones

The ₹62,500 cr. scheme, offering incentives for Indian brands, was cleared by Cabinet last month; it builds on PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing which ran from 2020 to FY26

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on Friday notified the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS), aimed at incentivising the domestic assembly of smartphones and greater local value addition in the process. “The time has come to focus on developing Indian brands,” IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said at an event announcing the scheme’s notification. “Indian brand, Indian design, Indian IP that’s the thought process.”

The ₹62,500 crore scheme had been approved by the Union Cabinet on July 15, and continues an earlier scheme that ran from 2020 to the last financial year.

With the notification and the announcement, the Ministry provided some fresh information about how the scheme would be operationalised. For instance, phone makers receive additional incentives for sourcing certain parts domestically.

This is on top of the base incentive (tapering down from 2.75-2.25% over the five-year tenure, with rates of 2.25-5% depending on the year and incremental sales) for assembly, plus 1.5% for sourcing components domestically (individual component incentives of 0.2-0.5%).



Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, center, addresses the media during the launch of the MPMS, in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

The 1.5% additional incentive would only be applicable if a firm is sourcing domestically for at least a quarter of the phones it sells in a given fiscal year.

While foreign phone-makers face a higher bar to avail incentives, the corpus is fungible overall, meaning there is no earmarked amount as such for domestic players. Indian brands — which will need to be majority-owned by Indian citizens and incorporated in India, along with intellectual property and trademark held locally — will have a flat 5% incentive throughout the scheme’s tenure, and are not subject to a minimum sales threshold applicable for other brands; they will have a baseline fixed at 2025-26.

Indian brands will also enjoy a domestic design and research and development incentive of 3%. Indian brands only need to demonstrate a ₹1,000 crore turnover, while others

need a minimum of ₹10,000 crore.

The scheme pushes expectant firms to grow production quickly. Incentives are only disbursed for sales that are beyond 15% the production of the previous fiscal year. For instance, if a unit produced ₹10 crore worth of phones in the preceding fiscal and then ₹12 crore in the next, it would only be eligible for incentives on production of ₹20 lakh. Briefing reporters on the details of the scheme, IT Secretary S. Krishnan said that it would create 60,000 “direct” jobs.

“Domestic value addition in mobile phone manufacturing is at 22%, which is a substantial deepening” of the sector, Mr. Krishnan said. “Our goal of doubling overall domestic value addition from 18-22% to 35-40% will be achieved in the coming days.” The latter target is in line with the value addition achieved by Chinese phone assembly units. The

number has a ceiling due to the global nature of electronics value chains, where various components crisscross the globe multiple times. Mr. Krishnan said that the phone manufacturing industry was important because “technology and skill transfer enables new sectors across the ecosystem (such as) laptops, gaming consoles, drone manufacturing, medical devices, components, tablets, smart watches and automobile windshields.”

A massive amount of phone assembly by firms like Apple and Samsung has moved into India, making India an exporter of finished handsets. “Around 70-75% of phones were imports in 2014-15, and now we’re exporters,” Mr. Krishnan pointed out. “India is the second largest phone manufacturer in the world and practically all phones sold here are made here.”

The government is aiming for ₹39 lakh crore in cumulative production (the combined sale value of the finished products) by the end of MPMS, which runs through 2030-31, and cumulative exports worth ₹15 lakh crore.

An empowered committee will make recommendations to the government on applications by Indian brands for incremental incentives, as well as any “non-fiscal” support from the government.

The Hindu · IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at the launch of the MPMS, New Delhi

- **Incentive structure:** a base incentive (tapering 2.75%→2.25% over the five-year tenure, at 2.25–5% depending on year and incremental sales) for assembly, **plus 1.5%** for sourcing components domestically (individual component incentives of 0.2–0.5%). The 1.5% top-up applies only if a firm sources domestically for **at least a quarter** of the phones it sells in a fiscal.
- **Preference for Indian brands:** majority Indian-owned, incorporated in India with IP and trademark held locally, they get a **flat 5% incentive** throughout, face **no minimum-sales threshold**, and enjoy an additional **3% design & R&D incentive**. Their turnover bar is just **₹1,000 crore**, versus **₹10,000 crore** for others.
- **From importer to exporter:** around **70–75% of phones were imports in 2014–15**; India is now the **world’s second-largest phone manufacturer**, with practically all phones sold domestically also made here as Apple and Samsung shifted assembly in.
- **Targets:** **₹39 lakh crore** in cumulative production and **₹15 lakh crore** in cumulative exports by the scheme’s end in **2030–31**. An empowered committee will clear incremental incentives and “non-fiscal” support.

Centre notifies key scheme to manufacture mobile phones

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This is on top of the base incentive (tapering down from 2.75-2.25% over the five year tenure, with rates of 2.25-5% depending on the year and the incremental sales) for the assembly itself. These additional incentives amount to 1.5% (with individual component incentives ranging



Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, centre, addresses the media during the launch of the MPMS, in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

from 0.2-0.5%).

The 1.5% additional incentive would only be applicable if a firm is sourcing domestically for at least a quarter of the phones it sells in a given fiscal year.

While foreign phone makers face a higher bar to avail incentives, the corpus is fungible overall, meaning there is no earmarked amount as such for domestic players. Indian brands – which will need to be majority-owned by Indian citizens and incorporated in India, along with intellectual property and trademark held locally – will have a flat 5% incentive throughout the scheme's tenure, and are not subject to a minimum sales threshold applicable for other brands; they will have a baseline fixed at 2025-26.

Indian brands will also enjoy a domestic design and research and development incentive of 5%. Indian brands only need to demonstrate a ₹1,000 crore turnover, while others

need a minimum of ₹10,000 crore.

The scheme pushes expectant firms to grow production quickly. Incentives are only disbursed for sales that are beyond 185% the production of the previous fiscal year. For instance, if a unit produced ₹10 crore worth of phones in the preceding fiscal and then ₹12 crore in the next, it would only be eligible for incentives on production of ₹50 lakh. Briefing reporters on the details of the scheme, IT Secretary S. Krishnan said that it would create 60,000 "direct" jobs.

"Domestic value addition in mobile phone manufacturing is at 23%, which is a substantial deepening" of the sector, Mr. Krishnan said. "Our goal of doubling overall domestic value addition from 18-22% to 35-40% will be achieved in the coming days." The latter target is in line with the value addition achieved by Chinese phone assembly units. The

number has a ceiling due to the global nature of electronics value chains, where various components crisscross the globe multiple times. Mr. Krishnan said that the phone manufacturing industry was important because "technology and skill transfer enables new sectors across the ecosystem (such as) laptops, gaming consoles, drone manufacturing, medical devices, components, tablets, smart watches and automobile windshields."

A massive amount of phone assembly by firms like Apple and Samsung has moved into India, making India an exporter of finished handsets. "Around 70-75% of phones were imports in 2014-15, and now we're exporters," Mr. Krishnan pointed out.

"India is the second largest phone manufacturer in the world and practically all phones sold here are made here."

The government is aiming for ₹9 lakh crore in cumulative production (the combined sale value of the finished products) by the end of MPMS, which runs through 2030-31, and cumulative exports worth ₹15 lakh crore.

An empowered committee will make recommendations to the government on applications by Indian brands for incremental incentives, as well as any "non-fiscal" support from the government.

The Hindu · IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at the launch of the MPMS, New Delhi

PRELIMS POINTERS

Scheme lineage: PLI for Large-Scale Electronics Manufacturing (2020) → MPMS (2025); MeitY is the nodal ministry; ICEA is the key industry association.

India's standing: the world's second-largest mobile-phone manufacturer and a net exporter of mobile phones since 2022-23; smartphones now rank among the top merchandise exports.

Policy anchors: Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Semicon India, and the components-ecosystem push covering PCBA, display and camera modules.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — WHY IT MATTERS

- ◆ **Deepening the value chain:** the sector's domestic value addition target is being pushed from ~18-23% to 35-40% — moving India from "screwdriver assembly" toward genuine component manufacturing (displays, cameras, PCBs, batteries).
- ◆ **Continuity with PLI:** MPMS builds on the electronics PLI that made mobile manufacturing a flagship of **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, while correcting the tilt toward large foreign contract-manufacturers by explicitly nurturing home-grown brands.
- ◆ **Strategic gains:** reduced import dependence, employment generation, supply-chain resilience amid global "China+1" diversification, and an ecosystem for laptops, wearables, medical devices and automotive electronics.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-3: Effects of liberalisation on the economy; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; inclusive growth; government budgeting and incentive design.

SC Lauds MGNREGA as a “Good, Effective Scheme”

WHY IN NEWS

A three-judge Bench led by CJI Surya Kant praised the repealed MGNREGA as a “salutary scheme” that was “neither a freebie nor an exploitation of rural workers,” while hearing a petition on delayed wages and a plea to elevate the **right to work to a fundamental right** under Article 21.

SC lauds scrapped MGNREGA as a ‘good, effective scheme’

The scheme was applauded by a three-judge Bench while hearing a petition on delayed wages under the defunct scheme; petition seeks to elevate the right to work as a fundamental right

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday praised the repealed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), calling it a “salutary scheme” that was neither a freebie nor an exploitation of rural workers.

The court’s accolade came amid claims by civil rights groups that MGNREGA’s successor, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) or the VB-G RAM G Act, has seen a 50% decline in employment generation, despite an increase in guaranteed work days from 100 to 125 per household annually.

The new law reflects a shift from a demand-driven, rights-based framework to a centrally-controlled model. Also, the funding burden on States has increased three-fold, shifting from a 90:10 ratio to 60:40. The “MGNREGA was a good, effective scheme. It did a wonderful job in rural areas and was implemented pan-India. It was neither a freebie nor



MGNREGS labourers working in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. The VB-G RAM G is a replacement for MGNREGA. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

exploitation,” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, orally observed.

Compensation sought

The Bench was hearing a petition filed by activist Aruna Roy seeking directions for the government to pay delayed wages under the MGNREGA, along with compensation.

Advocates Prashant Bhushan, Cheryl D’Souza and Neha Rathi, appearing for Ms. Roy, urged the court to examine whether a law could prescribe minimum wages lower than the

threshold determined by the State concerned.

The petition also sought to elevate the statutory guarantee of rural work to the status of a fundamental right under Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

“The Constitution does not make the right to work a fundamental right. It is more a democratic aspiration under Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy)... To achieve that aspiration, the state formulates the policy by which work is provided at a graded, compensatory level. Should we treat it on par

with Article 21?” Justice Jyotsna Bagchi asked Mr. Bhushan. Mr. Bhushan said the right to lead a dignified life is part of Article 21. “A dignified life requires you to get employment at minimum wages. Anything below minimum wages is forced labour,” he submitted.

Justice Bagchi said a minimum wage threshold might risk shrinking employment opportunities, while Chief Justice Kant noted that wages were usually linked to prevalent local conditions.

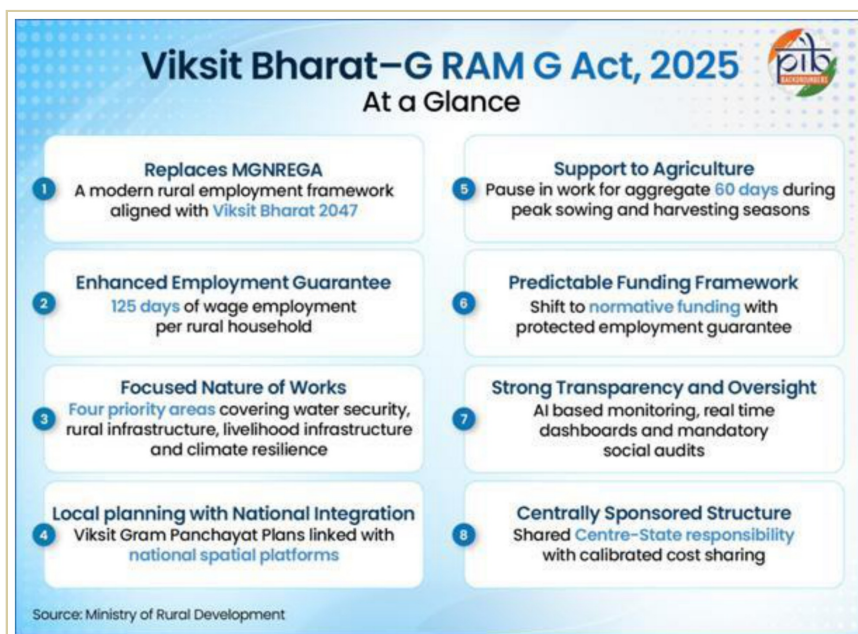
Justice V. Mohana stated that the issues raised by Mr. Bhushan must be examined afresh in light of the new law, rather than under the MGNREGA. “We have to see fresh details, fresh statistics,” Justice Mohana said.

Mr. Bhushan submitted that States were required to provide nearly half the funds under the new law. “The number of employments has come down by half. States have no money,” he said.

The court asked him to file a new petition while disposing of the current one.

The Hindu · MGNREGS labourers, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu

- Civil-rights groups claim MGNREGA's successor — the **Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar & Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM G Act** — has seen a **~50% decline in employment generation**, even as guaranteed workdays rose from **100 to 125** per household.
- The new law marks a shift from a **demand-driven, rights-based** framework to a **centrally-controlled** model; the funding burden on States has **tripled**, moving from a **90:10 to a 60:40** Centre-State ratio.
- The petition (filed by activist **Aruna Roy**) seeks directions to pay delayed wages with compensation, and to recognise a statutory guarantee of work as a fundamental right under **Article 21 (right to life)**.
- **Bench observations:** a dignified life requires employment at minimum wages — “anything below minimum wages is forced labour” (adv. Prashant Bhushan); yet a minimum-wage floor **might shrink employment** (Justice Bagchi), with wages usually tied to prevalent local conditions. The right to work is a **DPSP aspiration (Article 41, Part IV)**, not yet a fundamental right; the Court asked for a fresh petition.



Viksit Bharat–G RAM G Act, 2025 at a glance · Ministry of Rural Development (PIB)

Feature	MGNREGA	Proposed VB–G Ram G Bill
Guaranteed Workdays	Provides a legal guarantee of at least 100 days of wage employment annually.	Increases the statutory guarantee to 125 days of wage employment per household.
Wage Funding	The central government bears 100% of the cost for unskilled labour wages.	Mandates a 60:40 Centre-State cost sharing model for most states' wage bills.
Nature of Right	Justiciable Right – Citizens can sue if work is denied; funding is open-ended.	Schematic Entitlement – "Guarantee" is limited by the fixed budget cap.
Budgeting Approach	Funding is based on a "labour budget" reflecting actual demand for work from states.	The Centre will determine a fixed, state-wise annual funding allocation.
Operational Period	Designed to operate continuously without seasonal pauses .	Allows work suspension for up to 60 days during peak agricultural seasons .
Payment Frequency	Mandates wages be paid within 15 days of work completion.	Envisage paying wages weekly to improve workers' cash flow.

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MGNREGA vs the proposed VB-G RAM G framework — key shifts

PRELIMS POINTERS

The Act: NREGA 2005 (in force February 2006, renamed MGNREGA in 2009) guarantees 100 days of unskilled manual work per rural household per year on demand.

Key provisions: Section 3 (the guarantee); unemployment allowance if work is not provided within 15 days; work within 5 km; social audit under Section 17; wage revision under Section 6.

Delivery: demand-driven and self-targeting; Aadhaar-Based Payment Bridge; the NMMS app for real-time attendance; the Ministry of Rural Development is nodal.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — THE FEDERALISM & RIGHTS DEBATE

- ◆ **Justiciable right → schematic entitlement:** MGNREGA offered an open-ended, suable guarantee; the new "guarantee" is limited by a **fixed budget cap** and a Centre-determined, state-wise annual allocation — weakening the demand-driven design.

- ◆ **Fiscal federalism strain:** a 60:40 cost-sharing model shifts a heavier load onto States, raising **cooperative-federalism** concerns for a scheme long funded predominantly by the Centre.
- ◆ **Positives claimed:** normative funding with protected guarantee, four focused work-priorities (water security, rural & livelihood infrastructure, climate resilience), AI-based monitoring, real-time dashboards, mandatory social audits, and weekly wage payments.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-2: Government policies & interventions for development; welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; issues relating to poverty and hunger; issues & challenges pertaining to the federal structure.



GS-2 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Unimpeded Trade Needs IPMDA as the Answer

WHY IN NEWS

An expert commentary argues that maritime cooperation through the **Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)** – launched under the **Quad** in 2022 – is the most credible multilateral architecture to secure the free flow of trade across the Indo-Pacific.

Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer

Despite the diplomatic difficulties in United States-India relations due to mounting sanctions, it is increasingly clear that Washington needs regional powers such as New Delhi to support common global interests and values. Amid the U.S. visa issues for Indians and the energy crisis stemming from the war in West Asia, Indian and U.S. Foreign and Commerce Ministers have underscored the need for reciprocal trade and energy agreements. While the prime objectives in the present relations are clear, the strategy needs renewed focus on maritime domain awareness (MDA), which is crucial for the 'unimpeded trade' and has been unequivocally agreed to by both sides.

The Indo-Pacific is a trade artery
The West Asia crisis has demonstrated that the Indo-Pacific is not only a crucial geostrategic location for India and the U.S. but also for the rest of the world. Geoeconomically, it is the circulatory system of the global economy, a vast maritime corridor through which nearly \$7 trillion in trade flows annually, connecting energy producers in the Persian Gulf to manufacturing hubs in East Asia and consumer markets across the Americas. Some of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints, the Straits of Malacca, the Lombok, and the Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb, and Mozambique channels sit squarely within its waters, crucial for both energy and container supplies. Yet, this indispensable artery of global commerce is increasingly being threatened by a convergence of state-sponsored coercion, illegal maritime activity, and a dangerous surveillance gap – geographically, jurisdictionally and institutionally – that even the U.S. is finding challenging to address alone.

The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) launched under the Quad framework in 2022, represents the most credible multilateral architecture yet devised to address this problem. It is a practical, technology-based mechanism for sharing near-real-time maritime data across partner nations to detect, deter, and respond to threats to the free flow of trade. And its full



Pooja Bhatt
Teaches maritime geopolitics at the O.P. Jindal Global University

operationalisation is anchored in robust U.S.-India cooperation under Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.), which is now a strategic imperative. At the technological level, in 2025, India has already purchased SeaVision technology from the U.S., which includes software enhancements, training, and logistical support necessary for mutual MDA cooperation.

A surveillance deficit

The Indo-Pacific suffers from a persistent and widening maritime surveillance deficit. As a multilayered technological assimilation, MDA provides an effective understanding of the maritime domain and its impacts on security, safety, the economy, and the environment. Across the broader waters of the Indian Ocean, which connect to the South China Sea and the Western Pacific, hundreds of vessels routinely disable their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders – a phenomenon analysts call "going dark" – likely to evade sanctions, conceal cargo, and cause safety and environmental threats.

Such vessels may also be engaged in smuggling or ship-to-ship transfers of contraband. Many smaller fishing vessels fall outside mandatory AIS transponder carriage requirements, and depending on the applicable national and international regulatory framework, they are also found engaged in illegal fishing practices in other nations' waters or even at high seas. This depletes regional stocks and undermines the food security of littoral states.

Furthermore, as witnessed in recent times, non-state as well as state-affiliated actors are conducting grey-zone operations designed to intimidate and coerce, while escaping any legal or conventional military response. The Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration 2026 (IPMSC), under the IPMDA architecture, is as elegant in its pragmatism as in its cooperation, based on a shared understanding that no country can monitor the vast oceans alone. By integrating data from commercial satellite-based radio-frequency monitoring, radar fusion, and existing partner-nation sensor networks, and

sharing it with like-minded partners, it creates a layered, near-continuous picture of maritime activities.

The beneficiaries

For the U.S., regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean is essential if it aims to focus on its immediate neighbourhood in the Pacific and the Atlantic. For India, its Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), established in Gurugram in 2018, is a natural institutional complement to IPMDA's regional hub architecture. IPMDA is precisely the kind of arrangement that respects India's sovereignty while amplifying its reach. With the basics already in place, U.S.-India cooperation is necessary but not sufficient.

The full potential of IPMDA/IPMSC will be realised only through the active participation of existing Quad partners as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) partner states, the Pacific Island nations that constitute critical maritime corridors. The European Union, which has upheld the importance of free and open trade since the Hormuz crisis, signals an appetite for engagement that Washington and New Delhi must cultivate.

The contributions and benefits of IPMDA/IPMSC for smaller, capacity-constrained partners, such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Fiji, are significant. These countries have independent surveillance infrastructure, but their waters are frequently exploited because these systems remain ineffective at addressing maritime crimes beyond their jurisdictions. This provides an opportunity for collaboration.

The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has systematically dismantled the assumption that open trade is unilaterally sustainable. The freedom of navigation upon which global supply chains depend is increasingly contested, and such contestation, unabated, has become precedent in recent years. In a region where coercion has increasingly become the currency of power, transparency must present itself as a form of deterrence.

Maritime cooperation through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) can strengthen the Indo-Pacific's trading system

The Hindu · Op-Ed by Pooja Bhatt, O.P. Jindal Global University

- **What IPMDA does:** a practical, technology-based mechanism for sharing **near-real-time maritime data** across partner nations to detect, deter and respond to threats. Its full operationalisation is anchored in robust **US-India cooperation under the Quad** (India, Australia, Japan, US). In 2025, India purchased **SeaVision** technology from the US (software enhancements, training, logistical support).
- **The surveillance deficit:** across the Indian Ocean – connecting to the South China Sea and Western Pacific – hundreds of vessels routinely “**go dark**,” disabling their **Automatic Identification System (AIS)** transponders to evade sanctions, conceal cargo, smuggle, tranship contraband, and engage in **illegal fishing** that depletes stocks and threatens the **food security of littoral states**.

- **Grey-zone threats:** state and non-state actors conduct coercive operations while escaping any conventional military response.
- The Quad's **Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration 2026 (IPMSC)** fuses commercial satellite radio-frequency monitoring, radar, and partner sensor networks into a **layered, near-continuous** maritime picture.
- India's **Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**, set up in Gurugram in 2018, is a natural institutional complement that **respects India's sovereignty while amplifying its reach**. Beneficiaries include ASEAN, Pacific Islands, Bangladesh, Maldives, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Fiji; the EU signals appetite post-Hormuz.

Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer

Despite the diplomatic difficulties in United States-India relations due to mounting sanctions, it is increasingly clear that Washington needs regional powers such as New Delhi to support common global interests and values. Amid the U.S. visa issues for Indians and the energy crisis stemming from the war in West Asia, Indian and U.S. Foreign and Commerce Ministers have underscored the need for reciprocal trade and energy agreements. While the prime objectives in the present relations are clear, the strategy needs renewed focus on maritime domain awareness (MDA), which is crucial for the 'unimpeded trade' and has been unequivocally agreed to by both sides.

The Indo-Pacific is a trade artery

The West Asia crisis has demonstrated that the Indo-Pacific is not only a crucial geostrategic location for India and the U.S. but also for the rest of the world. Geoeconomically, it is the circulatory system of the global economy, a vast maritime corridor through which nearly \$7 trillion in trade flows annually, connecting energy producers in the Persian Gulf to manufacturing hubs in East Asia and consumer markets across the Americas. Some of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints, the Straits of Malacca, the Lombok, and the Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb, and Mozambique channels sit squarely within its waters, crucial for both energy and container supplies. Yet, this indispensable artery of global commerce is increasingly being threatened by a convergence of state-sponsored coercion, illegal maritime activity, and a dangerous surveillance gap – geographically, jurisdictionally and institutionally – that even the U.S. is finding challenging to address alone.

The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) launched under the Quad framework in 2022, represents the most credible multilateral architecture yet devised to address this problem. It is a practical, technology-based mechanism for sharing near-real-time maritime data across partner nations to detect, deter, and respond to threats to the free flow of trade. And its full



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operationalisation is anchored in robust U.S.-India cooperation under Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.), which is now a strategic imperative. At the technological level, in 2025, India has already purchased SeaVision technology from the U.S., which includes software enhancements, training, and logistical support necessary for mutual MDA cooperation.

A surveillance deficit

The Indo-Pacific suffers from a persistent and widening maritime surveillance deficit. As a multilayered technological assimilation, MDA provides an effective understanding of the maritime domain and its impacts on security, safety, the economy, and the environment.

Across the broader waters of the Indian Ocean, which connect to the South China Sea and the Western Pacific, hundreds of vessels routinely disable their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders – a phenomenon analysts call "going dark" – likely to evade sanctions, conceal cargo, and cause safety and environmental threats.

Such vessels may also be engaged in smuggling or ship-to-ship transfers of contraband. Many smaller fishing vessels fall outside mandatory AIS transponder carriage requirements, and depending on the applicable national and international regulatory framework, they are also found engaged in illegal fishing practices in other nations' waters or even at high seas. This depletes regional stocks and undermines the food security of littoral states.

Furthermore, as witnessed in recent times, non-state as well as state-affiliated actors are conducting grey-zone operations designed to intimidate and coerce, while escaping any legal or conventional military response. The Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration 2026 (IPMSC), under the IPMDA architecture, is as elegant in its pragmatism as in its cooperation, based on a shared understanding that no country can monitor the vast oceans alone. By integrating data from commercial satellite-based radio-frequency monitoring, radar fusion, and existing partner-nation sensor networks, and

sharing it with like-minded partners, it creates a layered, near-continuous picture of maritime activities.

The beneficiaries

For the U.S., regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean is essential if it aims to focus on its immediate neighbourhood in the Pacific and the Atlantic. For India, its Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), established in Gurugram in 2018, is a natural institutional complement to IPMDA's regional hub architecture. IPMDA is precisely the kind of arrangement that respects India's sovereignty while amplifying its reach. With the basics already in place, U.S.-India cooperation is necessary but not sufficient.

The full potential of IPMDA/IPMSC will be realised only through the active participation of existing Quad partners as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) partner states, the Pacific Island nations that constitute critical maritime corridors. The European Union, which has upheld the importance of free and open trade since the Hormuz crisis, signals an appetite for engagement that Washington and New Delhi must cultivate.

The contributions and benefits of IPMDA/IPMSC for smaller, capacity-constrained partners, such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Fiji, are significant. These countries have independent surveillance infrastructure, but their waters are frequently exploited because these systems remain ineffective at addressing maritime crimes beyond their jurisdictions. This provides an opportunity for collaboration.

The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has systematically dismantled the assumption that open trade is unilaterally sustainable. The freedom of navigation upon which global supply chains depend is increasingly contested, and such contestation, unrelenting, has become precedent in recent years. In a region where coercion has increasingly become the currency of power, transparency must present itself as a form of deterrence.

Maritime cooperation through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) can strengthen the Indo-Pacific's trading system

The Hindu · Op-Ed by Pooja Bhatt, O.P. Jindal Global University

PRELIMS POINTERS

Origin: IPMDA was launched at the 2022 Quad Summit in Tokyo; the Quad (India, US, Japan, Australia) began in 2007 and was revived in 2017.

India's maritime architecture: the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region at Gurugram (2018), the SAGAR vision (2015), the Colombo Security Conclave, and MAHASAGAR as the successor framing.

Tech core: it fuses commercial satellite radio-frequency data with AIS to expose "dark shipping" – vessels that switch off transponders to conceal illegal activity.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — ANCHORS & CHOKEPOINTS

- ◆ **Why the Indo-Pacific is a "trade artery":** nearly \$7 trillion in trade flows through it annually, via chokepoints – the Straits of Malacca, Lombok, Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb and the Mozambique Channel.
- ◆ **MDA** = a multilayered understanding of the maritime domain and its impact on security, safety, the economy and the environment.
- ◆ **India's maritime vision:** IPMDA dovetails with SAGAR/"MAHASAGAR," IFC-IOR data-sharing, and Quad working groups on maritime security.

GS-2 · SOCIAL JUSTICE

UDISE+ 2025-26: Ensuring Equity Amid Educational Progress

WHY IN NEWS

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report records notable progress in India's school system — but flags persistent **regional and social disparities**, underscoring the challenge of guaranteeing equitable, inclusive and quality education.

Ensuring equity amid India's educational progress

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report highlights notable progress in India's school education system, covering 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers. Progress has been recorded in gross enrolment, student retention, dropout reduction, teacher availability, and educational infrastructure. However, the report also shows that regional and social disparities persist in access, resources, learning opportunities, and educational outcomes.

Regional and social imbalances
The report confirms that significant variations exist across socioeconomic groups and geographic regions in terms of various indicators. The distribution of enrolled students shows that Andhra Pradesh leads in Aadhaar seeding (99.6%), followed by Chandigarh (99%), while Meghalaya records the lowest rate (35%), compared with the national average of 90.2%. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share of schools and student enrolment, while Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh have the lowest shares of schools relative to enrolment, indicating higher student-school ratios.

At the school level, West Bengal has recorded the highest proportion of foundational and preparatory schools (79% of total), and among the lowest secondary schools (11%); Chandigarh has the highest secondary schools (83%) and the lowest foundational and preparatory schools (5%) of total. The social composition of enrolled students shows significant variation across regions. Chandigarh and Delhi have the highest proportions of General category students, while Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Ladakh have high proportions of Schedule Tribe (ST) enrolment. Punjab records one of the highest shares of Scheduled Caste (SC) enrolment, whereas Other Backward Classes representation is particularly high in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

At the national level, the GER has recorded highest for OBCs (49%), followed by General (27%), SCs (17%), and STs (10%). Thus, GER indicates large differences in school education enrolment in comparison to their corresponding population of each social group.

The Gender Parity Index across all school levels shows higher girls' enrolment and participation than boys across most of the States/Union Territories. The UDISE+ data show that students from minority communities account for more than 20% of enrolment, with



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Muslims and Parsis among the major minority groups. The average enrolment per school shows that Chandigarh registers the highest average enrolment per school (1,194), followed by Delhi (788), while Ladakh records the lowest average enrolment (64), indicating variation in the size of the schools across the country.

The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is an important factor influencing students' performance and achievement. The PTR varies highly, registering lowest in Union Territories and highest in densely populated States. A significant inter-State variation in PTR exists across pedagogical stages; i.e., foundational, preparatory, and middle PTRs are generally lower than secondary across most of the States. Jharkhand records the highest Secondary PTR (43), followed by Uttar Pradesh, signifying a heavy workload on teachers. On the other hand, Sikkim has the lowest secondary PTR (6), followed by Ladakh. The GER varies significantly at the levels of schools and regions across the country. Meghalaya records the highest Foundational GER (131), followed by Mizoram, while Bihar has the lowest GER (24), preceded by Uttar Pradesh. Meghalaya again records the highest Preparatory GER (77), followed by Manipur, whereas Gujarat has the lowest GER (74), preceded by Bihar. Chandigarh and Meghalaya record the highest Middle GER (118), followed by Delhi. On the contrary, Bihar has the lowest GER (70), preceded by Nagaland. Similarly, Chandigarh registers the highest Secondary GER (109), followed by Goa, while Bihar has the lowest GER (48), preceded by Nagaland.

The dropout rate determines the attainment and transition rate to the next stage of schools. Bihar accounts for the highest preparatory dropout rate (7.9%), followed by Meghalaya. On the other hand, many States/Union Territories such as Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra do not report dropout. Similarly, Bihar records the highest middle-level dropout rate (9%), followed by Uttar Pradesh. While several States/Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh do not register dropouts at this stage, Ladakh records the highest secondary dropout rate (14.8%), followed by Karnataka. West Bengal has the lowest dropout rate (1.5%), preceded by Odisha.

Persistent gaps
Generally, access to schooling has improved significantly over the years. Most children now have a school at a suitable distance, but regional differences continue. Remotely located places, hilly, tribal and border areas still have limited schools and transport facilities, where school-going children face greater difficulties in attending school regularly, such as in Jangshir district of Uttarakhand, Ganjam and Kandhamal districts of Odisha, Kathu district of Jammu and

Kashmir, and Palghar district of Maharashtra. Simultaneously, children from SCs, STs, minorities, and economically poor families have a greater likelihood to face different barriers that limit their enrolment, attendance, and completion of schooling.

School infrastructure has improved in several areas of the country, i.e., access to drinking water and electricity. However, the availability of infrastructure varies regionally across the country. Educationally backward districts are still struggling to provide a learning environment in rural schools in comparison to urban areas. Teacher availability is a factor that significantly influences educational outcomes. The report shows that many States have recruited qualified teachers, while teacher shortages continue in several regions. Rural and remote schools often face a shortage of teachers performing multiple classes and subjects and many other non-teaching responsibilities allotted by the government. High student-teacher ratios reduce the individual attention students receive and adversely affect the learning process. Despite progress in girls' schooling, challenges persist in reducing dropout rates, enhancing transition from primary to secondary education, and providing sufficient and suitable facilities for disabled children. Inclusive infrastructure, accessible classrooms, and supportive teaching practices are essential for equitable education.

Targeted investment will help
The UDISE+ 2025-26 report shows that educational inequality persists across accessibility, infrastructure, teacher availability, digital resources, and social inclusion. Addressing these dimensions collectively is essential for equitable educational development. In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, targeted investment in educationally deprived regions, improved digital infrastructure, adequate teacher deployment, and stronger support for disadvantaged groups can help bridge persistent gaps.

Regional and social imbalances continue to influence educational opportunities and learning conditions. Reducing these disparities requires a balanced approach that collectively improves infrastructure, promotes equitable teacher deployment, strengthens inclusive social and economic policies, and provides dedicated support for disadvantaged social groups. A regionally and socially balanced approach that integrates educational quality, equity, and accessibility will help create a more inclusive education system, address the paradox of progress in India's evolving school education landscape, and contribute to the country's long-term social, economic, and regional development.

The Hindu · Analysis of the UDISE+ 2025-26 report

- **Scale:** the system covers **1.47 million schools, 240 million students and 10.2 million teachers**. Progress is visible in gross enrolment, retention, dropout reduction, teacher availability and infrastructure.
- **Disparities persist** in gross enrolment ratios (GER), dropout rates, pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) and infrastructure across regions and social groups:
 - **Aadhaar seeding:** Andhra Pradesh leads (99.6%), Chandigarh (99%); Meghalaya lowest (35%); national average 90.2%.
 - **PTR:** lowest in UTs, highest in densely populated States — Jharkhand has the highest secondary PTR (43), Sikkim the lowest (6) — signalling uneven teacher workloads.
 - **GER by social group:** OBCs (49%) > General (27%) > SCs (17%) > STs (10%) — large gaps relative to each group's population.
 - **Dropout:** highest secondary dropout in Ladakh (14.8%), followed by Karnataka; West Bengal lowest (1.5%).

- **Persistent gaps:** remote, hilly, tribal and border areas — e.g., **Bageshwar** (Uttarakhand), **Ganjam & Kandhamal** (Odisha), **Kathua** (J&K) and **Palghar** (Maharashtra) — still lack schools and transport, hurting regular attendance; teacher shortages and multi-grade teaching persist.
- **Way forward:** in line with **NEP 2020**, targeted investment in deprived regions, improved digital infrastructure, adequate teacher deployment and stronger support for disadvantaged groups.

Ensuring equity amid India's educational progress

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report highlights notable progress in India's school education system, covering 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers. Progress has been recorded in gross enrolment, student retention, dropout reduction, teacher availability, and educational infrastructure. However, the report also shows that regional and social disparities persist in access, resources, learning opportunities, and educational outcomes. Disparities in gross enrolment ratios (GER), dropout rates, pupil-teacher ratios, and infrastructure availability across regions and social groups indicate the ongoing challenge of guaranteeing equitable, inclusive, and quality education in India.

Regional and social imbalances

The report confirms that significant variations exist across socioeconomic groups and geographic regions in terms of various indicators. The distribution of enrolled students shows that Andhra Pradesh leads in Aadhaar seeding (99.6%), followed by Chandigarh (99%), while Meghalaya records the lowest rate (35%), compared with the national average of 90.2%. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share of schools and student enrolment, while Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh have the lowest shares of schools relative to enrolment, indicating higher student-school ratios.

At the school level, West Bengal has recorded the highest proportion of foundational and preparatory schools (79% of total), and among the lowest secondary schools (11%). Chandigarh has the highest secondary schools (85%) and the lowest foundational and preparatory schools (5%) of total. The social composition of enrolled students shows significant variation across regions. Chandigarh and Delhi have the highest proportions of General category students, while Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Ladakh have high proportions of Scheduled Tribe (ST) enrolment. Punjab records one of the highest shares of Scheduled Caste (SC) enrolment, whereas Other Backward Classes representation is particularly high in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

At the national level, the GER has recorded highest for GOCs (49%), followed by General (27%), SC (17%), and STs (10%). Thus, GER indicates large differences in school education enrolment in comparison to their corresponding population of each social group.

The Gender Parity Index across all school levels shows higher girls' enrolment and participation than boys across most of the States/Union Territories. The UDISE+ data show that students from minority communities account for more than 20% of enrolment, with

Muslims and Parsis among the major minority groups. The average enrolment per school shows that Chandigarh registers the highest average enrolment per school (1,154), followed by India (788), while Ladakh records the lowest average enrolment (64), indicating variation in the size of the schools across the country.

The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is an important factor influencing students' performance and achievement. The PTR varies highly, registering lowest in Union Territories and highest in densely populated States. A significant inter-State variation in PTR exists across pedagogical stages; i.e., foundational, preparatory, and middle PTRs are generally lower than secondary across most of the States. Jharkhand records the highest Secondary PTR (43), followed by Uttar Pradesh, signifying a heavy workload on teachers. On the other hand, Sikkim has the lowest secondary PTR (6), followed by Ladakh. The GER varies significantly at the levels of schools and regions across the country. Meghalaya records the highest Foundational GER (131), followed by Mizoram, while Bihar has the lowest GER (24), preceded by Uttar Pradesh. Meghalaya again records the highest Preparatory GER (171), followed by Manipur, whereas Gujarat has the lowest GER (74), preceded by Bihar. Chandigarh and Meghalaya record the highest Middle GER (188), followed by Odisha. On the contrary, Bihar has the lowest GER (70), preceded by Nagaland. Similarly, Chandigarh registers the highest Secondary GER (109), followed by Goa, while Bihar has the lowest GER (48), preceded by Nagaland.

The dropout rate determines the attainment and transition rate to the next stage of schools. Bihar accounts for the highest preparatory dropout rate (7.9%), followed by Meghalaya. On the other hand, many States/Union Territories such as Odisha, Haryana and Maharashtra do not report dropout. Similarly, Bihar records the highest middle-level dropout rate (9%), followed by Uttar Pradesh. While several States/Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh do not register dropouts at this stage, Ladakh records the highest secondary dropout rate (14.8%), followed by Karnataka. West Bengal has the lowest dropout rate (1.5%), preceded by Telangana.

Persistent gaps

Generally, access to schooling has improved significantly over the years. Most children now have a school at a suitable distance, but regional differences continue. Remotely located places, hilly, tribal and border areas still have limited schools and transport facilities, where school-going children face greater difficulties in attending school regularly, such as in Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand, Ganjam and Kandhamal districts of Odisha, Kathua district of Jammu and

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Teacher availability is a factor that significantly influences educational outcomes. The report shows that many States have recruited qualified teachers, while teacher shortages continue in several regions. Rural and remote schools often face a shortage of teachers performing multiple classes and subjects and many other non-teaching responsibilities allotted by the government. High student-teacher ratios reduce the individual attention students receive and adversely affect the learning process. Despite progress in girls' schooling, challenges persist in reducing dropout rates, enhancing transition from primary to secondary education, and providing sufficient and suitable facilities for disabled children. Inclusive infrastructure, accessible classrooms, and supportive teaching practices are essential for equitable education.

Targeted investment will help

The UDISE+ 2025-26 report shows that educational inequality persists across accessibility, infrastructure, teacher availability, digital resources, and social inclusion. Addressing these dimensions collectively is essential for equitable educational development. In line with the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), targeted investment in educationally deprived regions, improved digital infrastructure, adequate teacher deployment, and stronger support for disadvantaged groups can help bridge persistent gaps.

Regional and social imbalances continue to influence educational opportunities and learning conditions. Reducing these disparities requires a balanced approach that collectively improves infrastructure, promotes equitable teacher deployment, strengthens inclusive social and economic policies, and provides dedicated support for disadvantaged social groups. A regionally and socially balanced approach that integrates educational quality, equity, and accessibility will help create a more inclusive education system, address the paradox of progress in India's evolving school education landscape, and contribute to the country's long-term social, economic, and regional development.

The Hindu · Analysis of the UDISE+ 2025-26 report

PRELIMS POINTERS

UDISE+: the Unified District Information System for Education Plus, run by the Ministry of Education since 2018-19; it is India's largest school-education database.

Indicators: GER, NER, GPI (Gender Parity Index), PTR (pupil-teacher ratio) and dropout/transition rates; the Performance Grading Index (PGI) ranks states and UTs.

Legal & policy anchors: the RTE Act 2009 (Article 21A, 86th Amendment 2002, ages 6-14), NEP 2020 (100% GER in school education by 2030) and NIPUN Bharat for foundational literacy.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — KNOW THE INDICATORS

- ◆ **UDISE+** is India's largest school-education management information system, run by the **Ministry of Education**, capturing school-, teacher- and student-level data.
- ◆ **GER** = enrolment at a level ÷ official age-group population; **NER** counts only the right-age children; **PTR** = students per teacher; **GPI** (Gender Parity Index) gauges girls' vs boys' participation.
- ◆ **Equity levers:** RTE Act 2009, PM POSHAN, Samagra Shiksha and the NEP 2020's foundational-literacy and inclusion goals.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-2: Issues relating to development and management of social sector/services (education); government policies & interventions; mechanisms for protection of vulnerable sections.

“Saving Faces”: Facial Recognition at Protest Sites

WHY IN NEWS

An editorial warns that India is **normalising biometric surveillance of political gatherings** — deploying facial recognition at protest sites — **without first settling**, through legislation and judicial oversight, when the state may lawfully do so.

Saving faces

Use of facial recognition equipment at protest sites is worrisome

India appears to be normalising the technical ability to subject political gatherings to searchable biometric surveillance without first having settled, through legislation and judicial oversight, the circumstances in which the state may lawfully do so. While the Delhi Police have continued to deny the use of excessive force and manhandling people involved in the Cockroach Janta Party protests, contrary to protestors' testimonies, facial recognition equipment was present at the protest site while the demonstrations were on. According to its affidavit to the Supreme Court of India, the police deployed a facial recognition system (including Artificial Intelligence-enabled cameras to scan faces in real-time against a database), a mobile surveillance van and a command and control vehicle, smart spectacles for identifying individuals on the move, and drones and videographers; the van and the spectacles have been tied to private contractors. The police have also not addressed whether actual biometric processing occurred with every individual within the range of cameras. Even if the police discarded the images associated with infructuous checks, that the data may have been accessible to private contractors, whose terms of engagement are unclear, is worrisome. However, no statute governs the use of facial recognition systems; the

governing the use of facial recognition systems, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, whose data-processing obligations are not yet in force, still makes broad exemptions for state agencies. The Automated Facial Recognition System of the National Crime Records Bureau can be used to identify criminals, unidentified bodies, and so on, and the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act 2022 expanded the set of records that the police may collect from specified persons. However, these actions are still only allowed *vis-à-vis* specific groups of people.

Irrespective of the constitutional validity of the police's actions, the chilling effect on potential participants may also curtail the right to protest. The state has to pass a well-established proportionality test when interfering with the right to privacy. While the first question — the existence of a legitimate objective — already poses important challenges to facial recognition en masse, the technology is indiscriminate at the point of capture. After all, there is a less restrictive but equally effective alternative (e.g., conventional policing). At this time, far too many questions are unanswered — including over the data-processing agreements, access, legal provisions that authorised major decisions, and the expected rate of false positives — for the use of facial recognition with all protesters to be justified.

The Hindu · Editorial

- Per its affidavit to the Supreme Court, the police deployed at the “Cockroach Janta Party” protests a **facial-recognition system** (AI-enabled cameras scanning faces in real time against a database), a **mobile surveillance van**, a **command-and-control vehicle**, **smart spectacles**, and **drones and videographers** — with the van and spectacles tied to **private contractors**.
- Whether biometric processing occurred for **every individual** in camera range is unclear, and data may have been accessible to private contractors on **opaque terms**.
- **Legal vacuum**: no statute governs facial recognition; the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act** is not yet in force and carries **broad exemptions for state agencies**. The NCRB's **Automated Facial Recognition System** and the **Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022** allow record-collection — but only **vis-à-vis specific groups**, not the public at large.
- **Chilling effect**: mass facial recognition can curtail the right to protest. The state must satisfy the **proportionality test** — legitimate aim, necessity, and a less-restrictive alternative (e.g., conventional policing) — yet the technology is **indiscriminate at the point of capture**, with unresolved questions on false positives.

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Irrespective of the constitutional validity of the police's actions, the chilling effect on potential participants may also curtail the right to protest. The state has to pass a well-established proportionality test when interfering with the right to privacy. While the first question – the existence of a legitimate objective – already poses important challenges to facial recognition en masse, the technology is indiscriminate at the point of capture. After all, there is a less restrictive but equally effective alternative (e.g., conventional policing). At this time, far too many questions are unanswered – including over the data-processing agreements, access, legal provisions that authorised major decisions, and the expected rate of false positives – for the use of facial recognition with all protesters to be justified.

The Hindu · Editorial

PRELIMS POINTERS

Privacy law: K.S. Puttaswamy (2017) held privacy to be a fundamental right under Article 21; the proportionality test – legitimate aim, necessity, least-restrictive means – governs State intrusion.

Data protection: the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 is enacted but not yet in force, with wide exemptions for State agencies and no dedicated law on biometric surveillance.

On the ground: the NCRB's Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS); the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022 permits collection of biometric data.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — THE PRIVACY FRAMEWORK

- ◆ **K.S. Puttaswamy (2017):** privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21; any intrusion must pass a four-prong test – **legality, legitimate aim, proportionality and procedural safeguards**.
- ◆ **Surveillance reform gaps:** absence of an independent oversight body, purpose limitation, data-retention limits and audit trails for FRT deployment.
- ◆ **Balancing act:** security and law-enforcement utility vs the freedoms of expression, assembly and association under Article 19.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-2: Fundamental rights; government policies & issues in design/implementation. GS-3: Awareness in the field of IT; role of technology and associated concerns.

“Noise Annoys”: Enforcing Noise Norms Uniformly

WHY IN NEWS

An editorial argues India must enforce noise-pollution regulations **uniformly and consistently**, after the **Patna High Court** — in *Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar* — escalated to **statewide directives** (August 14 order) on high-decibel noise.

Noise annoys

India must enforce noise pollution regulations uniformly and consistently

In a February 2025 hearing in the matter of *Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar*, the Patna High Court acknowledged DJ trolleys and loudspeakers to be a major source of noise in Patna. After criticising the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) for failing to curb the menace, Justice Rajiv Roy directed the BSPCB to obtain reports from the police about permissions granted to operators of these noise sources and the action taken. In October, the police said they had seized equipment, levied fines, and so on over three months in Patna, Barh, and Fatuha but had taken no action in Masaurhi, a picture Justice Roy called “unbelievable” for suggesting that there were no noise violations there. In the course of these hearings, Justice Roy also summoned police officers and upbraided boilerplate affidavits, among others. The High Court’s August 14 order was a continuation of this escalation, culminating — for now — in Statewide directives on the emission of high-decibel noise. Effectively, the High Court’s actions illustrate how dismal enforcement has become despite the existence of comprehensive laws. Courts have repeatedly said that people have a right under Article 21 to be protected from unlawful noise. Today, with episodic enforcement having become endemic, the Patna High Court becoming a quasi-regulator is, at least as a stopgap measure, creditable.

It is absurd to expect the public to complain about every DJ or horn before the police can respond. The High Court’s directions to the authorities to pursue routine rather than complaints-based enforcement and to have DJs, sound-system operators, and event halls register themselves with the subdivisional authorities are the sort of proactive enforcement that regulating noise pollution in particular warrants. In fact, the High Court’s order also touched on a practical, everyday understanding of how loud-noise violations occur when it directed loudspeakers to stop playing at 9.55 p.m., five minutes before the law’s 10 p.m. cut-off, effectively allowing time for operators to wind up rather than permit the deceptively innocuous practice of carrying on past 10 p.m. because “it is just a few minutes”. Loud noise is often produced by ordinary social events such as festivals, weddings, political campaigns, and religious events, and enforcing rules creates friction with people who believe they have a right to practise their culture as they deem fit. Also, governments have an incentive to tolerate, rather than antagonise, their constituents. At the same time, having operators register themselves so that officials can regulate all of them equally rather than sporadically can also eliminate selective interventions. In the final analysis, the success of the High Court’s latest order should be measured by whether the State develops a consistent habit of enforcement.

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- In February 2025 the Court recognised **DJ trolleys and loudspeakers** as a major noise source in Patna and criticised the **Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB)**; Justice Rajiv Roy sought reports on permissions granted and action taken.
- **Uneven enforcement**: equipment was seized and fines levied in Patna, Barh and Fatuha, but **no action** in Masaurhi — a picture the judge called “unbelievable.”
- With the HC turning into a **quasi-regulator** as a stopgap, it ordered loudspeakers to stop at **9.55 p.m.** (five minutes before the 10 p.m. cut-off) and mandated **proactive registration** of DJs, sound-system operators and event halls with subdivisional authorities.
- Courts have repeatedly held that **Article 21** protects people from unlawful noise. Enforcement, however, creates friction with festivals, weddings, political and religious events — and governments have an incentive to **tolerate** constituents; success should be judged by whether the State builds a **consistent habit of enforcement**.

Noise annoys

India must enforce noise pollution regulations uniformly and consistently

In a February 2025 hearing in the matter of *Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar*, the Patna High Court acknowledged DJ trolleys and loudspeakers to be a major source of noise in Patna. After criticising the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) for failing to curb the menace, Justice Rajiv Roy directed the BSPCB to obtain reports from the police about permissions granted to operators of these noise sources and the action taken. In October, the police said they had seized equipment, levied fines, and so on over three months in Patna, Barh, and Fatuha but had taken no action in Masaurhi, a picture Justice Roy called “unbelievable” for suggesting that there were no noise violations there. In the course of these hearings, Justice Roy also summoned police officers and upbraided boilerplate affidavits, among others. The High Court’s August 14 order was a continuation of this escalation, culminating – for now – in Statewide directives on the emission of high-decibel noise. Effectively, the High Court’s actions illustrate how dismal enforcement has become despite the existence of comprehensive laws. Courts have repeatedly said that people have a right under Article 21 to be protected from unlawful noise. Today, with episodic enforcement having become endemic, the Patna High Court becoming a quasi-regulator is, at least as a stopgap measure, creditable.

It is absurd to expect the public to complain about every DJ or horn before the police can respond. The High Court’s directions to the authorities to pursue routine rather than complaints-based enforcement and to have DJs, sound-system operators, and event halls register themselves with the subdivisional authorities are the sort of proactive enforcement that regulating noise pollution in particular warrants. In fact, the High Court’s order also touched on a practical, everyday understanding of how loud-noise violations occur when it directed loudspeakers to stop playing at 9.55 p.m., five minutes before the law’s 10 p.m. cut-off, effectively allowing time for operators to wind up rather than permit the deceptively innocuous practice of carrying on past 10 p.m. because “it is just a few minutes”. Loud noise is often produced by ordinary social events such as festivals, weddings, political campaigns, and religious events, and enforcing rules creates friction with people who believe they have a right to practise their culture as they deem fit. Also, governments have an incentive to tolerate, rather than antagonise, their constituents. At the same time, having operators register themselves so that officials can regulate all of them equally rather than sporadically can also eliminate selective interventions. In the final analysis, the success of the High Court’s latest order should be measured by whether the State develops a consistent habit of enforcement.

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PRELIMS POINTERS

The rules: the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; the CPCB and State Pollution Control Boards enforce them.

Limits, day/night dB(A): industrial 75/70, commercial 65/55, residential 55/45 and silence-zone 50/40; night is 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Silence zones: a 100 m radius around hospitals, educational institutions and courts; In Re: Noise Pollution (2005) linked freedom from noise to Article 21.

◆ VALUE ADDITION — THRESHOLDS & RULES

- ◆ **WHO 2018 guidelines:** a health-protective level of **53 dB** for road-traffic noise; broadly, **<53–65 dB** is safe, **>75 dB** is harmful, and **120–140 dB** is the pain threshold.
- ◆ **Noise Pollution (Regulation & Control) Rules, 2000** (under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986) set ambient standards by zone – industrial (75/70 dB day/night), commercial (65/55), residential (55/45) and silence zones (50/40).
- ◆ **Enforcement bodies:** CPCB and State Pollution Control Boards; district administration and police for on-ground action.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-2: Governance and enforcement of regulations; role of regulatory bodies. GS-3: Environmental pollution and degradation; conservation.



Quotes of the Day — Thought Fodder

WHY IN NEWS

Eight bilingual quotations for Essay introductions/conclusions and GS-4 value-enrichment. Each captures a testable ethical or philosophical tension — use them to frame arguments, not merely to decorate.

Q1. विरोधाभास जीवन की विडंबनाओं को दर्शाते हैं।

Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life.

Q2. एक कृतज्ञ मन अति सुंदर होता है।

A grateful mind is very beautiful.

Q3. काँटा, कली का बदला हुआ रूप है।

A thorn is a changed bud.

Q4. जब दो हाथी लड़ते हैं, तब घास ही रौंदी जाती है।

When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets tramped.

खण्ड B SECTION B

Q5. प्रकृति जीवात्मा का प्रतीक है।

Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

Q6. एक अच्छे शिक्षित दिमाग में, हमेशा उत्तर से अधिक प्रश्न होंगे।

A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

Q7. कठोर निर्णयों को टालना सबसे कम नैतिक मार्ग है।

Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

Q8. उत्तम नेता वह है जो अपने अनुयायियों का अनुसरण करता है।

A good leader is one who follows the followers.

◆ HOW TO DEPLOY THESE QUOTES

- ◆ “Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life” & “A thorn is a changed bud” — on paradox, transformation and moral complexity; useful for essays on change, adversity and growth.
- ◆ “A grateful mind is very beautiful” & “Nature is the symbol of the spirit” — gratitude, aesthetics and the human-nature bond; pair with environmental ethics and inner well-being.
- ◆ “When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled” — power asymmetry and collateral harm; apt for geopolitics, federal conflict and the vulnerable.
- ◆ “A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers” — humility, critical thinking and lifelong learning.
- ◆ “Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course” — moral courage, accountability and decisiveness in public service (GS-4 case studies).
- ◆ “A good leader is one who follows the followers” — servant leadership, democratic responsiveness and citizen-centric governance.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE GS-4: Ethics & human interface — values, moral courage, leadership; Essay paper — enriching content with apt quotations.

PRACTICE ZONE

Mains · Prelims · Recap

Mains Q1 — GS-2

15 marks · 250 words

The transition from MGNREGA to the Viksit Bharat-G RAM G Act, 2025 represents a move from a demand-driven, rights-based guarantee to a centrally-controlled, budget-capped framework. Critically examine its implications for cooperative federalism and the right to work.

MODEL APPROACH

- **Intro:** note the SC's recent remark that MGNREGA was a “salutary scheme,” neither a freebie nor exploitation, and the ~50% reported fall in employment generation under the successor.
- **Body — Federalism:** the 90:10 → 60:40 cost-shift trebling States' burden; Centre-determined state-wise allocations vs earlier open-ended, demand-linked funding; strain on cooperative federalism.
- **Body — Right to work:** justiciable, suable guarantee reduced to a schematic entitlement capped by budget; right to work as a DPSP (Art 41) vs the plea to read it into Art 21; “below-minimum-wage = forced labour” argument.
- **Balance:** acknowledge gains — 125 guaranteed days, normative funding, social audits, AI monitoring, weekly wages, climate-resilience works.
- **Conclusion:** reforms must protect the demand-driven core and adequate financing so the guarantee stays real for the rural poor.

India is transitioning from an assembler to a value-adding manufacturer of electronics. In this light, evaluate the significance of the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) and recent FDI framework changes for Atmanirbhar Bharat.

MODEL APPROACH

- **Intro:** India as the world's second-largest phone manufacturer; ~70–75% of phones were imports in 2014-15, now largely made-in-India.
- **Body — MPMS:** ₹62,500-cr successor to PLI; base + 1.5% component-sourcing incentive; flat 5% + 3% design/R&D for Indian brands; value-addition target 18–23% → 35–40%; ₹39 lakh-cr production and ₹15 lakh-cr export goals by 2030-31.
- **Body — FDI easing:** 10% de minimis land-border stake via automatic route; balancing capital/technology inflow with security screening (Press Note 3, 2020).
- **Challenges:** component-import dependence, thin domestic R&D, global “China+1” competition, incentive fiscal cost.
- **Conclusion:** deepening the value chain and home-grown IP is key to durable self-reliance.

Prelims — 10 MCQs

1. With reference to FDI in India, consider the following:

1. FDI acquiring at least 10% of paid-up equity of a listed company is treated as a non-debt flow.
2. The RBI is the nodal agency that frames the FDI Policy.
3. Under the automatic route, only post-facto intimation to the RBI is required.

Which are correct?

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

2. The Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) is administered by:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| (a) DPIIT | (b) MeitY |
| (c) Ministry of Heavy Industries | (d) NITI Aayog |

3. Regarding the Viksit Bharat–G RAM G Act, 2025, consider:

1. It raises guaranteed employment from 100 to 125 days per household.
2. It retains the 90:10 Centre-State funding ratio of MGNREGA.
3. It permits work suspension of up to 60 days during peak agricultural seasons.

Which are correct?

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

4. The Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) is located at:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| (a) Kochi | (b) Visakhapatnam |
| (c) Gurugram | (d) Port Blair |

5. IPMDA and IPMSC 2026 are associated with which grouping?

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| (a) BIMSTEC | (b) The Quad |
| (c) IORA | (d) ASEAN Regional Forum |

6. “Going dark,” in maritime security, refers to vessels:

- (a) sailing at night without lights (b) disabling their AIS transponders
(c) using nuclear propulsion (d) entering silence zones

7. With reference to UDISE+, consider the following:

1. It is maintained by the Ministry of Education.
2. GER can exceed 100% due to over- and under-age enrolment.
3. PTR denotes the number of students per teacher.

Which are correct?

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

8. The four-prong proportionality test for privacy intrusions was laid down in:

- (a) Maneka Gandhi (1978) (b) K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)
(c) Kesavananda Bharati (1973) (d) Shreya Singhal (2015)

9. As per WHO 2018 guidelines cited, the health-protective level for road-traffic noise is about:

- (a) 33 dB (b) 53 dB
(c) 75 dB (d) 120 dB

10. The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 are framed under the:

- (a) Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 (b) Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
(c) Factories Act, 1948 (d) Disaster Management Act, 2005

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

1 → (b). FDI ≥10% of a listed firm's equity is a non-debt flow; the DPIIT (not RBI) frames the FDI Policy, while RBI enforces via FEMA rules. Statement 2 is wrong.

2 → (b). The MPMS was notified by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).

3 → (a). Days rise to 125 and a 60-day seasonal pause is allowed; funding shifts to 60:40 (not 90:10), so statement 2 is wrong.

4 → (c). The IFC-IOR was established at Gurugram in 2018.

5 → (b). Both are Quad-anchored maritime-domain-awareness initiatives.

6 → (b). “Going dark” means switching off the Automatic Identification System to evade tracking.

7 → (d). All three are correct — UDISE+ is run by the Ministry of Education; GER can exceed 100%; PTR = students per teacher.

8 → (b). The proportionality doctrine for privacy was articulated in the Puttaswamy (2017) judgment.

9 → (b). The cited WHO 2018 road-traffic-noise recommendation is 53 dB.

10 → (b). The 2000 Rules are notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

◆ QUICK REVISION RECAP ◆

- ◆ **FDI:** 29 projects, ₹4,895.65 cr; 10% land-border stake via automatic route; DPIIT nodal, RBI enforces; FEMA 1999 + NDI Rules 2019.
- ◆ **MPMS:** ₹62,500 cr; MeitY; Indian brands get flat 5% + 3% R&D; value addition 18-23% → 35-40%; ₹39 lakh-cr production, ₹15 lakh-cr exports by 2030-31.

- ♦ **VB-G RAM G Act 2025:** 100 → 125 days; 90:10 → 60:40; demand-driven → budget-capped; 60-day seasonal pause; weekly wages; social audits.
- ♦ **IPMDA/IPMSC 2026:** Quad MDA; India bought SeaVision (2025); AIS “going dark”; IFC-IOR at Gurugram (2018); ~\$7 tn Indo-Pacific trade.
- ♦ **UDISE+ 2025-26:** 1.47 M schools, 240 M students, 10.2 M teachers; GER OBC 49% > Gen 27% > SC 17% > ST 10%; NEP 2020 equity focus.
- ♦ **Facial recognition:** no governing statute; DPDP Act not in force with state exemptions; Puttaswamy (2017) proportionality; chilling effect on protest.
- ♦ **Noise:** Patna HC statewide directives; Art 21; WHO 53 dB; Noise Rules 2000 under EP Act 1986; CPCB/SPCBs enforce.

♦ PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS ♦

- ♦ **FDI vs FPI:** the cut-off is 10% of post-issue paid-up capital — 10% or more is FDI, below 10% is FPI. DPIIT frames policy; RBI/ED enforce.
- ♦ **MGNREGA years:** enacted 2005, in force February 2006, renamed 2009 — a favourite date-trap. Unemployment allowance triggers if work is not given within 15 days.
- ♦ **Quad:** founded 2007, revived 2017 — a security dialogue, not a treaty alliance; IPMDA was launched at the 2022 Tokyo Summit.
- ♦ **RTE:** Article 21A via the 86th Amendment (2002); ages 6-14; NEP 2020 targets 100% GER in school education by 2030 (not higher education).
- ♦ **Privacy:** Puttaswamy (2017) is a nine-judge Bench; privacy flows from Article 21; the DPDP Act 2023 is passed but awaits notification of rules.
- ♦ **Noise limits:** residential day/night is 55/45 dB(A); silence zones extend 100 m around hospitals, schools and courts; rules sit under the EP Act, 1986.