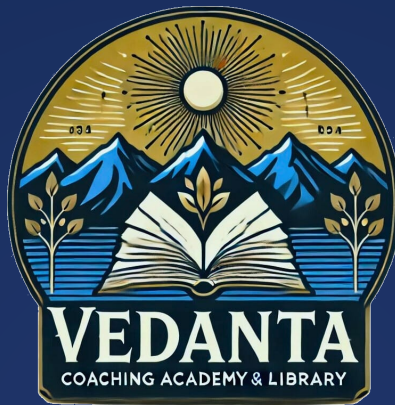


DAILY UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS



The Hindu Analysis

Current Affairs for UPSC & State PSC

26 August 2026

WEDNESDAY

India-China Border

Collegium & Judiciary

UNCCD Drought

Air Power & Theatre

Space Sector

TN Revenue Reform

UNCERD

Youth & Jobs

COMPILED BY

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

- ◆ Each topic follows a fixed flow: **Why in News** → **Analysis** → **Value Addition** → **Newspaper Clipping** → **Syllabus Link**.
- ◆ The **Value Addition** boxes carry Prelims-ready facts; the **Practice Zone** at the end has 2 Mains questions and 10 MCQs with a full answer key.
- ◆ Topic spread today — **GS 2**: 4 • **GS 3**: 4 • **Prelims**: 1.

EDITOR'S FOCUS FOR TODAY

- **Polity heavyweight**: collegium transparency — link Judges Cases, NJAC (2015) and RTI (2019).
- **IR & Security**: India–China SR talks and the theatre-command debate are prime GS-2/3 crossovers.
- **Environment & Economy**: UNCCD/desertification and TN revenue reform offer high-value data points.

01 India–China Border Delimitation Talks

GS 2 The Hindu · Page 1

WHY IN NEWS

During the 25th round of Special Representatives (SR) talks, NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing agreed to advance negotiations on delimiting parts of the disputed India–China boundary.

- India and China said both sides discussed ways to expand bilateral cooperation, maintain stability, ensure **peace and tranquility in the border areas**, and make progress on **boundary delimitation**, while sustaining transboundary cooperation.
- China's Foreign Ministry noted progress on delimitation after the 25th round of SR talks — in-depth discussions on advancing negotiations, strengthening border management and control, improving mechanism-building, and promoting cross-border cooperation.
- Neither side disclosed which parts of the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** were being explored for possible delimitation.
- At last year's SR talks, both sides had agreed to set up a working group to explore 'early harvest' border delimitation in some areas along the LAC.
- The SR mechanism on the boundary question was established in 2003 to explore a political framework for a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement.



The India–China border: Western, Middle and Eastern sectors along the LAC.

VALUE ADDITION — INDIA–CHINA BOUNDARY

- ◆ **Three sectors:** Western (Ladakh–Aksai Chin), Middle (Himachal, Uttarakhand) and Eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh).
- ◆ **LAC vs boundary:** The LAC is a notional line of control, not a mutually delineated, demarcated international boundary.
- ◆ **Doklam** is the tri-junction of India, China and Bhutan (2017 stand-off site).
- ◆ **Agreements:** 1993 Peace & Tranquillity Agreement; 1996 CBMs; 2005 Political Parameters & Guiding Principles; 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement.
- ◆ **October 2024:** disengagement patrolling agreement for Depsang and Demchok after the 2020 Galwan stand-off.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Depsang** and **Demchok** were the last friction points resolved (Oct 2024 patrolling pact).
- **McMahon Line** is the eastern boundary China disputes (Arunachal).
- **Aksai Chin** lies in the Western Sector, administered by China, claimed by India.

Syllabus link — GS 2: India and its neighbourhood; bilateral agreements involving India.



02 UN Panel Flags Violations Against SC, ST, Rohingya

PRELIMS The Hindu · Page 13

WHY IN NEWS

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) said it is 'gravely concerned' over reported human-rights violations against Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Rohingya refugees in India, on the ninth anniversary of the Rohingya crisis.

- The committee called for urgent action on '**hate speech**' and '**hate crime**', citing an increase in incidents targeting Bengali-speaking Muslims, and asked the Government to 'ensure accountability'.
- It flagged 'racially motivated violence, excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary and prolonged detention without due process, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence'.
- The remarks followed the **eleventh periodic review of India on August 11-12**; India's delegation was led by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta.
- The panel noted increased law-enforcement operations targeting Rohingya, Bengali-speaking Muslims, migrants and asylum-seekers, particularly after the 2017 MHA order and the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack.

UN panel flags violations against SC, ST, Rohingya

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) has said it is "gravely concerned" about reports of human rights violations against a vast segment of people in India, including Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and Rohingya refugees.

In a press note that came on the ninth anniversary of the Rohingya crisis, the committee called for urgent action to address "hate speech" and "hate crime" in India. It said that there had been an increase in incidents targeting Bengali-speaking Muslims and called on the Government of India to "ensure accountability" for these violations.

"The committee was gravely concerned about reports of large-scale violations perpetrated by law enforcement officials against ethnic and ethno-religious groups, indigenous and tribal people, including Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, particularly Dalits, and non-citizens," it said.

The remarks came a fortnight after the committee carried out the eleventh periodic review of India on August 11-12. India had sent Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta as the head of delegation for the review.

The committee said these communities had been subjected to "racially motivated violence, excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary and prolonged detention with-

out due process, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence".

"The committee called on India to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all such allegations and ensure accountability for those responsible," the press note said.

The panel further noted that there had been an increase in law enforcement operations targeting "Rohingya, Bengali-speaking Muslims, migrants and asylum-seekers, particularly following the 2017 Ministry of Home Affairs order and the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack in Kashmir". The panel said that police check posts had resorted to racial profiling that led to "arbitrary arrest and detention without due process".

UN panel flags violations against SC, ST, Rohingya.

VALUE ADDITION — CERD & THE CONVENTION

- ◆ **CERD:** body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
- ◆ **ICERD:** adopted 1965, entered into force 1969 — the principal international instrument defining and prohibiting racial discrimination in public and private life.
- ◆ **UDHR:** adopted by the UN General Assembly (1948); enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings.
- ◆ India is a party to ICERD; treaty bodies issue 'concluding observations', which are recommendatory, not binding.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- India is **not** a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol.
- CERD issues **concluding observations** (recommendatory, not binding).
- **Rohingya** are a stateless minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Syllabus link — Prelims: International conventions & bodies · GS 2: Important international institutions.



03 UNCCD COP17 — Fundamental Shift in Fight Against Drought

GS 3

The Hindu · Page 14

WHY IN NEWS

At the UNCCD COP17 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav urged a 'fundamental shift' in the global approach to droughts — from reactive relief to proactive, technology-enabled resilience.

- Speaking at the Ministerial Dialogue on 'Accelerating Drought Resilience', Yadav warned that dry spells are rapidly escalating; drought is '**no longer an occasional event, but a defining development challenge**'.
- He highlighted India's coordinated, multi-institutional approach integrating early warning, mitigation, relief and community resilience, and called for restoring 'the forest, before the flow'.
- The talks form a central component of UNCCD COP17, hosted by Mongolia under the theme '**Restoring Land. Restoring Hope**'.
- Land degradation currently impacts up to **40% of the planet's land surface**, undermining the livelihoods of billions worldwide.
- Delegates from 197 member parties convene in these biennial sessions to negotiate binding frameworks and policy guidance.

Minister seeks fundamental shift in fight against drought

Global approach to droughts must move from reactive relief to proactive resilience, says Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav while addressing UNCCD conference in Mongolia

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

There ought to be a fundamental shift in the global approach to droughts from reactive relief to proactive, technology-enabled resilience, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) conference in Mongolia on Tuesday.

Addressing international delegates at the Ministerial Dialogue on "Accelerating Drought Resilience" in Ulaanbaatar during the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) to the UNCCD, Mr. Yadav warned that dry spells are rapidly escalating. Drought is "no longer an occasional event, but a defining development challenge", he said, citing its compounding disruptions to global water security, agricultural food systems, biodiversity, and economic stability.

'Restore the forest'
He highlighted India's coordinated, multi-institu-



Union Minister Bhupender Yadav says droughts are no longer an occasional event, but a defining development challenge. FILE PHOTO

tional approach integrating early warning, mitigation, relief and community resilience. Rainfall monitoring and satellite-based drought assessments trigger preparedness at the inter-ministerial and State levels, ensuring that a dry spell does not escalate into a crisis. Emphasising the critical link between land and water, he called for restoring "the forest, before the flow", underscoring India's focus on catchment and riverscape forestry to reduce erosion, improve water retention and recharge groundwater.

The Minister advocated for integrating predictive technologies, localised early-warning monitoring, and proactive land management policies. The goal, he noted, is to equip vulnerable communities to anticipate and absorb environmental shocks rather than relying primarily on post-disaster relief.

Summit objectives

The ministerial talks form a central component of UNCCD COP17, hosted by Mongolia under the theme "Restoring Land. Restoring Hope". Adopted in 1994 following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the UNCCD

is one of the three major Rio Conventions – alongside the framework conventions on climate change (UNFCCC) and biological diversity (CBD). It stands as the sole legally binding international agreement linking environmental management directly to sustainable land stewardship.

The 17th conference serves as a pivotal negotiation platform as land degradation currently impacts up to 40% of the planet's land surface, undermining the livelihoods of billions of people worldwide.

During these biennial sessions, delegates from 197 member parties – alongside civil society leaders, scientists, and international financial institutions – convene to negotiate binding frameworks and policy guidance.

The agreements negotiated at COP17 aim to translate high-level environmental commitments into measurable, investable solutions for water and food security over the next decade.

Minister Bhupender Yadav addressing the UNCCD conference in Mongolia.

VALUE ADDITION — UNCCD & DESERTIFICATION

- ◆ **UNCCD:** adopted 1994 (after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit); one of the three Rio Conventions — alongside UNFCCC (climate) and CBD (biodiversity).
- ◆ It is the **sole legally binding** international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
- ◆ **Desertification:** land degradation in dryland areas driven by climate change, deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable agriculture.
- ◆ **Drying Lands report:** 77.6% of Earth's land has become drier since the 1990s; drylands now make up 40.6% of the terrestrial surface (excl. Antarctica).
- ◆ Worst-case projection: up to **5 billion people** could live in drylands by the century's end.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Bonn, Germany** hosts the UNCCD secretariat.
- India hosted UNCCD **COP14** (2019, Greater Noida).
- **LDN** (Land Degradation Neutrality) is a UNCCD/SDG 15.3 target.

Syllabus link — GS 3: Environment & conservation · Land degradation and drought.



04 End the Culture of Secrecy in Judicial Appointments

GS 2 The Hindu · Page 8

WHY IN NEWS

The transparency debate has resurfaced after Justice Ujjal Bhuyan observed that greater openness in the collegium process would strengthen public confidence and ensure that merit remains the governing principle.

- Reformers argue that insulation from political interference was never meant to become insulation from **constitutional accountability** – a question unresolved for three decades.
- The collegium is a **judicial creation, not a constitutional one**.

Evolution through the Judges Cases

- **First Judges Case (1981)**: gave the executive primacy in appointments.
- **Second Judges Case (1993)**: shifted primacy to the collective opinion of the CJI and senior judges.
- **Third Judges Case (1998)**: expanded this into today's five-member collegium.

Retreat from transparency

- The process remains among the least transparent in any major democracy – no notification of vacancies, no eligibility matrix, no known methodology for assessing candidates. Even Fali Nariman, an architect of the collegium, later turned critic.
- In October 2017 the collegium began publishing resolutions with brief reasons; since 28 November 2024 resolutions have stopped naming members or disclosing reasoning; in Nov 2025 CJI B.R. Gavai confirmed detailed reasons would no longer be published.
- The Court itself held in *CPIO vs Subhash Chandra Agarwal* (2019) that the CJI's office falls within the RTI Act – a logic not extended to how judges are appointed.
- **Comparisons**: the UK's Judicial Appointments Commission advertises vacancies and holds structured interviews; South Africa's Judicial Service Commission invites nominations publicly and holds televised interviews.

End the culture of secrecy in judicial appointments

The debate over transparency in judicial appointments has resurfaced after Justice Ujjal Bhuyan of the Supreme Court of India recently observed that greater openness in the collegium process would strengthen public confidence and help ensure that merit remains the governing principle – a question that has remained unresolved for three decades.

The collegium is a judicial creation, not a constitutional one. The First Judges Case (1981) gave the executive primacy in appointments; the Second Judges Case (1993) 4 SCC 441 shifted primacy to the collectively formed opinion of the Chief Justice of India and senior judges; the Third Judges Case (1998) 7 SCC 739 expanded this into today's five-member collegium. The reasoning was sound, but close to three decades later, the process remains among the least transparent in any major constitutional democracy: no notification of vacancies, no eligibility matrix, no known methodology for assessing candidates. Even Fali Nariman, credited as an architect of the collegium, later turned critic, recalling that it was 'not receptive at all' to the bar. When the system's own architects concede that it answers to no one, reform can hardly be called interference.

Resolutions without reasons

One has the example of the collegium's own record on disclosure, which has moved backwards, not forwards – perhaps the clearest evidence of an institution retreating deeper into opacity. In October 2017, it began publishing resolutions with brief reasons for elevation, a step then hailed as a foundation for transparency. That practice thinned steadily, and since November 28, 2024, resolutions have stopped naming which members took part in a decision or disclosing any reasoning at all. In November 2025, then Chief Justice of India (CJI) B.R. Gavai confirmed that the collegium had resolved to stop publishing detailed reasons altogether, citing concern that disclosure could harm the career prospects of candidates – a rationale that would equally justify withholding reasons from every rejected litigant.

This cannot be seen in isolation; the Court, in the *MediaOne* judgment (2023), held that sealed cover secrecy is 'antithetical to a transparent and accountable system'. If that principle governs the court's own cases, why should a lesser standard govern its own?

This absence of due process has fuelled a recurring allegation: that opacity has allowed

relatives of sitting and retired judges – the so-called 'incub judges' – an easier passage to the Bench than first-generation lawyers with no lineage to lean on. It is important to remember this is not a complaint from critics from outside alone: former CJI R.M. Lodha himself remarked that nearly one in three High Court judges could be an 'incub'.

The allegation is not anecdotal: in 2018, the Union government flagged 11 of the 33 names recommended by the Allahabad High Court collegium, noting that they were relatives of sitting or retired judges. A broader assessment in 2025 found that nearly 30% of the Supreme Court judges – roughly 10 of 33 – had familial links to former judges. In January 2025, this issue pushed the collegium to consider barring judges' kin and kin from consideration altogether (the proposal was discussed and in principle it was agreed to have higher scrutiny if candidates are relatives, but legally a bar was not created). That, in itself, is an admission that without a publicly defined selection matrix, there is no objective way to distinguish a meritorious relative from a beneficiary of judicial lineage.

This is where the judiciary's own jurisprudence turns inward. Articles 14 and 16 guarantee equality and equal opportunity in public employment. In *Secretary, State of Karnataka and Others vs Umadevi* (2006) 4 SCC 10, the Court held that appointments to public office cannot be made through backdoor methods and must ordinarily follow a transparent procedure open to eligible candidates. If constitutional equality demands openness in the recruitment of a clerk or an engineer, why should the highest constitutional offices remain exempt from comparable standards? To be sure, judicial appointments cannot be reduced to a competitive examination; qualities such as independence and temperament resist quantification. But, qualitative judgment does not require the total absence of procedure. It is prudent to note the irony: the Court itself held, in *CPIO vs Subhash Chandra Agarwal* (2019) 3 SCC 10, that the CJI's office falls within the Right to Information Act – a logic never extended to how judges are appointed.

What other democracies do

Other constitutional democracies show that transparency and judicial independence can coexist. In the United Kingdom, the Judicial Appointments Commission publicly advertises vacancies and conducts structured interviews; in South Africa, the Judicial Service Commission invites nominations publicly and conducts televised interviews. None of these systems is

flawless, but each rests on a premise that India has yet to accept: independence is strengthened, not weakened, when citizens understand how judges are chosen.

India's collegium continues to operate as though it belongs to an earlier era of institutional deference. Political theorist Jürgen Habermas argued that democratic legitimacy ultimately rests on the public sphere – an arena where institutions must justify themselves before informed citizens.

This is not abstract: every judicial appointment is now dissected on social media within minutes. The scrutiny of a CJI's own remark comparing youngsters to 'cockroaches' travelled from placards at Jantar Mantar to trending hashtags within hours; it will not take long for such movements to arrive at the doorstep of the higher judiciary itself. Contempt jurisdiction, built for the newsroom and the courtroom gallery, cannot be used to trifle the scrutiny of this scale and anonymity – it is an alarm bell for a system that still keeps its own appointments behind closed doors and resists constructive criticism. Institutions that embrace reform voluntarily emerge stronger; those that resist witness a slow erosion of the legitimacy they seek to protect.

Reform, not retreat

None of this requires dismantling the collegium; it only requires modernising it. A transparent framework could publish anticipated vacancies in advance, invite applications from eligible advocates, disclose objective eligibility criteria, and record reasoned recommendations explaining why one candidate was preferred over another. Confidential inputs on integrity can remain protected – transparency does not demand disclosure of every file, only openness about the process, the criteria and the reasoning behind constitutional appointments.

This is ultimately not a contest between the judiciary and the executive, nor an attempt to weaken judicial independence. It is a question of whether one constitutional value is allowed to eclipse another. The Constitution promises an independent judiciary, but, equally, promises equality, fairness and reasoned decision-making; values that are complementary, not adversarial. The debate of the 1990s was executive versus judiciary. The debate of this decade is opacity versus transparency. Therefore, unless the collegium accepts that independence without accountability breeds the very distrust it was designed to prevent, this asymmetry between what the judiciary demands of every other institution and what it permits of itself will continue to exist.

'End the culture of secrecy in judicial appointments.'

VALUE ADDITION — KEY CASES & CONCEPTS

- ◆ **Articles 124 & 217:** appointment of Supreme Court and High Court judges.
- ◆ **NJAC (99th Amendment):** struck down in 2015 (Fourth Judges Case) as violating judicial independence / basic structure.
- ◆ **Umadevi (2006):** public appointments must follow a transparent procedure open to eligible candidates.
- ◆ **MoP:** the Memorandum of Procedure governs collegium-executive appointment steps.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Art. 124A** (introduced by 99th Amendment for NJAC) was struck down in 2015.
- Only the **SC & HC judges** are appointed via the collegium; not tribunals.
- **Second Judges Case** = *SC Advocates-on-Record Assn v. Union of India* (1993).

Syllabus link — GS 2: Judiciary; appointment of judges; transparency and accountability.



05 The Limits of Air Power & Theatre-isation

GS 3 The Hindu · Page 8

WHY IN NEWS

The wars in Ukraine and Iran show that air power, while not weaker, is no longer sufficient to win a war alone — sharpening India's debate on theatre commands versus the IAF's preference for operational flexibility.

- India's Air Force has long favoured **operational flexibility over fixed commands** — an approach proven against Pakistan but untested against China. Four tests decide whether it holds:

1. The flexibility principle

- What worked against Pakistan (Balakot 2019, Op Sindoor) may not scale against China: 460–520 combat aircraft against the PLAAF's ~65 squadrons, with fewer airbases and less room to redeploy in the mountains.

2. The integration deficit

- Two parts can bridge it — joint-force generation (never built sufficiently for the China front) and peacetime jointness (needs only training and shared planning). Kargil (1999) exposed this gap; Ladakh (2020) showed it persists.

3. The institutional test

- Resistance is more about career progression than doctrine; ranks do not map evenly across the three services. The US made joint postings mandatory, not a career risk.

4. Consultative authority

- The IAF's Joint Coordination Centre depends on everyone agreeing — but a crisis leaves no time. A theatre command puts one person in charge with the power to act; the US, China and Israel have all made that choice.

The limits of air power, implications for theatre-isation

The wars in Ukraine and Iran delivered the same verdict to every air force. Ukraine kept the larger air force at bay, while in Iran, the skies were dominated by the opposing side, yet air superiority still failed to end the war. Both point to the same limitation of air power: it has not grown weaker, but it is no longer sufficient to win a war on its own.

That is the real stake in India's own debate: its Air Force has long favoured operational flexibility over fixed commands – an approach proven against Pakistan but untested against China.

Air power's limits exposed

Two wars and one wider pattern illustrate three ways in which air power falls short.

The first is the denial of airspace. What determined control of Ukraine's skies was not Russia's aircraft numbers, but Ukraine's networked air defence. This is what the United States Air Force's 2025 guidance concedes: contested low-level airspace is a problem that air superiority alone cannot solve. For India, this cuts both ways – integrated air defence could deny China control of the skies, or leave India exposed to the same risk in reverse.

The second is dominance of the air space. The allied air campaign against Iran is the clearest case of dominance without a decisive outcome. The allies had complete control of the skies, yet Tehran held firm. What they could see, they hit; what Iran hid, it survived. That should concern India, because what has worked against Pakistan may not hold against China. Pakistan lacks strategic depth and can be stressed quickly; China, given its military capacity, can absorb losses and continue fighting.

The third is the cost-arithmetic. This structurally favours the weaker force. A Shaded-type drone (Iran) costs roughly \$20,000 to \$50,000, while the interceptors can cost millions. India saw a version of this during Operation Sindoor (May 2025), when Pakistan's cheaper drones forced the use of costlier



Harinder Singh
retired Lieutenant General who commanded the Leh Corps during the 2020 Ladakh crisis

interceptors. Against China, that arithmetic operates on a much larger scale, and India is not yet prepared for it.

These limits are already forcing a doctrinal rethink across most modern air forces. For India, the challenge is structural: the centralised model of the Indian Air Force (IAF), proven against Pakistan, remains untested against China, where the terrain could compound these limitations.

The IAF's case against theatre-isation

The IAF favours flexibility over fixed commands. Four tests decide whether that position holds against China too.

The first is the flexibility principle. The IAF's claim is that what has worked before will work again. Against Pakistan, it did – Balakot (2019) and Sindoor demonstrated that. Against China, however, the numbers are tighter: 460-520 combat aircraft against the People's Liberation Army Air Force's roughly 65 squadrons. The mountains make the challenge even greater, with fewer airbases and less room to redeploy. So the flexibility that defines the IAF's approach may not hold where it matters most.

The second is the integration deficit. If flexibility cannot close the gap, then jointness might. Two parts can help bridge this deficit. The first is joint-force generation, which has never been built sufficiently for the China front. The second is peacetime jointness, which requires not new hardware, only training and shared planning. Kargil exposed this gap in 1999; the Ladakh crisis in 2020 showed that it still persisted.

The third is more institutional, than operational. Two aspects matter. The resistance is more about career progression than doctrine. Also, ranks do not map evenly across the three services, leaving joint chains of command unsettled. Neither factor determines whether flexibility or jointness will actually work, although both matter. The United States made joint postings mandatory; not a career risk.

The fourth is consultative authority. The IAF's own proposal – a joint Coordination Centre – depends on everyone agreeing, and a crisis leaves no time for that. A theatre command puts one person in charge, with the power to act. The U.S., China and Israel have each already made that choice – not proof that it guarantees success, but evidence that a consultative process has its limits. Of the four questions here, only one concerns how the IAF fights. The rest concern how India organises itself for the next war. That decision lies beyond the IAF; it belongs to India's political leadership, which has a larger stake in the outcome.

The cost of delay

The IAF's position is defensible where it has been tested – in Balakot and Sindoor. What it does not tell us is how quickly the force could mobilise or how effectively it could conduct joint operations against China.

The cost of leaving this debate unresolved is real. If, for instance, China moves into Ladakh the same week that Siachen Glacier flares up, someone will have to decide, in real time, which front gets the limited pool of Rafales and S-400 systems.

A jointness gap left unaddressed for another decade could mean that an Integrated Battle Group (IBG) commander along the Line of Actual Control is still planning around air support that may not reliably arrive when needed to defend India's territorial integrity. And if that were to happen, people would not remember the missing theatre command, but a military that was simply not ready for war.

None of this is a case against the IAF. It is a case against testing the IAF's convictions in a crisis, when there may be no second chance. Therefore, one could argue that theatre-isation does not dilute the IAF's flexibility; rather, it is the missing structure that could allow that flexibility to survive contact with the one border crisis India has not faced in many decades.

'The limits of air power, implications for theatre-isation.'

VALUE ADDITION — THEATRE COMMANDS

- ◆ **Theatre command:** integrated command bringing Army, Navy and Air Force under a single operational commander for a geography/mission.
- ◆ **CDS & DMA:** the Chief of Defence Staff heads the Department of Military Affairs and drives tri-service integration/theaterisation.
- ◆ **Existing joint commands:** Andaman & Nicobar Command and the Strategic Forces Command.
- ◆ **Op Sindoor (May 2025):** cited example of cheaper drones forcing costlier interceptor use.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- India's **Integrated Theatre Commands** are still being operationalised.
- **CDS** post created in 2020; first CDS was Gen. Bipin Rawat.
- **PLAAF** = People's Liberation Army Air Force.

Syllabus link — GS 3: Security; defence reforms; role of air power and jointness.



06 Root Causes — Youth Crisis Is About Jobs, Not Just Exams

GS 2 The Hindu (Editorial) · Page 8

WHY IN NEWS

After youth agitation forced the Education Minister's resignation, the government conceded exam-reform demands, and the PM announced free online coaching. But the deeper crisis is the absence of jobs, not merely examination reform.

- MoSPI data show private coaching now costs **16%** of family spending on a child's education (12.5% in 2018), and nearly a quarter of that budget in the higher-secondary years.
- Cheaper coaching has limited value while quality professional education is confined to a handful of institutions — over 22 lakh candidates competed for ~1.4 lakh medical UG seats, fewer than 10,000 at the top 50 colleges.

- Manufacturing — best placed to absorb graduates — remains at **~one-sixth of gross value added**, far from the promised quarter of the economy.
- **Corporate investment fell from 17.3% of GDP (2007-08) to 10.3% (2024-25)**, unmoved by the 2019 corporate-tax cut from 30% to 22%.
- The remedy: public investment in industrial capacity, support disciplined by export performance rather than domestic protection, and tempering enforcement zeal that targets medium-sized firms — the Vietnam route to jobs at scale.

Root causes

India's youth crisis is about the absence of jobs, not just examination reform

It has been a few weeks since the youth agitation forced the resignation of then Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The government conceded the students' demands for examination reform, which found an echo in the Prime Minister's Independence Day address, when he announced free online coaching for competitive examinations using India's digital public infrastructure. MoSPI's survey data bears out why this would be welcome to students — private coaching costs 16% of what an Indian family spends on a child's education, against 12.5% in 2018, and nearly a quarter of that budget by the higher secondary years which is when the student prepares for competitive exams. Cheaper coaching is of limited value as quality professional education remains confined to a handful of institutions. For instance, over 22 lakh candidates appeared in this year's medical entrance exam for about 1.4 lakh undergraduate seats with fewer than 10,000 of them at the top 50 colleges. The situation is similar to the Joint Entrance Examination for engineering colleges. That is perhaps why, for the first time since the All India Survey on Higher Education began in 2011, undergraduate enrolment fell by 93,322 in 2023-24, particularly among young men. The fall was the sharpest in Uttar Pradesh, where *The Hindu's* analysis found undergraduate enrolment down 1.53 lakh even as diploma enrolment rose 1.38 lakh. An analysis of Periodic Labour Force Survey

lakh. An analysis of Periodic Labour Force Survey unit-level data found that of every 100 graduates aged 15 to 29 in 2025, only 26 were in regular salaried employment, and just four had a salaried job with a contract and social security. The youth employment crisis therefore has two ends — in the preparation for jobs, and in jobs themselves. Mere free coaching would address neither.

The structural problems in the Indian economy, despite the government's touting of 6%-6.5% growth, are now too obvious to ignore. Manufacturing, the job sector best placed to absorb India's college graduates, remains at around a sixth of gross value added, nowhere near the quarter of the economy the government has long promised. Meanwhile, the private sector has been retreating from its task as corporate investment has fallen from 17.3% of GDP in 2007-08 to 10.3% in 2024-25, unmoved by the cut in corporate tax from 30% to 22% in 2019. The steps required of the Union government are clear: public investment in industrial capacity, support for industry disciplined by export performance rather than domestic protection, and tempering a regulatory and enforcement zeal that seems to selectively target enterprises, affecting the jobs-catering medium-sized companies in particular. This route has a better chance of delivering jobs for the youth at the scale needed and as countries such as Vietnam have shown.

Editorial: 'Root causes' — India's youth crisis is about jobs.

VALUE ADDITION — JOBS & GROWTH

- ◆ **PLFS:** Periodic Labour Force Survey (NSO, MoSPI) — the official employment data source.
- ◆ **GVA:** Gross Value Added measures output by sector (GDP minus net taxes on products).
- ◆ **Corporate tax cut:** base rate reduced 30%→22% in 2019 to spur private investment.
- ◆ **Demographic dividend:** productive potential of a young workforce — realised only if jobs and skills match.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **NEET/JEE** feed the coaching economy discussed here.
- **Corporate tax cut** (2019): domestic firms 30%→22%.
- **Vietnam** cited as an export-led jobs model.

Syllabus link — GS 2: Education & employment · GS 3: Growth, industry & jobs.



07 Escape Velocity — India's Space Sector Needs Reliability

GS 3 The Hindu (Editorial) · Page 8

WHY IN NEWS

On the third National Space Day, PM Modi urged 20 space-startup founders to build an 'aura' to draw global talent. The editorial argues a private space sector must be built on reliability and regular launches, not romance.

- Rockets and satellites are no longer emblems; they are the **plumbing of the information age** — the scaffolding beneath navigation, banking, weather and war.
- A private space sector cannot succeed merely because its wares are called rockets — the romance that carried the state programme will not carry a business.
- A peer-reviewed analysis (*Economics Letters*) finds it cost **\$13,302 to loft a kilogram to LEO** on an Indian rocket in 2025 — costlier than China (\$5,809) and the US (\$3,225), well above the global average (\$3,868).
- India launches too rarely to build reliability — only **five launches in 2025** against 30 projected. GSAT-N2 (too heavy for LVM-3) flew on a Falcon 9; Pixxel and Digantara rode SpaceX to orbit.
- SpaceX put three-quarters of the world's 2025 payload into orbit. India's value lies in jobs, long-term capital, tax revenues and **heavy-lift launches that undercut SpaceX and China** — Moon bases are the ornament, not the engine.

Escape velocity

India's space sector must focus on reliability and regular launches

For much of the 20th century, a rocket tearing a white seam through the sky did for India roughly what football did for Argentina and Brazil. Nations shut out of the councils where economic and strategic weight was measured found, in a game of European origin, an arena where their poverty did not disqualify them. Mastery was open to anyone with nerve and skill. Space was other things but also India's football. A famished, newly independent republic that could barely feed itself nevertheless chose to gamble on rockets and atomic piles — an expensive bet on a future it could not yet see. In that era of a controlled economy and state broadcaster monopoly, a launcher rising was its own justification. The utility of its payload was secondary, in the eyes of the masses, to the veneer of technological competency. Today, rockets and satellites are no longer emblems; they are the plumbing of the information age, the unglamorous scaffolding beneath navigation, banking, weather and war. On the third National Space Day — the anniversary of Chandrayaan-3's touchdown in the lunar south polar region — Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged 20 space-startup founders to build an "aura" that would draw the world's talent to India. But that might be a wrong framing married to the old view of space. A private space sector cannot harvest success merely because its wares are called rockets and launch

gramme will not carry a business.

A recent peer-reviewed analysis in *Economics Letters* by Alessio Terzi and Francesco Nicoli finds that it cost \$13,302 to loft a kilogram into low-earth orbit on an Indian rocket in 2025 — costlier than China (\$5,809), Japan, Russia, Europe and the United States (\$3,225), and well above the global average of \$3,868. That is because India launches too rarely and uneconomically to rapidly build the required reputation for reliability. There were only five launches in 2025, against the 30 that were projected. The consequence is visible. GSAT-N2, at 4,700 kg too heavy for ISRO's LVM-3, went up on a Falcon 9; Pixxel and Digantara — two of the 20 at Mr. Modi's meeting — rode SpaceX to orbit. SpaceX alone put three-quarters of the world's payload into orbit in 2025, underlining its near monopolistic stranglehold but also pointing to opportunities. The value of India's space sector can no longer rely on aura but in jobs, in long-term capital and the tax revenues that follow and, in heavy-lift launches that undercut SpaceX and China. Moon bases with NASA and interplanetary reveries belong to the new imagination of space, and they matter — but they are the ornament, not the engine.

Editorial: 'Escape velocity' — reliability over aura.

VALUE ADDITION — SPACE ECOSYSTEM

- ◆ **IN-SPACe**: single-window promoter/regulator for private space activity.
- ◆ **NSIL**: New Space India Ltd — the commercial arm of ISRO.
- ◆ **LVM-3**: heavy-lift launcher; **PSLV/GSLV** workhorse launchers.
- ◆ **Chandrayaan-3 (2023)**: first soft-landing near the lunar south pole — anniversary marked as National Space Day (Aug 23).
- ◆ Target: a **\$44-billion space economy**, with private rocket factories and a deeper supply chain.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **National Space Day:** 23 August (Chandrayaan-3 landing anniversary).
- **Vikram-1** (Skyroot) — first privately built Indian rocket to reach orbit.
- **Falcon 9** (SpaceX) carried India's GSAT-N2 in 2024.

Syllabus link — GS 3: Science & Technology · Space sector & indigenisation.



08 Tamil Nadu Can Lead India on Revenue Reform

GS 2 · GS 3 The Hindu · Page 9

WHY IN NEWS

Tamil Nadu's decision to set up a high-level Revenue Augmentation Committee (chaired by Montek Singh Ahluwalia) could do something no Indian State has systematically attempted: modernise how revenue itself is defined and managed.

- The committee is to strengthen own-tax and non-tax revenues, improve buoyancy, plug leakages and increase fiscal self-reliance.
- TN's own-tax revenue reached **9.3% of GSDP (2002-03)** after exceeding 10% in the early 1990s; yet non-tax revenue is a weakness — only **7% of total revenue**.

Defining revenue correctly

- A market loan or bond provides cash today while creating a liability — it is **financing, not revenue**. Selling an existing asset exchanges one asset for another and does not generate revenue.
- The IMF's **Government Finance Statistics Manual (GFSM 2014)** offers a clear framework: revenue = taxes, social contributions, grants and other revenue (fees, interest, dividends, rents).

Sustainable revenue

- Priorities: better tax administration over higher rates; linking GST data with registration, vehicle and property databases; periodic review of user charges, royalties and licence fees; and predictable dividends from state enterprises.
- The inherited lesson: borrowing to finance recurrent expenditure raises debt and shrinks fiscal space — so revenue reform cannot be separated from expenditure efficiency and fiscal risk.

T.N. can lead India on revenue reform

Tamil Nadu's decision to establish a high-level Revenue Augmentation Committee could prove more important than simply finding additional resources for the State Budget. It offers Tamil Nadu an opportunity to do something no Indian State has yet systematically attempted: modernise the way revenue itself is defined and managed.

The committee, chaired by Montek Singh Ahluwalia, has been asked to recommend measures to strengthen own-tax and non-tax revenues, improve buoyancy, plug leakages, and increase fiscal self-reliance. Tamil Nadu has been one of India's stronger performers in economic growth and social development. Sustaining these achievements – and the public services and investment that underpin them – will require a sustainable revenue base.

Tamil Nadu used to be one of India's fiscally better-managed States. Its own-tax revenue reached 9.3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in 2002-03, after exceeding 10% in the early 1990s. Yet non-tax revenue has remained a weakness: only 7% of total revenue came from non-tax sources.

The 15th Finance Commission's work explained how the earlier advantage for own-tax revenue ended. A study prepared for the Commission found own-tax revenue falling from close to 9% of GSDP in 2006-07 to 6.4% in 2016-17, with tax buoyancy below one in eight of the 14 years examined. More recently, Tamil Nadu's own-tax revenue was budgeted at around 6.2% of GSDP in 2024-25, compared with 6.9% in Karnataka and 8.2% in Telangana.

The committee will therefore address a structural problem. But before asking how Tamil Nadu can raise more revenue, it should ask a more fundamental question: what counts as government revenue?

Defining revenue
This distinction has become blurred in Indian public finance.



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"Resource mobilisation" often encompasses taxes and user charges alongside borrowing, official loans, green and municipal bonds, blended finance, and asset monetisation. These may all provide resources, but they are economically very different.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Government Finance Statistics Manual (GFSM 2004) provides a clear framework.

Government revenue consists of taxes, social contributions, grants and other revenue, including fees and charges, dividends, interest, royalties, and rents. Borrowing is different. A market loan or bond provides cash today while creating a financial liability. It is financing, but not revenue. Nor does selling an existing asset generally create revenue. It exchanges one asset for another. While recurring lease payments, royalties, concession fees, rents, and dividends may constitute as genuine non-tax revenue, proceeds from outright asset sales generally do not.

This matters because a government can appear to have mobilised substantial "resources" without improving its underlying capacity to finance public services. Borrowing and asset sales can finance investment or ease temporary financing constraints but they cannot permanently finance a structural gap between recurrent expenditure and revenue.

Tamil Nadu should therefore use this committee to become the first Indian State to explicitly adopt international standards for defining and presenting government revenue. This would complete an unfinished reform agenda. Fiscal deficit and financing measures need to be consistent with international practice, accompanied by fuller reporting of arrears, guarantees, off-budget borrowing, and public enterprise finances. Otherwise, conventional cash accounts can give an incomplete picture of fiscal trends. India's public financial management weaknesses are

concerned with not simply how much governments raise or spend, but how comprehensively fiscal transactions are defined, classified and reported. Indian States conventionally divide revenue into own-tax revenue, own non-tax revenue, shares in central taxes, and grants from the Centre. These accounts should increasingly be reconcilable with internationally accepted classifications.

Tamil Nadu need not abandon its existing system. It could publish a supplementary GFSM along with its Budget, separating revenue and transactions in assets and financing.

Sustainable revenue

Having defined revenue correctly, the committee should concentrate on raising it sustainably. The first priority should be better tax administration rather than simply higher rates. Linking GST information with registration, vehicle, property, and other administrative databases can reduce evasion and improve buoyancy without increasing the burden on compliant taxpayers.

Second, non-tax revenue deserves greater attention. User charges should be periodically reviewed against costs. Royalties, licence and concession fees, and rents and returns from public assets should similarly be reviewed. State-owned enterprises should generate predictable returns through better governance and transparent dividend policies – not exceptional dividends to fill annual budget gaps.

The inherited lesson is clear: borrowing to finance recurrent expenditure raises debt, interest burdens, and reduces fiscal space for development. Revenue reform cannot therefore be separated from expenditure efficiency, liabilities and fiscal risks.

Thus, Tamil Nadu, by becoming the first Indian State to adopt international standards for defining and presenting government revenue, could establish a benchmark for other States and the Union government.

A market loan or bond provides cash today while creating a financial liability. It is financing, but not revenue

'T.N. can lead India on revenue reform.'

VALUE ADDITION — PUBLIC FINANCE

- ◆ **Own-tax revenue:** State's GST share, stamp duty, excise, vehicle & land taxes.
- ◆ **Non-tax revenue:** interest, dividends, royalties, user charges, fees.
- ◆ **Tax buoyancy:** responsiveness of tax revenue to GDP growth.
- ◆ **Finance Commission:** constitutional body (Art. 280) recommending Centre–State tax devolution.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **GFSM 2014** is the IMF's Government Finance Statistics Manual.
- **Art. 280:** Finance Commission; **Art. 293:** State borrowing.
- **Fiscal Responsibility (FRBM)** frameworks cap deficits.

Syllabus link — GS 2: Centre–State fiscal relations · GS 3: Government budgeting & mobilisation of resources.



Practice Zone

MAINS · PRELIMS · ANSWER KEY

Q1 · GS 2

"The collegium was designed to protect judicial independence, not to shield judicial appointments from accountability." Critically examine the demand for greater transparency in the collegium system in light of recent developments. (250 words)

“कॉलेजियम न्यायिक स्वतंत्रता की रक्षा के लिए बनाया गया था, न कि न्यायिक नियुक्तियों को जवाबदेही से बचाने के लिए।” हाल की घटनाओं के आलोक में कॉलेजियम प्रणाली में अधिक पारदर्शिता की मांग की समालोचनात्मक विवेचना कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

Approach: Trace the evolution through the three Judges Cases; contrast independence with accountability; cite the 2024-25 retreat from published reasons, CPIO vs Subhash Chandra Agarwal, and UK/South Africa models; conclude with 'reform, not retreat'.

Q2 · GS 3

India's air power is proven against Pakistan but untested against China. Discuss how theatre-isation and jointness can address the limits of air power exposed by recent conflicts. (250 words)

भारत की वायु शक्ति पाकिस्तान के विरुद्ध सिद्ध है परंतु चीन के विरुद्ध अपरीक्षित है। हाल के संघर्षों से उजागर वायु शक्ति की सीमाओं को थिएटर कमान और संयुक्तता किस प्रकार संबोधित कर सकती हैं, विवेचना कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

Approach: Use Ukraine/Iran to show air power is insufficient alone; discuss the four tests (flexibility, integration, institutional, consultative); explain CDS/theatre commands and jointness; balance IAF's flexibility argument with the need for unified command.

Prelims MCQs

10 QUESTIONS

Q1. With reference to the Special Representatives (SR) mechanism between India and China, consider the following statements:

1. It was established to explore a political framework for settling the boundary question.
 2. The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is a mutually delineated and demarcated international boundary.
- Which of the statements is/are correct?

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

Q2. The Doklam tri-junction, in the news, lies at the meeting point of the borders of:

- (a) India, China and Nepal
- (b) India, China and Bhutan
- (c) India, Bhutan and Bangladesh
- (d) India, China and Myanmar

Q3. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) monitors implementation of which instrument?

- (a) Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- (b) International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- (c) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- (d) Convention against Torture

Q4. With reference to the UNCCD, consider the following statements:

1. It is one of the three Rio Conventions.
2. It is the sole legally binding agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
3. It was adopted following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

Which of the statements are correct?

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

Q5. The theme of UNCCD COP17, held in Mongolia, was:

- (a) Our Land, Our Future
- (b) Restoring Land. Restoring Hope
- (c) Land for Life
- (d) United for Land

Q6. The collegium system for appointment of judges in India was established through:

- (a) An express provision of the Constitution
- (b) The 99th Constitutional Amendment
- (c) Judicial interpretation in the Judges Cases
- (d) A statute enacted by Parliament

Q7. In *CPIO vs Subhash Chandra Agarwal (2019)*, the Supreme Court held that:

- (a) The NJAC is constitutional
- (b) The office of the CJI falls within the ambit of the RTI Act
- (c) Collegium resolutions must be published
- (d) Judges cannot be appointed without executive consent

Q8. Consider the following about the revised Index of Core Industries (ICI) and space-launch economics discussed recently:

1. In 2025 India had far fewer launches than projected.
2. The cost per kilogram to low-earth orbit on an Indian rocket in 2025 was below the global average.

Which is/are correct?

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

Q9. Which of the following is/are among India's existing tri-service/joint commands?

1. Andaman & Nicobar Command
2. Strategic Forces Command
3. Western Theatre Command

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

Q10. With reference to government finance, which of the following would NOT be counted as 'revenue' under the GFSM 2014 framework?

- (a) Tax collections
- (b) Dividends from state enterprises
- (c) Proceeds from a market loan or bond
- (d) User charges and fees

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 – A. The SR mechanism (2003) explores a political settlement framework. The LAC is a notional line of control, NOT a demarcated international boundary – so statement 2 is incorrect.

Q2 – B. Doklam is the tri-junction of India, China and Bhutan, and was the site of the 2017 stand-off.

Q3 – B. CERD monitors the ICERD (adopted 1965, in force 1969), the principal instrument prohibiting racial discrimination.

Q4 – D. UNCCD (adopted 1994) is a Rio Convention alongside UNFCCC and CBD, is the sole legally binding land-management agreement, and followed the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. All three are correct.

Q5 – B. COP17 in Ulaanbaatar was hosted under the theme 'Restoring Land. Restoring Hope.'

Q6 – C. The collegium is a judicial creation evolved through the First (1981), Second (1993) and Third (1998) Judges Cases – not a constitutional or statutory provision.

Q7 – B. The Court held that the CJI's office is a 'public authority' under the RTI Act, 2005.

Q8 – A. India had only five launches in 2025 (vs 30 projected) – statement 1 correct. At \$13,302/kg, India was ABOVE the global average (\$3,868) – statement 2 incorrect.

Q9 – B. India currently has the Andaman & Nicobar Command and the Strategic Forces Command. Geographic theatre commands are still under implementation.

Q10 – C. A market loan/bond is financing that creates a liability – it provides cash but is not revenue.

QUICK REVISION RECAP

- ◆ **SR talks (25th round):** India-China to advance boundary **delimitation**; LAC has three sectors – Western, Middle, Eastern.
- ◆ **CERD** monitors **ICERD** (1965/1969); flagged violations against SC, ST and Rohingya after the 11th periodic review of India.
- ◆ **UNCCD COP17** (Mongolia, theme 'Restoring Land. Restoring Hope') – one of three Rio Conventions; sole legally binding land pact.
- ◆ **Collegium** evolved via three Judges Cases; NJAC struck down 2015; CPIO vs S.C. Agarwal (2019) – CJI office under RTI.
- ◆ **Air power limits:** proven vs Pakistan, untested vs China → case for jointness & theatre commands (CDS/DMA).
- ◆ **Space:** India \$13,302/kg to LEO (2025), 5 launches vs 30 projected; target \$44-bn space economy; IN-SPACe, NSIL.
- ◆ **TN revenue reform:** Ahluwalia committee; a loan/bond is **financing, not revenue** (GFSM 2014).