

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Page 01 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

The ongoing proceedings before the Supreme Court of India regarding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls have brought to the fore a crucial constitutional debate on the scope of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The Commission has asserted that the SIR is neither a "parallel" National Register of Citizens (NRC) nor an encroachment upon the Union's exclusive domain over citizenship, but rather a constitutional obligation flowing from its mandate to ensure free and fair elections. This controversy touches the core of India's democratic framework, where citizenship forms the basis of political participation.

EC tells SC it has duty to weed out foreigners

Poll body defends SIR in the Supreme Court, insists it has power to verify citizenship status

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (EC) began its defence of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls before the Supreme Court on Tuesday by dismissing claims that it is conducting a "parallel" National Register of Citizens (NRC) as sheer "rhetoric".

The poll body maintained that it has the "constitutional power, even a constitutional duty" to ensure that not a single foreigner, as far as possible, occupies space in the nation's electoral rolls.

The SIR kicked off in Bihar last year and expanded to cover 12 more States and Union Territories in the ongoing second phase.

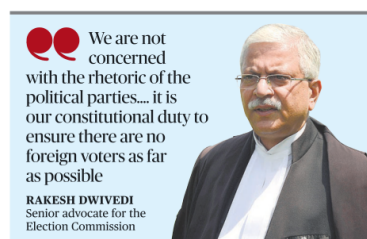
"We have a constitutional duty, and not just a constitutional power, to ensure no foreigners are there on the electoral rolls. It is not important how many foreigners are found... It was repeatedly asked of us to show how many foreigners were found in Bihar, but that is not important. Even if there was one foreigner, he had to be excluded. We are not concerned with the rhetoric of the political parties. They may be right or wrong. As the Election Commission, it is our constitutional duty to ensure there are no foreign voters as far as possible," senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, clarified before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant.

sure no foreigners are there on the electoral rolls. It is not important how many foreigners are found... It was repeatedly asked of us to show how many foreigners were found in Bihar, but that is not important. Even if there was one foreigner, he had to be excluded. We are not concerned with the rhetoric of the political parties. They may be right or wrong. As the Election Commission, it is our constitutional duty to ensure there are no foreign voters as far as possible," senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, clarified before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant.

Faulty comparison

Mr. Dwivedi said the comparison of the SIR with the NRC was devoid of truth. The EC differentiated between the NRC conducted in Assam and the "special

EC stresses that NRC register includes all citizens; the electoral rolls only consider those above 18



revision" of electoral rolls underway in the State.

"The NRC register includes all the people, all citizens, whereas, in electoral rolls it is citizens who are above 18 years of age. Less than that they are not in the electoral roll. A person of unsound mind is excluded from the electoral roll, but is part of the NRC. Preparation of the electoral roll is not a parallel NRC on the face of it," Mr. Dwivedi contended.

The senior counsel argued that it was for the Centre to issue a 'national identity card' and maintain a 'National Register of Indian Citizens' and, for that purpose, establish a National Registration Authority under Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. On the other hand, the EC drew its power to verify citizenship for the "preparation of the electoral rolls" under Article 324 of the Constitution. Mr. Dwivedi

2.89 crore voters deleted in U.P.

NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

The Election Commission on Tuesday published the draft rolls for Uttar Pradesh under the special intensive revision with 2.89 crore names deleted, the highest for any State or Union Territory where SIR has been held so far. » PAGE 5

said the Constitution was "citizen-centric", which meant 'citizenship' was a central theme.

"All the important functionaries of the three organs of governance have to be citizens of India, be it the President, Vice-President, MPs, MLAs, or judges of the constitutional courts. One of the conditions is that they be citizens... No person is eligible to participate in the electoral process unless he is a citizen," Mr. Dwivedi said.

He noted how citizenship had played a prime part in the struggle for nationhood. The Government of India Act, 1935, had allowed a separate electorate for Europeans, leading to an objection raised in the Constituent Assembly.

Citizenship status

He noted how citizenship had played a prime part in the struggle for nationhood. The Government of India Act, 1935, had allowed a separate electorate for Europeans, leading to an objection raised in the Constituent Assembly.

"From the aforesaid, it is evident that from its inception, the Constituent Assembly intended that authorities responsible for preparation of electoral rolls would enquire into citizenship and exclude those who were not citizens from the electoral rolls of constituencies. Later, the EC was vested with plenary powers with respect to superintendence, direction, and control over all elections, as well as the power to verify the status of citizenship under Article 324 read with Article 326

(adult suffrage)," Mr. Dwivedi submitted for the poll body.

Even the power of Parliament under Article 327 to frame election laws was "subject to provisions of the Constitution", Mr. Dwivedi said, adding that this means that "the legislative powers of Parliament envisaged under Article 327 are subject to Articles 324 and 326."

Citizenship Act

Addressing the petitioners' submission that citizenship was exclusively the domain of the Union government, the EC counsel pointed to Section 9(2) of the Citizenship Act. "The Central government has exclusive jurisdiction only with termination of citizenship on account of voluntary acquisition under this provision," Mr. Dwivedi submitted.

Background and Context

The SIR exercise, initiated in Bihar and subsequently extended to several other States and Union Territories, aims to update electoral rolls by removing ineligible entries, including those of non-citizens. Petitioners have challenged this process, alleging that it resembles the NRC exercise undertaken in Assam and could lead to exclusionary outcomes.

In response, the ECI has drawn a clear distinction between the NRC and electoral rolls. While the NRC is intended to identify all citizens irrespective of age, electoral rolls include only those citizens who are above 18 years and otherwise qualified under the Constitution. The Commission has emphasised that exclusion from electoral rolls does not amount to a determination of citizenship status for all legal purposes.

Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

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Article 324 and Plenary Powers of the ECI

Article 324 vests the ECI with plenary powers of "superintendence, direction and control" over elections.

According to the Commission, this necessarily includes the power—and duty—to ensure that only citizens participate in the electoral process.

Article 326 and Adult Suffrage

Article 326 restricts the right to vote to citizens of India, reinforcing the argument that verification of citizenship is inherent in preparing electoral rolls.

Articles 327 and Legislative Supremacy

Although Parliament has the power to enact election laws under Article 327, such laws are expressly subject to the Constitution.

The ECI contends that its constitutional mandate under Articles 324 and 326 cannot be diluted by statutory interpretation.

Citizenship Act, 1955

Petitioners argue that citizenship determination lies exclusively with the Union government.

The ECI has countered this by pointing out that the Union's exclusive jurisdiction under Section 9(2) of the Act is limited to termination of citizenship upon voluntary acquisition of foreign nationality, not routine verification for electoral purposes.

Key Issues and Concerns

Democratic Integrity vs. Exclusion Risks: The ECI's position underscores the principle that even a single non-citizen on electoral rolls undermines democratic legitimacy. However, critics fear that aggressive verification could lead to wrongful exclusion of genuine citizens, especially among vulnerable populations.

Federal Balance: The case raises questions about the balance between constitutional bodies and the Union government, particularly in areas where citizenship and electoral processes intersect.

Precedential Impact: The Supreme Court's interpretation will have long-term implications for future electoral revisions and the autonomy of the ECI.

Conclusion

At its core, the dispute over the Special Intensive Revision reflects a deeper constitutional tension between safeguarding electoral purity and protecting individual rights. The Election Commission's assertion that the Constitution is "citizen-centric"

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aligns with the foundational principle that political participation is reserved for citizens alone. At the same time, the Supreme Court's scrutiny is vital to ensure that the exercise of such powers remains proportionate, transparent, and non-arbitrary.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following constitutional provisions directly links citizenship with the right to vote in India?

- (a) Article 14
- (b) Article 21
- (c) Article 326
- (d) Article 368

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Free and fair elections require both inclusiveness and legality. Comment on this statement in the context of the Supreme Court's scrutiny of the Election Commission's role in excluding non-citizens from electoral rolls. **(150 words)**

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Page 07 : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam

Global climate governance has historically prioritised forests as the primary natural solution to climate change. However, recent debates at international climate forums highlight a growing scientific consensus that grasslands, savannahs, and rangelands are equally critical for climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and social justice. The discussion gained renewed relevance with the United Nations declaring 2026 as the International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists, and continued marginalisation of grasslands at UNFCCC negotiations, including COP30 in Belém, Brazil.



Grasslands and shrub forest in the upper Nilgiris, a part of the Western Ghats, UNESCO world heritage site

Not just forests: why grasslands also belong in national climate plans

Protecting a biome like grasslands cannot happen in isolation but must come about through goals shared by the various UN bodies. Unfortunately, there are still debates ongoing about whether biodiversity and climate goals align and how institutions can build synergies

Satirsha Lathia

The United Nations has declared 2026 to be the "International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists".

In 2022, a group of scientists from institutions in Tanzania, Zambia, the U.K., the U.S., Germany and Canada wrote an open letter urging the parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to broaden their goals to be inclusive of all biomes on earth, but especially grasslands and savannahs. Their letter, published in *Science*, asserted that even though savannahs are potentially better carbon sinks, forests have lagged the livelihood in global climate negotiations. Unfortunately, three years since the letter was written, the UNFCCC climate summit has continued to fall short of addressing this key issue.

The UNFCCC COP29 climate talks took place over the course of 10 days in the city of Baku in Brazil, and it had a major focus on forests. Hosting the bulk of the Amazon forest, Brazil had no opportunity to place forests at the centre of its agenda. Farly on at the conference, the announcement of the Tropical Forest Resilience Facility (TRFR) was exciting to most attendees. With commitments of multi-million dollar funds from different countries, the TRFR was established to fund countries to keep tropical forests intact.

COP30, which ended with a lack of any concrete roadmap to protect the climate, also signalled a glaring disparity in a global climate action agenda that has continued to favour forests alone. Much like forests, other major biomes the world over are also facing the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss — and protecting them can also aid climate action.

"Everyone is talking the effects of climate change, but the desert people are facing some of the harshest effects," said Samudra Murugan, an Ika/Wongtha/Yovungar indigenous person and the CEO of Indigenous Threat Alliance (ITA). "It is getting hotter, and it is getting harder to live here".

The ITA is a network of indigenous community groups that work to protect and manage the vast desert grasslands that make up more than a third of Australia's landmass.

Just beginning
Grasslands are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. The biome has suffered rapid habitat loss due to agricultural conversion to forests and plantations, the spread of invasive species, and the extraction of fossil fuels. In addition, many governments have suppressed indigenous and local land management techniques such as controlled fire and grazing, leaving forest land to burn during wildfires with greater intensity and to release more carbon into the atmosphere as forests degrade.

Today, the desert grasslands of Australia are reeling under the effects of dry spells and bush fires induced by climate change. These consequences are playing out in tandem with those of the

bushfire grass (*Emberiza chloris*), an invasive species of grass that has only replaced native grass but which also burns with higher intensity.

Organisations like the ITA have been at the forefront of bringing more attention to the desert grasslands of Australia. Supported by indigenous communities, the ITA has been working on the ground to protect their grasslands through regionally appropriate burning regimes, around-the-clock monitoring by indigenous rangers, and invasive species management.

"I still think that in my lifetime, there won't be a chance for me to walk up to someone in Melbourne and ask them 'where is the desert of our country'," Samudra said, further highlighting that the grasslands are often seen as nothing more than empty spaces and to this also insufficiently funded by the government.

No cerrado, no Amazon
The same situation in Australia is echoed around the world. Brazil is home to one of the world's most biodiverse savannahs, called the cerrado. Home to eight of the 12 river systems like the Amazon and the Tocantins, the cerrado is crucial in the Amazon basin. The cerrado is crucial, in fact the cerrado grasslands face twice as much range loss due to human activities as well as climate change compared to the Amazon rainforest in the country.

Of late, small-scale efforts have been bringing forth the importance of grasslands at the COP summits. Scientists, members of indigenous and local communities, and policymakers have been coming together to advocate for this underserved biome. At the COP30 itself, big headlines at the central hall of the venue; public demonstrations by indigenous communities living in the cerrado; and special youth groups formed by the Brazilian ministry with representatives from each of the 160 biomes in the country all brought issues related to grasslands to the participants' attention, even if these efforts were scattered.

"Several side events also highlighted grasslands. In one event called 'Cerrado e Amazonia: Conectando Pólos Agrários', Dandara Tomazetti, a federal congresswoman from the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil and coordinator of the Cerrado Defense Group of the Environmental Parliamentary Front, highlighted the crucial role of the cerrado grasslands. In her words, "The Cerrado and the Amazon are two biomes, and the Amazon is a biome, but the cerrado is a biome that is connected ecologically. It is important to understand that without the cerrado, there is no Amazon."

A social justice issue
The cerrado today faces multiple pressures from growing agricultural expansion, mining, fire suppression, overgrazing, and loss of communities' practices. In her words, "The Cerrado and the Amazon are two biomes, and the Amazon is a biome, but the cerrado is a biome that is connected ecologically. It is important to understand that without the cerrado, there is no Amazon."

Recognising the importance of grasslands, valuing their potential for carbon sequestration, integrating grassland protection in countrywide NDCs, while giving local communities the rights to their land, are the first steps in mainstreaming the protection of grasslands.

endangering the ecology as well as the people that live there. First, by officially recognising territorial rights and secure demarcations for indigenous people and Q'eqchi' Maya (A'chi) communities in Brazil, Dandara said, highlighting that protecting the cerrado is also a social justice issue. "We need to ensure the implementation of inclusive public policies that integrate the participation of traditional communities in the management of natural resources."

Building these narratives from the side events to the negotiating rooms of the COP is a long road. By design, the UNFCCC COP focuses almost exclusively on conversations around managing carbon, while biodiversity and land degradation largely remain the talking points for the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the U.N. Convention on Combat Desertification (CDB). To their credit, however, the CBD and the CDB have made better efforts to recognize grasslands in their programmes.

For example, at the UNFCCC COP26 conference in Glasgow, there were efforts to highlight the importance of grasslands and rangelands in achieving land degradation neutrality. Through resolution L26, the UNFCCC COP officially recognised that rangelands are complex socio-ecological systems and called on its parties to "prioritise policies and investments" and to "improve tenure security in rangelands".

Building bridges
Protecting a biome like grasslands can't happen in isolation but must come about through goals shared by the various UN bodies. Unfortunately, there are still debates ongoing about whether biodiversity and climate goals align and how institutions can build synergies. In 1992, the formation of the Three Rio Conventions marked a historic first step in bridging the gap between the UNFCCC, the UNFCCC, and the UNFCCC — and from there a mechanism to cooperate on goals to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation together.

COP30 also saw the active participation of organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature on the matter of these overlooked biomes. In a report jointly released during the conference, titled 'Protecting the overlooked carbon sink', authors from these organisations highlighted a growing need to integrate grasslands in climate negotiations. In its policy recommendation, the report stated that

grasslands should be considered in "an integrated manner across all three Rio Conventions to break silos and maximize effectiveness." The report also stated that grasslands must be recognised in the country-specific nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which are national climate action plans that outline a country's commitment to reducing emissions under the Paris Agreement.

Small step for India
Laying bridges between the U.N. bodies is in fact the best way to protect the world's grasslands, and a similar exercise between various bodies of the Indian government could benefit the country's grasslands as well. According to the white paper released by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru, at the UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow, grasslands in India come under the purview of 14 ministries, each with competing interests and policy goals. While the Union Environment Ministry considers grasslands for conservation purposes, says the Ministry of Rural Development publishes the "wonderful atlas of India" that often includes grasslands the atlas deems suitable for conversion to other uses. If the governing bodies are united from the national to the multilateral levels, however, the benefits could trickle down through mechanisms such as the country-specific NDCs. In fact, one of India's eight NDCs is "to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030".

By recognising grasslands as a crucial carbon sink, the Indian government can easily incorporate the biome, move away from forest-focused carbon sequestration schemes, and give its own climate mitigation efforts a boost.

In a similar vein, a policy brief shared by a group of researchers from Brazil titled the UNFCCC "Adapt the Ecosystem-based Approach as an integrated pathway" to conserve and sustainably manage "open ecosystems as adaptation actions, enabling their inclusion in Brazil's NDCs".

Recognising the importance of grasslands in unique ecosystems worthy of attention, valuing their potential for carbon sequestration and ecosystem services, integrating grassland protection in countrywide NDCs, all while giving local communities the rights to their land and management practices — these are essential first steps in mainstreaming the protection and sustenance of grasslands globally. Creating bridges between the relevant UN bodies such that countries can develop unified policies is also crucial.

All these goals can be achieved if the parties to the U.N. uphold the values of multilateralism and proactive science and civil society over self-interest and agribusiness lobbies.

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Why Grasslands Matter

Major but Overlooked Carbon Sinks

Grasslands store a large proportion of carbon below ground in soils and root systems, making them resilient to fires compared to forests.

Scientific evidence suggests savannahs can rival or even outperform forests in long-term carbon sequestration when sustainably managed.

Biodiversity Hotspots

Ecosystems such as Brazil's cerrado and India's semi-arid grasslands support unique flora and fauna.

The cerrado alone sustains eight of Brazil's twelve major river systems, underlining its hydrological importance.

Climate Adaptation and Resilience

Grasslands buffer against droughts, floods, and desertification.

Indigenous practices such as controlled burning and rotational grazing reduce wildfire intensity and ecosystem degradation.

Global Governance Gaps

Forest Bias in Climate Negotiations: COP30 focused heavily on tropical forests, exemplified by initiatives like the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), while grasslands received marginal attention.

Institutional Silos: Climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation are addressed separately under:

UNFCCC (carbon and emissions),

Convention on Biological Diversity, and

UN Convention to Combat Desertification: This fragmentation has limited integrated ecosystem-based approaches.

Positive Steps Elsewhere: The UNCCD COP16 recognised rangelands as complex socio-ecological systems and emphasised tenure security and targeted investments.

Grasslands as a Social Justice Issue

Indigenous and pastoralist communities depend directly on grasslands for livelihoods.

In Australia, Indigenous ranger networks manage vast desert grasslands using traditional knowledge.

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In Brazil, cerrado degradation is linked to agribusiness expansion, mining, and toxic waste dumping, disproportionately affecting Indigenous and Afro-descendant (Quilombola) communities.

Thus, grassland protection intersects with rights, equity, and inclusive governance, not just ecology.

Implications for India

According to studies by Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Indian grasslands fall under the jurisdiction of nearly 18 ministries, often labelled as “wastelands” and targeted for afforestation or diversion.

India’s NDC under the Paris Agreement focuses on increasing forest and tree cover as carbon sinks, overlooking grasslands.

Recognising grasslands as legitimate carbon sinks would:

Strengthen India’s climate mitigation strategy,

Prevent ecologically harmful afforestation,

Support pastoral livelihoods and biodiversity.

Way Forward

Integrate Grasslands into NDCs using an ecosystem-based approach.

Bridge the Rio Conventions (UNFCCC–CBD–UNCCD) to create unified policies for climate, biodiversity, and land.

Recognise Community Rights and traditional management systems.

Move Beyond Forest-Centric Climate Policy to include all major biomes.

Conclusion

The climate crisis is not confined to forests alone. Grasslands, often mischaracterised as “empty” or “degraded” lands, are vital carbon sinks, biodiversity reservoirs, and lifelines for millions of people worldwide. Their continued neglect in global and national climate frameworks represents both a scientific oversight and a governance failure. Mainstreaming grasslands into climate action—through integrated policies, inclusive institutions, and ecosystem-based approaches—is essential for achieving truly holistic and just climate solutions.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The 'cerrado', frequently mentioned in climate and biodiversity discussions, is best described as:

- (a) A tropical rainforest biome in Southeast Asia
- (b) A cold desert ecosystem in South America
- (c) A mangrove ecosystem along the Atlantic coast
- (d) A biodiverse savannah ecosystem in Brazil

Ans : d)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Protection of grasslands is as much a social justice issue as it is an environmental one. Discuss with suitable global and Indian examples. (150 Words)

Page 10 : GS II : Governance / Prelims Exam

Over the past decade, India has invested heavily in building a large-scale skilling ecosystem to harness its demographic dividend. Flagship initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) have trained more than 1.4 crore candidates since 2015. However, despite this quantitative expansion, skilling has not emerged as a first-choice aspiration for India's youth. Persistently low employability outcomes, limited wage premiums, and weak industry acceptance raise critical questions about the effectiveness, credibility, and accountability of India's skilling architecture.

Rethinking India's skilling outcomes

What prevents skilling from becoming a first-choice pathway for youth? Why has formal vocational training reached only a small share of the workforce? What limits industry participation in public skilling programmes? Why do Sector Skill Councils lack credibility with employers?

EXPLAINER

Pravesh Dudani

The story so far:

Over the last decade, India has built one of the largest skilling ecosystems in the world. Between 2015 and 2025, India's flagship skilling programme, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, has trained and certified around 1.40 crore candidates. Yet skilling has not become a first-choice pathway for most young Indians. Employability outcomes remain uneven, and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data show that wage gains from vocational training are modest and inconsistent, particularly in informal employment, where most workers are absorbed, offering limited recognition for certified skills and little visible improvement in quality of life.

Why does skilling still fail to inspire aspiration?

India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) stands at 28%, but the National Education Policy 2020 aims to raise it to 50% by 2035. This cannot be done just by expanding traditional education; it must be integrated into higher education pathways in a way that makes it easier for people to learn new skills.

Despite years of investment, only about 4.1% of India's workforce has received formal vocational training, barely improving from about 2% a decade ago (PLFS; World Bank). In contrast, across OECD countries, about 44% of upper-secondary learners are enrolled in vocational programmes, rising to around 70% in countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

The India Skills Report 2025 shows that post-degree skilling by graduates is not a mainstream or high-participation behaviour in India. If skilling is to scale



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meaningfully, it must travel through and alongside formal education.

How can industry contribute meaningfully?

Industry is the single largest beneficiary of effective skilling and trained manpower. According to various industry reports, high attrition, long onboarding cycles, and productivity losses impose real costs, with attrition rates of 30-40% common across retail, logistics, hospitality, and manufacturing alone.

Yet, there is still not much participation from the industry. Most employers do not use public skilling certifications as hiring benchmarks; instead, they use internal training, referrals, or private platforms (NITI Aayog; World Bank). The National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) has increased participation, but its effects are still unequal, particularly among bigger companies.

Industry is neither incentivised nor obligated to meaningfully contribute to relevant curriculum development, certification standards, or assessment rigour at scale. As long as skilling remains something industry consumes rather than

co-designs, it will lag labour-market reality.

Why do Sector Skill Councils fail?

The most serious structural failure in India's skilling ecosystem lies with the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).

SSCs were created with a clear mandate: to act as industry-facing institutions that define standards, ensure relevance, and anchor employability. In effect, they were meant to own the skilling value chain – from identifying industry demand to certifying job readiness. That mandate has not been fulfilled.

Today, responsibility is fragmented: training is delivered by one entity, assessment by another, certification by SSCs, and placement by someone else – if at all. Unlike higher education or technical institutions such as polytechnic diploma colleges, where reputational risk enforces accountability, the skilling system diffuses responsibility without consequence.

This fragmentation has eroded trust. Employer surveys frequently indicate that SSC credentials have limited signalling

value compared to degrees or prior work experience. Standards exist, but employers do not reliably hire against them. Industry-led certification models illustrate what is missing. Certifications from AWS, Google Cloud, or Microsoft work because the certifier's credibility is at stake. Assessments are fair and graded, not binary, and employers know what a certified candidate can do.

SSCs were meant to play this role at a national scale. Instead, they have largely limited themselves to standards creation, without owning outcomes. Until SSCs are held accountable for employability, certification will remain symbolic rather than economic.

The ongoing overhaul of standard-setting bodies must confront this directly.

How can skilling drive sustained economic growth?

India's skilling challenge is a failure of accountability, not of intent or government funding.

Expanding NAPS and deepening industry integration can become one of the fastest levers to improve job readiness at scale by pushing skilling into the workplace. Initiatives like PM-SETU, the central scheme for modernisation of ITIs, point towards stronger execution models where industry ownership and accountability are built into programme design.

When skills are embedded in degrees, when industry is treated as a co-owner, and when SSCs are made answerable for placement outcomes, skilling move from fragmented welfare intervention to a pillar of national economic empowerment.

That shift is not just about jobs. It is about the dignity of labour, productivity, and India's ability to convert its demographic strength into sustained national growth.

Pravesh Dudani is the Founder & Chancellor of Medhavi Skills University and an Advisor to NSDC

THE GIST

Despite PMKVY training around 1.40 crore candidates, employability outcomes remain uneven, wage gains are modest and inconsistent, and informal employment offers limited recognition for certified skills and little visible improvement in quality of life.

Limited industry participation, uneven NAPS outcomes, and the structural failure of Sector Skill Councils – fragmented responsibility, weak signalling value of certifications, and lack of accountability for employability – have reduced skilling to a fragmented welfare intervention rather than a driver of sustained economic growth.

Current Status of Skilling in India

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Low Penetration of Formal Vocational Training: According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and World Bank data, only about 4.1% of India's workforce has received formal vocational training—an improvement, but still far below global standards.

International Comparison: In OECD countries, nearly 44% of upper-secondary students are enrolled in vocational education, with some European nations exceeding 70%. This contrast highlights India's structural bias towards degree-based education.

NEP 2020 Context: The National Education Policy 2020 aims to raise Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035, implicitly recognising that skilling must be integrated with higher education pathways rather than remain a parallel system.

Why Skilling Lacks Aspirational Value

Weak Labour-Market Signalling

PLFS data indicate modest and inconsistent wage gains from vocational training, especially in the informal sector where most skilled workers are absorbed.

Certification often does not translate into better job quality or social mobility.

Disconnect from Formal Education

The India Skills Report 2025 shows that post-degree skilling is not a mainstream behaviour.

Skilling remains viewed as a fallback option rather than a respected professional pathway.

Limited Industry Participation

Industry stands to gain the most from effective skilling through reduced attrition, shorter onboarding cycles, and productivity gains. Yet:

Most employers do not treat public skilling certifications as reliable hiring signals.

Hiring relies more on internal training, referrals, or private platforms, as noted by NITI Aayog and World Bank studies.

While the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) has expanded apprenticeships, participation remains uneven, especially among large firms.

The absence of strong incentives or obligations for industry to co-design curricula, assessments, and standards has resulted in skill mismatches and outdated training modules.

Crisis of Credibility: Sector Skill Councils (SSCs)

Sector Skill Councils were envisioned as industry-led bodies responsible for defining standards, certifying skills, and ensuring employability. In practice, they suffer from:

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Fragmented Accountability: Training, assessment, certification, and placement are handled by different entities, diluting responsibility.

Low Employer Trust: SSC certificates have weak signalling value compared to degrees or industry-branded certifications (e.g., cloud certifications by global tech firms).

Outcome Blindness: SSCs are rarely held accountable for placement or wage outcomes, reducing incentives to maintain rigorous standards.

This structural weakness represents a core governance failure rather than a funding or intent deficit.

Economic and Developmental Implications

India's skilling challenge is ultimately about productivity and inclusive growth:

Poor skilling outcomes undermine labour productivity and industrial competitiveness.

Weak integration with industry prevents India from fully leveraging its demographic advantage.

Initiatives such as PM-SETU (ITI modernisation) and expanded apprenticeships indicate a shift towards execution models with clearer ownership and accountability.

Way Forward

Embed Skills within Degrees to normalise skilling as part of mainstream education.

Make Industry a Co-owner, not just a consumer, of skilling programmes.

Reform SSCs by linking their credibility to employability and placement outcomes.

Scale Apprenticeships as a bridge between education and employment.

Conclusion

India's skilling ecosystem reflects a paradox: large scale without commensurate impact. The core problem lies not in policy intent or budgetary support, but in fragmented accountability and weak labour-market alignment. Unless skills are embedded in education, industry is meaningfully integrated, and Sector Skill Councils are held answerable for outcomes, skilling will remain a welfare-oriented intervention rather than a driver of economic transformation. Reimagining skilling as a pillar of productivity, dignity of labour, and sustained growth is essential for converting India's demographic potential into durable national prosperity.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which one of the following best distinguishes effective industry-led certifications (e.g., global tech certifications) from India's public skilling certifications?

- (a) Strong employer trust and graded competency signalling
- (b) Binary pass–fail assessment
- (c) Government backing
- (d) Lower cost of certification

Ans : a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Despite large public investment, skilling has not emerged as an aspirational pathway for Indian youth. Analyse the structural and institutional reasons behind this failure. **(150 Words)**

Page 11 : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam

India's public health system is facing a multidimensional crisis marked by chronic underfunding, rapid privatisation, regulatory failures, and deep social inequities. Recurrent reports of unethical medical practices, rising disease burdens, and deteriorating working conditions for healthcare workers point to systemic weaknesses rather than isolated failures.

The debate assumes significance in the context of India's constitutional commitment to social justice and the Directive Principles that place public health as a core responsibility of the State. The article foregrounds a crucial but often overlooked dimension: the role of doctors not merely as care providers, but as agents of social and policy change.

Structural Problems in India's Public Health System

Chronic Underfunding and Weak Public Infrastructure

Public health expenditure in India remains low relative to its population size and disease burden.

Overcrowded public hospitals, medicine shortages, and inadequate primary healthcare continue to push citizens towards private providers.

Privatisation and Marketisation of Healthcare

Increasing dominance of private equity in healthcare has transformed medical care into a profit-driven sector.

Schemes such as Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PMJAY) and extensive public-private partnerships have led to substantial public funds flowing into private hospitals, often without commensurate strengthening of public facilities.

Doctors in private settings face revenue targets, influencing clinical decision-making and eroding trust.

Impact on Medical Education

High fees in private medical colleges (often exceeding ₹40 lakh) have commercialised medical education.

Training has become exam-centric, with emphasis on MCQs rather than clinical reasoning and community health.

This discourages engagement with social determinants of health and public service.

Social Determinants and Policy Failure

Rising non-communicable diseases due to ultra-processed food consumption, persistent air and water pollution, climate change, and unsafe infrastructure reflect policy gaps beyond the health sector. Disease patterns increasingly mirror inequality, with class, caste, gender, and geography determining access to care and health outcomes. Despite decades of programmes, tuberculosis,

Daily News Analysis

anaemia, road traffic injuries, and chronic kidney disease remain widespread, underscoring weak implementation and regulatory capture by powerful commercial interests.

Doctors as Agents of Social Change

The article situates doctors within a broader ethical and political framework:

Physicians witness the direct translation of policy failures into human suffering, giving them moral authority and social credibility.

Historically, doctors have acted as reformers and political actors:

Rudolf Virchow conceptualised medicine as a social science and argued that disease is rooted in political and social structures.

The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War reframed nuclear proliferation as a public health threat.

In India, Muthulakshmi Reddy used medical authority to advance gender justice and social reform.

These examples underline that neutrality in the face of injustice is incompatible with medical ethics.

Accountability and Governance Gaps

India's health crisis resembles an overflowing system where attention is focused on managing disease outcomes rather than addressing upstream causes. Privatisation, inadequate regulation, and neglect of preventive public health act as "leaks" in the system. Doctors, by questioning policy choices—such as promotion of tobacco, poor road safety enforcement, or weak pollution control—can shift public discourse from symptomatic treatment to structural reform.

Conclusion

India's public health challenges stem less from a lack of medical knowledge and more from policy neglect, inequitable governance, and unchecked commercialisation. While increased funding and stronger regulation are essential, transformative change also requires moral and institutional accountability. Doctors, given their societal trust and proximity to suffering, are uniquely positioned to bridge clinical realities with public policy. Reimagining physicians not only as healers but as advocates for social justice is critical to rebuilding a resilient, equitable, and people-centred public health system in India.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following pairs:

Issue	Associated outcome
1. Ultra-processed food consumption	Rise in non-communicable diseases
2. Air and water pollution	Increased disease burden
3. Climate change	Reduced pressure on public health systems

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Evaluate the impact of privatisation on India's public healthcare system, with special reference to equity, access, and quality of care. **(150 Words)**

Page 11 : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam

As the global economy transitions towards low-carbon and circular production systems, biomaterials are emerging as a critical frontier in materials science and industrial policy. Derived wholly or partly from biological sources, biomaterials offer an alternative to fossil-based plastics, chemicals, and textiles. For India, which faces the dual challenge of environmental degradation and high import dependence on petrochemical materials, biomaterials present an opportunity to align sustainability, industrial growth, farmer welfare, and strategic autonomy. The article highlights why biomaterials are increasingly central to India's green manufacturing ambitions.

What are biomaterials and how do they work?

How can indigenous biomaterials reduce dependence on fossil-based imports?

Shambhavi Naik

The story so far:

As countries look to shift to cleaner processes to manufacture consumer products, be it plastics or textiles, biomaterials will become the new frontier of materials engineering.

What are biomaterials?

Biomaterials are materials derived wholly or partly from biological sources, or engineered using biological processes, that are designed to replace or interact with conventional materials. They are increasingly used across sectors such as packaging, textiles, construction, and healthcare. Biomaterials can be broadly categorised into three types: drop-in biomaterials, which are chemically identical to petroleum-based materials and can be used in existing manufacturing systems (such as bio-PET); drop-out biomaterials, which are chemically different and require new processing or end-of-life systems (such as

polylactic acid or PLA); and novel biomaterials, which offer new properties not found in conventional materials, such as self-healing materials, bioactive implants, and advanced composites.

Why does India need biomaterials?

For India, biomaterials address multiple goals, including environmental sustainability, industrial growth, revenue generation, and supporting farmer livelihoods through a single pathway. Indigenous biomaterials biomanufacturing can reduce India's heavy dependence on fossil-based imports for plastics, chemicals, and materials. It would also enable diversified value for agricultural feedstocks and residues, offering farmers new income streams beyond food markets. As global regulations and consumer preferences shift toward low-carbon and circular products, biomaterials position the Indian industry to remain competitive in export markets. Biomaterials also support domestic policy goals around waste reduction, such as the ban on single-use

plastics and climate action goals.

Where does India stand today?

India's biomaterials sector, spanning bioplastics, biopolymers, and bio-derived materials, is rapidly emerging as a strategic industrial and sustainability opportunity, with the bioplastics market alone valued at around \$500 million in 2024 and forecast to grow strongly through the decade. Balrampur Chini Mills planned PLA plant investment in Uttar Pradesh is one of the biggest investments in India. Domestic innovation includes startups like Phool.co, converting temple flower waste into biomaterials and Praj Industries, who have their own demonstration-level bioplastics plant in progress. Although India has a rich agricultural base, in some sectors, there is foreign dependence for the technologies required for the transformation of feedstocks into market-ready final products.

What is the way forward?

India has an advantage in building a

biomaterials industry, but some issues would need to be addressed first. If feedstocks also do not scale with increased demand, there could be feedstock competition with food sources. Similarly, aggressive agricultural practices could lead to water stress and soil deterioration. Further, weak waste-management and composting infrastructure could undermine environmental benefits. Fragmented policy coordination across agriculture, environment, and industry may slow adoption, and failure to move quickly could leave India dependent on imports as other countries scale faster.

To capitalise on this sector, policy actions include scaling biomanufacturing infrastructure (especially fermentation and polymerisation capacity), improving feedstock productivity for crops such as sugarcane, maize, and agricultural residues using emerging technologies, and investing in R&D and standards to develop both drop-in and novel biomaterials.

Clear regulatory definitions, labelling norms, and end-of-life pathways (recycling or industrial composting) are essential to build consumer and industry confidence.

Government procurement, time-bound incentives under frameworks, and support for pilot plants and shared facilities can help de-risk early investments.

Shambhavi Naik is chairperson, Takshashila Institution's Health & Life Sciences Policy

THE GIST

▼ Biomaterials derived from biological sources are increasingly used across sectors and can reduce dependence on fossil-based imports while supporting environmental sustainability, industrial growth, and farmer livelihoods.

▼ India's biomaterials sector is emerging as a strategic opportunity, but scaling biomanufacturing infrastructure, feedstocks, waste-management systems, and policy coordination is essential to remain competitive as other countries scale faster.



What Are Biomaterials and How Do They Work?

Biomaterials are materials produced using biological feedstocks (such as crops, residues, or waste) or biological processes (like fermentation). They can be classified into three broad categories:

Drop-in Biomaterials

Chemically identical to petroleum-based materials and compatible with existing infrastructure.

Example: Bio-PET used in packaging.

Drop-out Biomaterials

Chemically distinct materials requiring new processing or end-of-life systems.

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Example: Polylactic Acid (PLA), which is biodegradable and

compostable under industrial conditions.

Novel Biomaterials

Materials with new functionalities such as self-healing properties, bio-active behaviour, or advanced composites, especially relevant for healthcare and high-value manufacturing.

These materials function by converting biological carbon into durable products, thereby reducing lifecycle emissions and fossil fuel use.

Why Biomaterials Matter for India

Reducing Import Dependence

India imports a significant share of fossil-based plastics, polymers, and chemicals.

Indigenous biomaterials can substitute these imports, strengthening economic resilience and aligning with Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Farmer Income Diversification

Agricultural residues, sugarcane, maize, and non-food biomass can become industrial feedstocks, offering farmers income beyond food markets.

Export Competitiveness

As global markets impose carbon standards and sustainability norms, biomaterials help Indian industry remain competitive.

Environmental and Climate Goals

Supports bans on single-use plastics, waste reduction, and India's climate commitments by lowering lifecycle emissions.

India's Current Position

India's biomaterials ecosystem is at a nascent but promising stage:

The bioplastics market was valued at about \$500 million in 2024 and is expected to grow rapidly.

Major investments include the PLA manufacturing plant planned by Balrampur Chini Mills in Uttar Pradesh.

Start-ups such as Phool.co are converting temple flower waste into high-value biomaterials.

Companies like Praj Industries are developing indigenous bioplastics technologies.

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However, India still depends on foreign technologies in certain high-end conversion processes, limiting domestic value capture.

Challenges and Policy Gaps

Feedstock Competition: Large-scale demand could compete with food crops if not managed carefully.

Environmental Trade-offs: Intensive agriculture may worsen water stress and soil degradation.

Infrastructure Deficit: Weak composting, recycling, and waste-segregation systems may negate environmental gains.

Fragmented Governance: Poor coordination across agriculture, environment, and industry ministries slows adoption.

Global Competition: Delay in scaling could lock India into future import dependence as other countries advance faster.

Way Forward

To unlock the full potential of biomaterials, India must:

Scale biomanufacturing infrastructure, especially fermentation and polymerisation capacity.

Improve feedstock productivity using precision agriculture and biotechnology.

Invest in R&D, standards, and certification for both drop-in and novel biomaterials.

Establish clear regulatory definitions, labelling norms, and end-of-life pathways.

Use government procurement, targeted incentives, and shared pilot facilities to de-risk early investments.

Conclusion

Biomaterials represent a convergence of climate action, industrial strategy, and rural economic transformation. For India, they offer a pathway to reduce fossil-fuel dependence, create new value chains for agriculture, and position domestic industry for a low-carbon global economy. However, success will depend on timely policy coordination, infrastructure creation, and technological self-reliance. If pursued strategically, biomaterials can become a cornerstone of India's sustainable manufacturing future rather than a missed opportunity in a rapidly evolving global materials landscape.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : In the context of sustainable manufacturing, the term “drop-in biomaterials” refers to materials that:

- (a) Are biodegradable under all natural conditions
- (b) Require entirely new industrial infrastructure
- (c) Are chemically identical to conventional fossil-based materials
- (d) Are used only in medical applications

Ans: (c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Biomaterials represent a convergence of climate action, industrial policy, and agricultural transformation. Discuss in the Indian context. **(150 Words)**

Page : 08 : Editorial Analysis

The right to disconnect in an 'always-on' economy

In the digital age, our greatest tools of productivity – the smartphone, the laptop, the instantaneous email – have become our silent, 24X7 taskmasters. They have eroded the vital boundary between professional life and personal well-being, turning evenings, weekends, and even holidays, into extensions of the workday. This culture of constant availability is not a badge of dedication; it is a creeping sickness, and its diagnosis is writ large across the face of the Indian workforce. The time has come for India to officially legislate a fundamental right for its citizens: the right to disconnect.

As the proposer of a Private Member's Bill advocating this very measure, I believe that this is not merely a piece of progressive labour reform. It is a national imperative for public health, long-term economic productivity, and social stability. We cannot achieve our aspirations as a global power if our most valuable resource – our people – are quietly burning out.

An unsustainable pace of work in India

The data paint a grim picture. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), a staggering 51% of India's workforce works more than 49 hours per week, placing the country second globally for extended working hours. This is an unsustainable pace. The human cost of this relentless cycle is even more alarming: 78% of employees in India report experiencing job burnout, leading inevitably to physical and emotional exhaustion.

This crisis of perpetual availability is not a matter of feeling fatigued; it translates directly into severe health conditions. The lack of a proper work-life balance contributes significantly to lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, anxiety and depression. These are not just individual tragedies; they are a societal burden that drains our health-care system and severely impairs organisational productivity. A fatigued worker is less creative, more prone to error, and, ultimately, less productive. The current emphasis on measuring work by sheer duration over quality is archaic and self-defeating. The tragic death of Anna Sebastian Perayil (the healthy young E&Y employee who literally died of overwork in 2024) was a warning for the entire workforce. Furthermore, work-related stress, often fuelled by the expectation of 24X7 digital availability, is a significant contributor to the burgeoning national mental health crisis, accounting for 10%-12% of cases, as per the National Mental Health Survey. To ignore this silent epidemic is to wilfully neglect the well-being of the nation.

India's current legal framework, despite recent attempts, remains insufficient to protect the average worker in the hyper-connected, modern economy. The Occupational Safety, Health, and



Shashi Tharoor

is the fourth-term Member of Parliament (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha), an award-winning author, a former Minister of State for Human Resources Development and a former Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology

India's legal framework is still weak and insufficient in protecting the average worker in the hyper-connected and modern economy

Working Conditions Code, 2020, sets a maximum limit on working hours for traditional "workers", but critically, it often fails to extend the same protection to all "employees", particularly contractual, freelance, and gig workers. This gap leaves a large portion of India's young, digitally-native, and highly vulnerable workforce exposed to exploitative working hours, without adequate safeguards. In a system where employees fear disciplinary action or termination simply for failing to answer a late night email, the power dynamic is inherently skewed towards the employer.

A global issue

My proposed Bill aims to correct this foundational flaw. It is crucial that the Code is amended to clearly define and limit working hours for all employees. It seeks to enshrine the "right to disconnect" in law, ensuring two core protections: first, employees cannot be penalised, disciplined, or discriminated against for refusing to respond to work-related communication beyond their specified working hours. Second, a mechanism must be established to address and resolve grievances when the rights of workers are infringed upon. Both are fundamentally about restoring dignity and ensuring that the right to recharge is respected, allowing individuals to maintain their physical and mental well-being without fear of professional repercussions.

India is not alone in grappling with the challenges of the 'always-on' economy. This is a global issue demanding a legislative response. Countries across the world have already recognised this necessity, setting a clear precedent that we must now follow. France, a pioneer in this area, introduced the "right to disconnect" as far back as 2017. Since then, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Australia have followed suit, embedding similar protections into their labour codes.

These laws mandate that companies negotiate specific protocols to limit after-hours digital communication. This is a clear signal that the most developed economies understand that respecting downtime is not an impediment to economic growth, but a precondition for sustainable growth. We must shed the myth that the world will stop turning if an email is answered the next morning.

The law, however, is merely a framework. The "right to disconnect" is defined as the employee being no longer compelled to remain available beyond their regular working hours, thereby blurring the lines between their personal and professional lives and exacerbating stress and burnout. The legislation provides the shield, but we must also wield the sword of cultural change.

The legislative momentum behind the right to

disconnect confirms its urgency, with pioneering States such as Kerala already introducing their own legislation for the local private sector. While these State-level initiatives are commendable steps, the complexity and national scale of the 'always-on' crisis demand a uniform, central amendment to secure this protection for every Indian worker. My proposed Bill, by amending the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020), ensures that this right is foundational across all States and, critically, extends protection to the vulnerable contractual and gig workforce often left out by current definitions. This national approach embeds the right to disconnect as an essential pillar of occupational safety, including mandated mental health support, transforming it from a simple prohibition on employer action into a holistic mandate for employee well-being.

Other interconnected steps to take

Still, laws alone are insufficient to facilitate meaningful transformation. For any legislation to be effective, it must be supported by comprehensive awareness programmes, advocacy and sensitisation workshops for both employees and management. It is especially important to address the organisational norms that perpetuate toxic work cultures – those where "presenteeism" is valued over actual output, and where the late night email is seen as a proxy for commitment. The provisions for proactive mental health support services, including counselling and psychological support for workers, must, therefore, become integral to the new workplace ethos.

The right to disconnect is an investment. It is an acknowledgment that well-rested minds are sharper, more innovative and more committed in the long run. By allowing employees to genuinely recharge and recover, we are not simply reducing working hours. We are dramatically enhancing the quality of those hours spent on the job.

Incorporating legal protections for a work-life balance – the right to disconnect and limiting working hours – will forge a holistic and vigorous approach toward improving the workplace environment in India. By focusing on the well-being of our employees, both their physical and mental health will improve, creating a more sustainable and, ultimately, more productive workforce for the future of India.

The choice before us is clear: to continue down the path of burnout, risking the health and potential of our young demographic dividend, or to embrace this reform, liberating our workforce and proving that India's economy is built not just on speed, but on the strength and sustainability of its people. I urge the government to implement this necessary step towards a healthier, happier, and more productive nation.

GS Paper III : Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question : Excessive working hours and digital burnout undermine long-term economic productivity. Discuss in the context of India's demographic dividend. **(150 words)**

Context :

The rapid digitalisation of work has fundamentally altered employment relationships across the world. Smartphones, emails, and remote-working tools have dissolved the boundary between professional and personal life, giving rise to an "always-on" work culture. In this context, Shashi Tharoor has argued for a statutory right to disconnect for Indian workers through a Private Member's Bill. The proposal frames the issue not merely as a labour reform, but as a public health, productivity, and social justice imperative—especially relevant for India's young and digitally dependent workforce.

The Problem: India's Unsustainable Work Culture

According to the International Labour Organization, nearly 51% of India's workforce works more than 49 hours a week, placing India among the countries with the longest working hours globally.

High work intensity and constant digital availability have contributed to widespread burnout, mental stress, and lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, anxiety, and depression.

The National Mental Health Survey indicates that work-related stress contributes significantly to India's growing mental health burden.

The tragic death of a young corporate employee in 2024 due to overwork highlighted the human cost of unchecked workplace stress.

This culture prioritises presenteeism (long hours and constant availability) over productivity and quality of work, leading to declining efficiency and long-term economic losses.

Gaps in India's Legal Framework

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 prescribes limits on working hours but primarily focuses on "workers", leaving many "employees"—especially contractual, freelance, and gig workers—outside effective protection.

In digitally mediated jobs, power asymmetry between employer and employee compels workers to remain available beyond office hours due to fear of penalties or job loss.

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This legal gap disproportionately affects young, urban, white-collar,

and gig-economy workers.

The Proposed 'Right to Disconnect'

The proposed Bill seeks to amend existing labour law to:

Protect employees from penalties for refusing to respond to work-related communication outside defined working hours.

Create grievance redressal mechanisms for violations of this right.

Extend coverage to all employees, including contractual and gig workers.

By embedding the right to disconnect within occupational safety, the proposal treats mental health and rest as integral to workplace well-being rather than optional benefits.

Global Experience and Best Practices

India's debate mirrors global trends. Several countries have already legislated the right to disconnect:

France (2017) pioneered the law, requiring companies to define after-hours communication norms.

Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Australia have followed with similar protections.

These experiences show that respecting employee downtime does not harm competitiveness; rather, it supports sustainable productivity and innovation.

Federal and Policy Dimensions

States like Kerala have initiated steps toward regulating after-hours work in the private sector.

However, given the national scale of digital labour markets, a uniform central framework is essential to ensure consistent protection across States.

Beyond legislation, awareness programmes, organisational reforms, and mental health support systems are necessary to change workplace culture.

Conclusion

The demand for a statutory right to disconnect reflects a deeper rethinking of development and productivity in the digital age. India's demographic dividend cannot be sustained on a foundation of burnout, stress, and declining well-being. By legally recognising the right to disconnect, India would affirm that economic growth must rest on humane, dignified, and sustainable work practices.

Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025

A Private Member's Bill titled Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Objective: To protect employees from work-related demands after office hours and promote work-life balance.

Key Provisions

Proposes setting up an Employees' Welfare Authority to:

Enforce the right to disconnect

Conduct baseline studies on work conditions

Negotiate rules for after-hours work in companies with more than 10 employees

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Employees cannot be punished for refusing to respond to work

calls/messages after working hours.

If employers assign work beyond fixed hours, they must pay overtime wages.

Provides for counselling services and digital detox centres to address:

Telepressure

Work-related stress

Information overload ("info-obesity")

Comparative International Practice

European Union: Employer control determines what qualifies as work, including on-call and standby time.

France: Clear demarcation between working time and rest time; digital communication regulated through collective bargaining.

Germany: Strict enforcement of working-hour limits and rest periods.

These systems embed digital communication within working-time regulation, unlike India.

Constitutional Dimension

The freedom to disconnect is closely linked to personal autonomy under Article 21.

The Bill does not clearly articulate this constitutional linkage or explain how autonomy is protected at the workplace.

Leaves ambiguity on whether the right is statutory or reflects a deeper constitutional guarantee.

About Private Member's Bill (PMB)

Introduced by an MP who is not a Minister.

Any non-minister MP, from ruling or opposition party, is a Private Member.

PMBs are usually discussed on Fridays during parliamentary sessions.

Very few PMBs become law:

Only 14 PMBs passed since Independence

No PMB has been passed since 1970

The Bill is an important starting point, but without redefining work in the digital age, aligning with labour codes, and clarifying its legal and constitutional status, it remains inadequate. Indian labour law continues to rely on a framework designed for physical workplaces, limiting the effectiveness of the right to disconnect.

