

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE
Thursday :18 June, 2026

Edition : International Table of Contents

Page 07	Dhaka's new Padma barrage will reshape water power in the region
Syllabus: GS II & III :IR & Environment / Preliminary Examination	
Page 07	The universe's expansion still accelerating: researchers
Syllabus :GS III :Science and Tech/ Preliminary Examination	
Page 08	Innovate or be eaten :India must realise the importance of innovating up to the frontier
Syllabus: GS II :Governance	
Page 10	The RBI and its growing fiscal role
Syllabus : GS III: Indian Economy / Preliminary Examination	
Page 10	What does the India-Russia logistics agreement allow?
Syllabus: GS II :International Relations	
Page 08: Editorial Analysis	Health data must drive action, not just headlines
Syllabus : GS II:Social Justice	

Page 01 :GS II &III : IR &Environment / Preliminary Examination

The Government of Bangladesh has approved the construction of a 2.1 km long Padma Barrage on the Ganges River (Padma in Bangladesh). This barrage will be built just 180 km downstream from the Farakka Barrage located in West Bengal, India. Coming at the time of the renewal of the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty, which expires in December 2026, this move is giving a new turn to the hydro-politics of South Asia. While on one hand, this project is a means for Bangladesh to overcome water scarcity during the dry season, on the other hand, it also has serious environmental impacts and regional security implications.

Key Points of Analysis Project Details and Bangladesh's Argument

- **Structure and Capacity:** This 2.1 km long barrage will store approximately 2,900 million cubic meters of water, benefiting about 6.5 crore (65 million) people in southwestern and northern Bangladesh.
- **Cost and Timeline:** Its construction is estimated to cost around 50,443 crore Taka (about 39,170 crore Rupees) over 7 years.
- **Control of Lower Riparian State:** Bangladesh has long blamed India's Farakka Barrage for its seasonal water shortage. Through this barrage, Bangladesh wants to increase its control over its water resources as a 'lower riparian' state.

The 1996 Ganges Water Treaty and Challenges

- **Rule of the Treaty:** According to the treaty, if the water flow at Farakka falls below 70,000 cusecs, both countries will share the water half-and-half. It is mandatory for both to receive 35,000 cusecs of water alternately during the dry months of March to May.
- **Uncertainty in Flow:** Due to climate change, the water flow at Farakka during the dry months in recent years (such as 1997, 2008, 2010, 2016) has been significantly lower than expected, raising questions about the relevance of the old treaty.
- **Expiration of the Treaty:** This historic treaty is expiring in December 2026, which further increases the political significance of this new barrage.

Dhaka's new Padma barrage will reshape water power in the region

The new barrage will lie just 180 km downstream of the Farakka barrage in Bengal — which Bangladesh has blamed for its periodic water scarcity. The Farakka, one of India's largest with a feeder canal, was built to divert water from the Ganga to the Bhagirathi-Hooghly, and flush the Kolkata Port

Sonika Loganathan
 CHENNAI

Bangladesh recently signed off on the new Padma barrage to control the Padma river, which is the Ganga in Bangladesh, and abate the country's seasonal water scarcity. The 2.1-km-long structure will store 2,900 million cubic metres of water to serve 6.5 crore people across southwestern and northern Bangladesh. It is estimated to cost Tk 50,443 crore (Rs 39,170 crore) over seven years. The barrage will lie just 180 km downstream of the Farakka barrage in West Bengal — which Bangladesh has increasingly viewed as an impediment. The Farakka barrage is one of India's largest with a feeder canal and was built to divert water from the Ganga to the Bhagirathi-Hooghly and flush the Kolkata Port. Under the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty, Bangladesh will receive half the water from the Farakka barrage when the flow is under 70,000 cusecs, but during the dry season between March and May, each country has to receive at least 35,000 cusecs of water in three alternating 10-day periods.

Treaties past and future
 A 2019 review by a team of experts in *Water Policy* found that there were "repeated occurrences of low flow at Farakka during the drier years in the post-Treaty period," including in 1997, 2008, 2010 and 2016. They concluded that the 1996 Treaty couldn't account for rising unpredictability in the flows. The agreement is set to expire in December 2026.

But Dhaka has also said the Farakka barrage is responsible for the country's periodic water scarcity. To add to the anxiety, several river-sharing agreements between India and Bangladesh also remain unsigned, including the Teesta River Treaty. According to S. Janakarajan, president of the South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies, "All transboundary water issues centre around the lack of timely flow of water," implying the barrage will be a way for the lower riparian state to exert some control over its water resources. But this equity will come at a considerable environmental cost.

Effects of Farakka barrage
 The Farakka barrage has altered the Ganga river's character and ecology in Bangladesh. About a third of the country's population relies on the Ganga basin, mostly to irrigate crops. But by redirecting the river and reducing flow, the barrage has diminished groundwater recharge, reduced the extent of waterways for navigation, increased salinity, eroded riverbanks, and has left less freshwater flowing to the Sundarbans. According to Mr. Janakarajan, "a substantial part of Bangladesh" is less than 10 m above sea level.

"In the near future, sea-level rise will lead to the disappearance of 17% of the territory of Bangladesh," researchers wrote in the *Journal of Marine Science and Engineering* in 2022. This, they added, will "create 20 million refugees, and 2,20,000 km² of land will be submerged following a projected sea-level rise of 1,500 mm to



A view of the Padma river from space in 2016. 1045A

take place within 150 years."

Bangladesh also drew around 520 litres of groundwater per person per day in 2008 (the latest year for which the UN FAO Aquastat database provides national figures for withdrawals by source). While this is not particularly high, the country's dependence on groundwater is a matter of concern. Because the Farakka barrage also reduces flow in the Padma, the Padma is less able to transport silt, which sinks to the riverbed and piles up. When the monsoons arrive, the river overflows quickly and floods.

The sediments are also crucial to maintaining ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them. For example, the Sundarbans region hosts the world's largest contiguous mangrove forest and depends on water from the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers. Mr. Janakarajan said less sediment and freshwater flowing from these barrages will cause water in the Sundarbans to become saline whereas the ecosystem requires brackish water, which is less salty.

These changes will also lead to fewer fish, affecting the lives and livelihoods of fisherfolk in the area.

Fondness for concrete
 South Asia is currently on a dam-building spree. There are more than 160 hydroelectric power projects underway in the region, per a 2023 review in *Water*. China is also building what will be the world's largest dam over the upper course of the Brahmaputra, just before the river enters India. In response, India has

initiated a Rs 6.4 lakh crore hydroelectric power project, including building over 200 dams in its Northeast.

Dams — of which barrages are a type — are generally designed to operate for a century. Climate change is breaking this guarantee.

To ensure a barrage doesn't overflow under heavy bursts of rain, for instance, engineers have to drain water from behind it using canals, Omair Ahmad, former South Asia managing editor at *Dialogue Earth*, said. However, this will require building extensive water diversion infrastructure that would likely be made of cement.

"Creating greater pondage here in a cement thing means water is not going into your groundwater. It cannot," Mr. Ahmad said. "It is robbing a much larger area around that barrage of the regular flow of water that would seep in from a river basin."

Given the adverse environmental consequences, experts said building another barrage is not the most rational choice.

"We think big projects will actually manage [water] despite historical evidence that they do not," Mr. Ahmad said. "It is rare for big projects to be able to manage this because ecosystems are a bit too complex."

Mr. Ahmad and Mr. Janakarajan also suggested that instead of one large barrage, Bangladesh should consider building a series of smaller check-dams, which don't dramatically alter a river's flow.

But this has the downside of requiring cross-country planning and maintenance,

whereas a barrage will be 'confined' to a specific area.

"Water sharing is always going to be a political issue," Sreenidha Batta, an international affairs professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, said. "The more we try to tame the river, the more we fall into other issues [with] long-term consequences which we cannot see now. But in the immediate context, it looks beneficial, and we are always pandering to the constituency."

The Daily Star has reported Bangladesh officials saying the government will build the Padma barrage with its own money. Experts, however, said the country lacks the engineering resources for a project of this scale and likely has help from China.

Working on a project so close to the border alongside India's scepticism towards Bangladesh's new Turage Rahman administration could make India uncomfortable, Prof. Datta added.

"China gets to be seen more and more as a dominant water manager in South Asia, as it has already become in the Mekong," Mr. Ahmad said. "India becomes a less relevant actor within its own neighbourhood."

So far, India has not directly commented on the Padma barrage. Dhaka has said its relationship with India depends on what they agree about sharing the Ganga's waters — and New Delhi that all river-sharing issues will be handled within the existing bilateral framework.

The treaty's renewal process is underway. sonika.l@thehindu.co.in

Environmental and Ecological Impacts

- **Groundwater and Salinity:** Halting the natural flow of rivers will reduce groundwater recharge. Bangladesh is already extracting 520 liters of groundwater per capita daily, which will further deepen the crisis.
- **Threat to Sundarbans:** A reduction in freshwater flow will turn the water of 'Sundarbans', the world's largest mangrove forest, saline, whereas its ecosystem requires less saline, i.e., 'brackish' water. This will destroy fisheries and local livelihoods.
- **Sedimentation and Floods:** Due to Farakka, sediment transport in the Padma River has decreased, making the riverbed shallow. The accumulation of this silt during monsoons causes rivers to overflow quickly, leading to severe floods.
- **Sea Level Rise:** A large part of Bangladesh is less than 10 meters above sea level. It is estimated that a future rise in sea level could submerge 17% of Bangladesh, creating 2 crore (20 million) 'Climate Refugees'.

'Dam Building Race' in South Asia (Hydro-Hegemony)

- **Regional Context:** Currently, there is a race to build large concrete structures in South Asia. More than 160 hydroelectric projects are underway in the region.
- **Stance of China and India:** China is building the world's largest dam in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra (Tibet). In response, India is also working on more than 200 dams in the Northeast at a cost of 6.4 lakh crore Rupees.
- **Threat of Climate Change:** Large concrete dams are designed for 100 years, but due to the erratic weather of climate change (extreme rain or drought), these structures harm the environment and completely block groundwater. According to experts, building smaller 'check-dams' instead of large barrages was a better alternative.

Geopolitical Implications and India's Concerns

- **Suspicion of Chinese Involvement:** Bangladesh claims that it will build this with its own money, but experts believe that Bangladesh does not possess such large engineering capacity and indirect Chinese assistance could be involved in it.
- **Impact on India's Diplomatic Relevance:** If China emerges as the 'Dominant Water Manager' in South Asia, similar to the Mekong River, India's influence in this region will weaken.
- **Strain in Bilateral Relations:** India's tough stance toward Bangladesh's new 'Tarique Rahman Administration' and this project being built so close to India's border with Chinese technical help could increase New Delhi's strategic concerns.
- **Pending Treaties:** Agreements on several other border rivers, including the Teesta River water dispute, still remain pending, maintaining an atmosphere of mistrust.

3. Conclusion The Padma Barrage project appears to fulfill Bangladesh's immediate domestic political and water needs, but in the long run, it could prove to be an Ecological Disaster for the entire delta region. This concrete policy of 'subduing nature' will

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

cause irreparable damage to the environment. Wisdom for India and Bangladesh lies in showing diplomatic maturity during the renewal of the Ganges Water Treaty in December 2026. Under the bilateral framework, both countries should focus not just on water sharing, but on 'Joint Basin Management' and environmental protection keeping climate change in mind, so that this sensitive region can be saved from both Chinese geopolitical intervention and environmental destruction.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to the Ganges Water Treaty (1996) and India-Bangladesh hydro-relations, consider the following statements:

1. Under the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty, if the water flow at Farakka falls below 70,000 cusecs during lean months, both countries share the water equally (50:50).
2. The Ganges River is known as 'Padma' in Bangladesh, and the proposed new Padma Barrage is located downstream of India's Farakka Barrage.
3. The Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem requires completely hypersaline water for its survival.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None of the above

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "The proposed new barrage project by Bangladesh on the Ganga (Padma) river is not merely a water-management infrastructure but also a strategic symbol of emerging hydro-politics and Chinese influence in South Asia." Critically analyze this statement in light of the Ganges Water Treaty expiring in December 2026 and discuss its strategic implications for India. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Page 07 :GS III : Science and Tech / Preliminary Examination

A research published recently in the journal 'Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society' (MNRAS) has confirmed that the expansion rate of our universe is continuously accelerating (Accelerating Rate). This study has rejected the controversial claim of the year 2025, which stated that the expansion of the universe had slowed down (Decelerating). This research involved an international team of scientists, including two Nobel laureates (Adam Riess and Brian Schmidt), who re-evaluated the data of 'Type Ia Supernova' to reinforce the fundamental principles of modern cosmology.

Key Points of Analysis Composition of the Universe

- **Ordinary Matter:** This includes all stars, planets, gas, dust particles, and all visible objects present on Earth. It constitutes only 5% of the total components of the entire universe.
- **Dark Matter:** This is an unknown and invisible substance that cannot be seen directly, but its presence is detected through its gravitational influence on galaxies and stars. It constitutes about 27% of the universe.
- **Dark Energy:** This is a mysterious, invisible energy that works opposite to gravity (Anti-gravity) and is pushing galaxies away from each other. It is the largest part of the universe, i.e., about 68%.

Type Ia Supernova: Cosmic 'Mile Markers'

- **Definition:** This is a special type of astronomical explosion that occurs due to the destruction of a 'White Dwarf' (the final dense remnant of the lifespan of a low or medium mass star).
- **Significance:** The intrinsic luminosity of all these supernova explosions is almost the same. When viewed from Earth, their brightness appears higher or lower depending on the distance. Due to this characteristic, scientists use them as 'cosmic mile markers' or 'standard candles' to measure astronomical distances billions of light-years away and the expansion rate of the universe.

Background of the Scientific Controversy (2025 vs 2026 Research)

- **The 2025 Claim (Yonsei University, South Korea):** The team led by Professor Young-Wook Lee claimed that as the universe aged, the peak luminosity of these supernovae changed (Age Effect). They argued that dark energy is weakening and the expansion of the universe has slowed down, which made the 1998 Nobel Prize-winning discovery appear flawed.
- **The 2026 Refutation (University of Southampton, UK):** Astrophysicist Brody Popovic and his team proved in the new research that there were 'severe methodological flaws' (Methodological Flaws) in the 2025 study.

Flaws and Corrections of the 2025 Research

- **Confusion between Galaxy and Star Age:** The previous research incorrectly assumed that the age of the host galaxy (Host Galaxy) and the age of the exploding star inside it are exactly the same.

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com



The galaxy NGC 2525 located nearly 70 million light-years from earth. It is famous for its supernova SN 2018, which the Hubble space telescope captured in 2018. ESA/NASA

The universe's expansion still accelerating: researchers

While some researchers say it has confirmed the notion that the universe is expanding at an accelerated rate, the very observation that led to the identification in the 1990s of an enigmatic cosmic force called dark energy. The study's results, which were published last year, had concluded that this cosmic expansion is not slowing down, but rather accelerating. "The universe is still accelerating," said astrophysicist Brody Popovic of the University of Southampton in England, one of the leaders of the study published this month in the journal *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*. The study's findings, by a team that included two Nobel Prize recipients, were backed by observations in two different datasets of a type of stellar explosion called Type Ia supernova in order to calculate vast cosmic distances. These supernovae cause the destruction of an object called a white dwarf, the dense remnant of a low to intermediate-mass star at the end of its

The study rebuts argument that the cosmic expansion is no longer speeding up — a finding that had challenged the basic understanding of the universe

lifecycle. This type of supernova has proven valuable in investigating the universe's structure based on evidence that all of these explosions have roughly the same luminosity. Their observed brightness differs depending upon their distance from earth, making them useful as cosmic mile markers.

By measuring the brightness of these supernovae as seen from earth, scientists can gauge the universe's expansion rate and its change over time. The big bang event roughly 13.8 billion years ago initiated the universe, and it has been expanding ever since. Scientists in 1998 disclosed that this expansion is accelerating, with an invisible force called dark energy as the hypothesized reason.

The universe's contents include ordinary matter — stars, planets, gas, dust and all the familiar stuff on earth — and dark matter and dark energy. Ordinary matter represents an estimated 5% of the cosmos. Dark matter, which is known from its gravitational influences on galaxies and stars, makes up an estimated 27%. Dark energy makes up an estimated 68%. The authors of the 2025 study, which was published in the same journal as the new study, concluded that dark energy is weakening and has stopped accelerating the universe's expansion.

Over the past decade, a group at Yonsei University has argued that supernova distances should be calibrated differently by accounting for the ages of the stars that eventually explode, and that this 'age effect' could substantially alter the evidence for acceleration. In our study, we found no evidence for the claimed 'age effect' in the largest calibrated supernova samples used by the research," astrophysicist Adam Riess of Johns Hopkins said. Astrophysicist Young-Wook Lee of Yonsei University, located in Seoul, was one of the leaders of the 2025 study. He defended the findings of his team, and said the main arguments made by the researchers in the new study have "serious methodological flaws or lead to conclusions that are internally inconsistent by their own logic."

The researchers in the new study expressed confidence in their methodology and their conclusions confirming acceleration.

- **Ignorance of Mass Correction:** The 2025 paper had omitted the standard scientific corrections for host galaxy masses (Host Galaxy Mass), which is mandatory for accuracy in modern cosmology. After correcting these errors, no evidence of the 'Age Effect' was found.

Conclusion:

This new research has saved the 'Standard Model of Cosmology' from a major crisis. After the confirmation that the accelerated expansion of the universe is still ongoing, the focus of scientists will now be able to center on what dark energy actually is, rather than whether it exists or not. This progress of science demonstrates that continuously challenging old established concepts and testing them with new data is the true identity of a scientific temperament (Scientific Temper), which is the only way to understand the profound mysteries of the universe.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to 'Type Ia Supernova', which is frequently discussed in astronomy, consider the following statements:

1. It is a specific type of cosmic explosion resulting from the collapse of a massive black hole.
2. They possess a nearly uniform intrinsic luminosity, which allows scientists to use them as 'Standard Candles'.
3. They are utilized to measure astronomical distances billions of light-years away and to determine the rate of cosmic expansion.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans: c)

Page 08 :GS II : Governance

The presented article provides a critical analysis of India's technology and innovation landscape. In the context of the 'Bharat Innovates 2026' event held in Nice, France, the author argues that Indian professionals possess an extraordinary capacity to lead at the global level. However, recent geopolitical events, such as the restriction of Anthropic's powerful AI models (Claude Mythos and Fable) for non-American users, have made it clear that if India does not become self-reliant in frontier technology, it will be left behind. According to the article, to become a global hub of innovation, India needs not just 'risk capital' but massive 'political capital' and policy reforms.

Innovate or be eaten

India must realise the importance of innovating up to the frontier

There is no question that Indian professionals are capable of pathbreaking innovation. As evidenced by the strong representation of Indian and Indian-origin technology industry leaders, Indian executives have displayed extraordinary talent in both the managerial and technical work that goes into building and advancing complex businesses at the forefront of the global economy's most important engines. 'Bharat Innovates 2026', the event in Nice, France, supported by the Ministry of Education, has shown that many of these innovations are possible in India, and that patient incubation of startups in key strategic areas can lead to exceptional results that are competitive with the best-in-class globally. India's potential to be a global home for innovation is real, especially with the kind of middle power collaboration that French President Emmanuel Macron advocated for at the event. The innovation question is key to processing the aftermath of Anthropic's most powerful AI models, Claude Mythos and Fable, being banned for non-Americans, a move that has already affected some Indian entities and users.

Perhaps it is not possible to brute-force frontier AI or semiconductor technology, given the tens of billions of dollars even a single player requires to make incremental advances in these fields. Becoming an AI deployment superpower, as many tech policymakers advocate, may also be a pursuit of a losing battle; India, after all, is not alone in seeking knowledge economy efficiencies from AI. But the field of opportunities remains nonetheless vast: deep tech in areas such as space exploration, defence, and even material sciences remain an open contest. For India to pursue innovation, two ingredients are important: India must be a stable and attractive home for capital and talent. For the former, the swash-buckling rent-seeking of the successful must be reined in to keep innovators from dreading success on Indian soil; venture capital must be in a position to assess exploratory and cutting-edge pitches on the same footing as they do in other countries; and tax policies must be clear and predictable. To be an attractive home for talent, what is required is quite simple: the top talent must look forward to their future in India, instead of running into a dead end for their potential and the life they feel greener pastures may afford them. For this, investments in public goods such as clean air, abundant urban green spaces, and affordable and reliable public transport can go a long way. These are, after all, what returnees miss the most. Some of India's oldest and most stubborn problems are in the way of a truly innovative ecosystem. The good news is that these problems need political capital, not risk capital.

Key Points of Analysis Indian Talent and Potential

- **Global Leadership:** The strong presence of Indian and Indian-origin tech giants in the global tech sector and top multinational corporations proves that Indians have the ability to pioneer innovation at both technical and managerial levels.
- **Successful Incubation:** The 'Bharat Innovates 2026' event has proved that if startups are given patient incubation in strategic sectors, India can deliver globally competitive results.
- **Middle Power Collaboration:** By collaborating with countries like France, India can strengthen its position in the global innovation ecosystem.

The New Geopolitics of Technology and India's Warning (The Geopolitics of AI)

- **Tech Nationalism:** The restriction of its most powerful AI models (Claude Mythos and Fable) by Anthropic for non-American entities and users is a glaring example of 'tech nationalism'.
- **Need for Self-reliance:** This restriction has affected many Indian tech entities, which serves as a warning that India cannot become a 'technology superpower' by merely relying on the deployment of foreign AI technologies.

Strategic Choices: Opportunities in Deep Tech

- **Limitations of Big Tech:** In areas like Frontier AI or semiconductor manufacturing, a lead can only be established through massive investments (tens of billions of dollars), which might be difficult for India to achieve directly through 'brute force'.
- **Open Contest:** There are immense possibilities for India in other areas of Deep Tech where global competition is still open:
 - Space Exploration

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

- Defence Tech
- Material Sciences

Two Key Ingredients for Innovation Ecosystem

A. Attractive and Stable Home for Capital:

- **Curbing Rent-seeking:** The tendency of successful and established industries to earn unfair advantages or suppress new innovators (Rent-seeking) must be reined in, so that new entrepreneurs do not fear failure or exploitation.
- **Venture Capital Perspective:** Indian venture capitalists, instead of just seeking safe investments, must evaluate risky, exploratory, and cutting-edge pitches with the same seriousness as is done in Western countries.
- **Clear Tax Policies:** There must be consistency, clarity, and predictability in taxation policies.

B. Retaining Top Talent:

- **Stopping Brain Drain:** The country's top talent should not perceive their future in India to be bleak. They should not feel that the full utilization of their potential is possible only abroad ('Greener Pastures').
- **Investment in Public Goods:** The things that professionals returning from abroad (Returnees) miss the most in India are the quality of life. For this, the government must increase investment in the following areas:
 - Clean Air
 - Abundant Urban Green Spaces
 - Affordable and Reliable Public Transport

Conclusion The conclusion of the article is highly significant: the biggest hurdles in the path of India's innovation ecosystem are not financial but structural and administrative. India must transform its policy framework to survive in this brutal global competition of "innovate or be eaten." This requires political capital more than risk capital. Until India provides a clean, safe, and transparent business environment to its talent, it will remain merely an 'AI deployment superpower' (a user of others' technology) rather than a true 'innovation hub'. To ensure technical sovereignty, India must urgently reform its domestic policies and public infrastructure.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: In the context of technological innovation and economics, which of the following best describes the frequently used term "Rent-seeking"?

- (a) The government providing land or office spaces at subsidized rent to poor startup entrepreneurs in rural areas.
- (b) The practice of manipulating public policy or economic environments to capture unearned wealth or extra profit without creating any new value or real production.
- (c) Earning foreign exchange by leasing the patent rights of a technological product to other nations.
- (d) The process of multinational companies establishing their data centers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities of India.

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "In the emerging era of technological nationalism, countries that depend solely on foreign frontier technologies risk strategic vulnerability." Examine in the context of India's AI ecosystem. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**



Page 10 :GS III : Indian Economy / Preliminary Examination

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved a record surplus transfer (Surplus Transfer/Dividend) of ₹2.87 lakh crore to the Central Government for the financial year 2025-26 (FY26). This amount is far higher than the average of previous years (₹30,000 to ₹65,000 crore). Although this transfer is in line with the revised 'Economic Capital Framework' (ECF), its massive scale has sparked a serious debate on central bank independence (Central Bank Independence), India's fiscal federalism (Fiscal Federalism), and the "fiscalisation" (Fiscalisation) of monetary policy.

The RBI and its growing fiscal role

RBI's record ₹2.87 lakh crore surplus transfer to the Centre shows its growing fiscal significance, as earnings from reserve management and foreign assets support govt. finances; the trend raises questions about central bank independence, fiscal centralisation, and exclusion of such transfers from fiscal devolution to States

ECONOMIC NOTES

Deepanshu Mohan
Ankur Singh

Central banks occupy a peculiar position in modern democracies. Governments spend, tax, and borrow. Central banks manage inflation, preserve confidence in the currency, and safeguard financial stability. Their credibility rests on maintaining a degree of distance from the fiscal compulsions of the governments they serve.

Recent developments surrounding the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) invite a closer examination of that relationship.

Much of the recent discussion has focused on the RBI's management of foreign exchange reserves, interventions with respect to managing the rupee, including instances of reserve-rebalancing through gold sales, and increased foreign-currency holdings.

Yet, the more consequential story surrounding this is the extent to which the institution may be seen to be becoming more executive or fiscalised in its role to support the government.

In May, the RBI approved a record surplus transfer of ₹2.87 lakh crore to the Union government for FY26. While fully consistent with the Economic Capital Framework, its scale raises questions about the evolving role of the central bank within India's fiscal architecture.

A structural shift

Surplus transfers have been around the ₹30,000 crore to ₹65,000 crore level for the past few years. The tipping point was reached in 2019 after the implementation of the revised Economic Capital Framework.

The transfer is now at a record high of ₹2.87 lakh crore for FY26.

This move coincides with the phenomenal growth of the RBI's balance sheet. It increased by 20.6% in one year to ₹91.97 lakh crore by March 2026. Gross income increased by over 26% during the same period.

Traditionally, governments fund expenditure through taxation, borrowing,



The Reserve Bank of India continues to operate within a well-defined framework. REUTERS

and revenue growth. Political consent is needed for taxation. Borrowing is disciplined by markets and future repayment obligations. Economic growth requires real growth in productive capacity.

Central-bank transfers are different. They generate fiscal space without new taxes, new borrowing, or commensurate growth in economic production. The latest transfer alone is bigger than the annual budgets of several Indian States.

This is not a bad practice to make such transfers. However, it does pose an interesting question. When does a stabilising institution start to act as a fiscal instrument?

The evolution of the RBI's reserve management is a good example.

The RBI may have sold almost \$12 billion worth of gold and bought foreign-currency assets by about \$7.5 billion in the face of rupee pressures, according to recent reports.

These are standard reserve-management decisions when looked at superficially. Central banks are constantly adjusting their portfolios based on market conditions. Gold is a strategic reserve asset. Foreign-currency assets are the source of liquidity for intervening in exchange-rate markets.

However, the management of reserves has become a financial issue.

The recent surplus transfer included a significant portion of gains from foreign

assets, foreign exchange transactions, and interest earned on securities holdings. The activities are mainly being carried out to ensure monetary and financial stability, but are also producing increasingly significant fiscal revenues for the sovereign.

This is where the discussion transcends accounting. The RBI's balance sheet is now at ₹92 lakh crore. The composition of reserves, intervention in the exchange rate, and asset allocation decisions now impact not just monetary stability, but also the economy's overall health. They are becoming more and more important for fiscal results as well.

The experience of India is different from that of the advanced economies, where central banks became entangled with fiscal policy by engaging in quantitative easing and buying a large number of bonds. In this case, the link has come about because of the increasing significance of the fiscal value of central-bank earnings.

The federal blind spot

The least talked about part of this debate is fiscal federalism.

The total amount of ₹2.87 lakh crore transfer is non-tax revenue and hence it is a Union government gain. It is not part of the divisible pool of income tax collections or GST revenues which are subject to Finance Commission formulas. There is no automatic share to the States.

States still have significant spending obligations. Concurrently, they have restrictions on borrowing under Article 293 and have much less fiscal flexibility than the Union government.

However, one of the biggest transfers of resources from the public sector in recent years is still not part of fiscal devolution.

The point isn't whether States have a legal claim to RBI profits. They do not. The question is whether a central institution acting on behalf of the monetary union as a whole should indirectly support fiscal centralisation, without any mention of accountability, transparency or federal balance.

Dividend transfers, cesses, surcharges and borrowing restrictions are all considered to be individual policy instruments when viewed individually. Together, they show a progressive shift in the fiscal landscape of India towards the centre.

An evolving institution

The debate over the RBI's record surplus transfer is therefore not ultimately about the dividend itself. It is about how modern states finance themselves.

The central bank has evolved from being primarily a guardian of monetary stability into an increasingly important source of fiscal capacity. The latest transfer may have eased borrowing pressures and strengthened the government's fiscal position, but it also underscores how closely monetary institutions and fiscal outcomes have become intertwined.

The RBI continues to operate within a well-defined framework and retains substantial operational autonomy. Yet central bank independence is not merely a matter of legal design. It is also a question of institutional distance.

As surplus transfers become larger and fiscal pressures intensify, preserving that distance may become more difficult. It may also become more important.

(Deepanshu Mohan is Dean and Professor of Economics at O.P. Jindal Global University. He is currently Visiting Professor at LSE and a Visiting Research Fellow at University of Oxford. Ankur Singh is a Research Analyst with Centre for New Economics Studies)

THE GIST

▶ The RBI's balance sheet increased by 20.6% in one year to ₹91.97 lakh crore by March 2026, while gross income rose by over 26% during the same period.

▶ The RBI may have sold almost \$12 billion worth of gold and bought foreign-currency assets by about \$7.5 billion in the face of rupee pressures, with the recent surplus transfer including gains from foreign assets, foreign exchange transactions and interest earned on securities holdings.



Key Points of Analysis Structural Shift in RBI's Balance Sheet

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

- **Unprecedented Growth:** By March 2026, RBI's balance sheet has reached ₹91.97 lakh crore with an annual growth of 20.6%, while its gross income (Gross Income) has increased by more than 26%.
- **Traditional Revenue vs Central Bank Transfer:** Governments usually mobilize revenue from taxation (Taxation), borrowing (Borrowing), or economic growth. Taxation requires political consensus (Parliamentary approval) and borrowing is subject to market discipline. In contrast, RBI's dividend provides a huge fiscal space (Fiscal Space) to the government without any new tax or borrowing. This transfer is even larger than the annual budget of several smaller states of India.

Emergence of RBI as a 'Fiscal Instrument'

- **Foreign Exchange and Gold Management:** According to recent reports, to manage the value of the Rupee, the RBI sold gold worth approximately \$12 billion and purchased foreign currency assets worth \$7.5 billion.
- **Stability vs Revenue:** Although these decisions are taken to maintain monetary and financial stability, they are resulting in huge profits from foreign assets, foreign exchange transactions, and interest on securities (Securities), which is ultimately becoming a major source of revenue for the sovereign (Sovereign) government.
- **Global Comparison:** In developed economies (such as the US or Europe), central banks engaged in fiscal policy through 'Quantitative Easing' and large-scale bond purchases. In contrast, in India, this connection is happening due to the fiscal value of RBI's massive earnings.

Fiscal Federalism and 'The Federal Blind Spot'

- **Outside the Divisible Pool:** This transfer of ₹2.87 lakh crore falls under 'Non-Tax Revenue'. This means that this amount is not part of that divisible pool of central taxes like income tax or GST which is shared with the states under the formula of the Finance Commission (Finance Commission). It goes entirely into the account of the Central Government.
- **Financial Pressure on States:** States have strict borrowing limits under Article 293 and their expenditure obligations (health, education, welfare schemes) are very large. States have no share in this largest financial transfer happening from the public sector.
- **Fiscal Centralisation:** Cesses (Cesses), surcharges (Surcharges), borrowing restrictions on states, and now this record dividend of RBI—all these factors together are tilting India's fiscal landscape in favor of the Center, thereby affecting the federal balance (Federal Balance).

Crisis Looming over Central Bank Autonomy

- **Institutional Distance:** The credibility of a central bank rests on maintaining a safe distance from the immediate fiscal compulsions (election spending, reducing deficit) of the government.
- **Future Challenge:** As the pressure on the government to reduce the fiscal deficit increases and the size of RBI's surplus transfer grows larger, maintaining this institutional distance will become more difficult and challenging.

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Conclusion:

This record surplus transfer of RBI is ultimately not just a financial accounting (Accounting), but it is an indication of how modern states are financing (Finance) themselves. Although this move has reduced the borrowing pressure of the Central Government and helped in meeting the fiscal deficit targets, it has created a deep chasm in financial federalism. As a monetary union (Monetary Union), the central bank works for the economic interest of the entire country. Therefore, in the future, there is a need for a broad policy discussion on the transparency, accountability of such large transfers, and the indirect fiscal centralization happening through them, so that India's federal structure is not weakened.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Which of the following best explains the term "Fiscalisation of Monetary Policy"?

- (a) Monetary policy focused solely on inflation control
- (b) Use of monetary institutions and tools to indirectly support government fiscal objectives
- (c) Privatization of central banking functions
- (d) Elimination of fiscal deficits through taxation

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Examine the implications of RBI's record surplus transfer on fiscal consolidation, central bank independence, and fiscal federalism in India. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

Recently in January 2026, the highly anticipated bilateral Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) between India and Russia has been operationalised, which has been named 'RELOS' (Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement). Contrary to the ongoing claims on social media that this is a "military alliance" and under this, the Russian military will be permanently deployed in India, this article clarifies that RELOS is an administrative and technical agreement. This is similar to the agreements signed by India with other strategic partners like the United States (LEMOA) and Japan.

What does the India-Russia logistics agreement allow?

What is RELOS, and does it allow India and Russia to station troops on each other's territory?

Dinakar Peri

The story so far:

The India-Russia bilateral Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), termed the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), which had been dragging on for several years, was operationalised in January this year. There was a flutter on social media recently with claims that it allows the stationing of 3,000 Russian troops on Indian soil or vice versa, painting it as a military alliance. However, it is like any LSA, the likes of which India has signed with other countries.

What are Logistics Support Agreements?

A logistics agreement is a foundational military cooperation agreement between

countries for administrative purposes that enables the reciprocal use of each other's bases and ports for supplies, repair, and fuel. The agreement also stipulates the occasions on which this can be utilised, generally for exercises, joint training, port calls, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief situations. As defence cooperation and military-to-military engagement become vital in international relations, the agreement simplifies essential administrative procedures and reduces bureaucracy.

For instance, the agreement with the U.S., Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) signed in 2016, the first such, provides a framework for reciprocal provision of logistic support, supplies and services for activities such as joint exercises, training, or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. "It does not provide for the establishment of any

bases or basing arrangements," Minister of State for Defence Subhash Bhamre said in a written reply in the Parliament in February 2017.

If the hyperbole is to be believed, India and Russia can station troops on each other's territory, then by convention, it also means that India and the U.S. can do the same under the LEMOA. But that is grossly incorrect, as clarified by the Minister, and is so for any LSA.

What are the existing agreements?

India has signed a series of logistics support agreements since the LEMOA in 2016. Currently, India has similar agreements with nine countries – the U.S., the U.K., France, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, Singapore, and Russia – concluded on similar lines, which provide logistics support and technical aid. The basic template and purpose for all these

remain the same. There is also one with Oman covered under the overarching defence cooperation agreement.

What is the agreement with Russia?

Like other agreements, RELOS defines procedures for supporting military formations, port calls of warships, and the use of airspace and airfield facilities by military aircraft of both countries and the organisation of logistics and technical support of military formations of warships, military aircraft, and other equipment.

The agreement was signed in Moscow on February 18, 2025, and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the federal law ratifying it on December 15, 2025. According to the Kremlin, the purpose of the agreement is to define the procedures for the deployment of military formations, port calls by warships, and the use of airspace and airfield infrastructure by military aircraft of the two countries.

Broadly, RELOS covers joint military exercises, training, HADR missions, port and repair services, medical support, as well as delivery of food and technical resources and reciprocal access to military facilities, including airbases and ports, to support ship and aircraft personnel.

The agreement stipulates a maximum

of 3,000 troops, representing a broad upper limit that takes into account the size of contingents and the number of ships or aircraft that may visit during engagements mutually agreed upon by both sides. It is valid for a period of five years, allowing for revisions later to reflect changing circumstances and requirements. The time frame for positioning of assets and personnel would be subject to the visit mutually agreed upon by both parties, one official said.

In fact, the scale of bilateral and multilateral relations between India and other countries is much larger. Indian armed forces exercise with the U.S. now.

Also, the agreement does not confer any provision for permanent basing of assets, and the agreement shall be exercised during joint exercises, port calls, or visits mutually agreed by both nations based on provisions of the agreement, officials clarified. "No permanent or long-term stationing has been agreed upon as part of the Agreement."

One important aspect is that RELOS gives access to Russian military facilities in the Arctic as both countries expand cooperation there, as new navigation routes open up, a fallout of global warming. (Dinakar Peri is Fellow, Security Studies at Carnegie India)



Key Points of Analysis What are Logistics Support Agreements (LSA)?

- **Administrative Framework:** This is a basic agreement for military cooperation between countries meant for administrative purposes. Under this, the militaries of both countries can use each other's military bases and ports for supplies (Supplies), repair (Repair), and refueling (Fuel).
- **Occasions of Use:** It can be used only on special occasions, such as—joint military exercises, joint training, port calls (warships coming to the port), and situations of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- **Reduction in Bureaucracy:** It simplifies defense cooperation and reduces necessary administrative procedures and paperwork between the militaries of both countries.

What is RELOS and What Does it Permit?

- **Timeline of the Agreement:** This agreement was signed on 18 February 2025 in Moscow, and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the federal law approving it on 15 December 2025, after which it came into force in January 2026.
- **Key Provisions:** RELOS defines the procedure for the use of facilities of each other's airspace (Airspace) and airfield (Airfield) by military formations, port calls of warships, and military aircraft of both countries.
- **Coverage Area:** It includes delivery of food, technical resources, medical assistance, and reciprocal access to airfields and ports.

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai – 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Refutation of the Illusion of Military Deployment (No Troop Stationing or Permanent Bases)

- **The Truth Behind the Limit of 3,000 Troops:** Contrary to social media claims, the maximum number of 3,000 troops mentioned in the agreement is only an upper limit (Upper Limit). This has been fixed keeping in view the total contingent (Contingents) of ships/aircraft arriving during joint exercises or port visits.
- **No Permanent Base:** Officials have clarified that this agreement does not allow either country to establish a permanent or long-term military base (Permanent Basing) in the other's territory.
- **Comparison with LEMOA:** India signed LEMOA, its first such agreement with the US, in 2016. The government has already clarified in Parliament that these agreements do not mean establishing military bases.

Strategic Significance of RELOS for India

- **Access to Arctic Region:** The most significant strategic aspect of this agreement is that it provides India access to Russian military facilities (Facilities) in the Arctic region. Due to global warming (Global Warming), new navigation routes (Navigation Routes) are opening in the Arctic, where India and Russia are increasing their cooperation.
- **Global Balance:** India currently has entered into such logistics agreements with a total of 9 countries (USA, UK, France, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Oman, and now Russia). Implementing it with Russia reflects India's policy of 'Strategic Autonomy' and multi-lateral alignment (Multi-alignment).
- **Duration:** This agreement is valid for 5 years, which can be revised later depending on the circumstances.

Conclusion:

The operationalisation of 'RELOS' is a milestone in the time-tested (Time-tested) defense relations of India and Russia. It should not be seen as a military alliance or an agreement of sovereignty, but as an instrument of modern defense diplomacy. This agreement will increase the operational reach (Operational Reach) of the Indian Navy and Air Force from the Indian Ocean to the Arctic Ocean. India entering into equal logistics agreements with various superpowers (the US and Quad countries on one hand, and Russia on the other) proves that New Delhi keeps its national and security interests paramount without joining any single bloc.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding RELOS:

1. RELOS is a military alliance between India and Russia.
2. It allows reciprocal logistical support between the armed forces of both countries.
3. It permits permanent deployment of troops in each other's territory.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Discuss the significance of the India-Russia RELOS agreement in strengthening defence cooperation and India's maritime outreach. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

Aim, Think & Achieve

www.lakshyaacademy.co | www.lakshyaaiasacademy.com

Page :08 : Editorial Analysis

Health data must drive action, not just headlines

There is an unsettling paradox in the release of health survey data in India. Survey findings often end up doing exactly the reverse of what they should. They often highlight what we already know, do not take a sufficiently serious view of what has not improved, and rarely lead to immediate programmatic action. The discussion that follows is often ritualistic: the government highlights achievements, newspapers amplify numbers, academics wait for raw data to analyse, and business and industry identify market opportunities.

This seems to be the case with the three recently released health-linked surveys: the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), the National Statistical Office (NSO) 80th Round Household Consumption on Health and the National Health Accounts Estimates for India 2022-23.

All three should have offered a moment of national stocktaking. Instead, the two reports on health expenses barely received any attention, while the third, the NFHS-6, and its use by key stakeholders, tells a familiar story. In government communication, improvements have been selected and celebrated. Achievements must, of course, be acknowledged. However, the real value of such surveys is not in confirming what has worked, but in showing where programmes remain weak and old strategies are no longer sufficient.

The business of disease

Industry and business groups have flagged rising health challenges reported in NFHS-6. Rising obesity becomes an argument for weight-loss products, apps, gyms, diagnostics and drugs. Rising diabetes becomes an opportunity for monitoring devices, test packages and private clinics. Rising non-communicable diseases become the market case for more screening, testing and medicalisation. Where public health messaging is weak and private health markets are aggressive, every survey finding can become a business prospect.

The one positive development so far has been the extensive coverage in the print media, which has flagged what matters to citizens: the rise of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases (NCD). Yet, much of this was already known. Obesity and other NCDs have moved from urban and affluent groups to all social and economic groups. The new data merely put fresh numbers to an old warning.

What is grossly missing is critical reflection and policy dialogue around these findings. This should worry us. A health survey is not meant to be a national reminder of familiar problems but an instrument of course correction. If anaemia



Chandrakant Lahariya

Practising physician in preventive and cardio-metabolic medicine and specialist in health policy. He has worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN system for nearly 18 years

has not improved, the response cannot be another paragraph in a report. If out-of-pocket expenditure remains high, the answer cannot be only a headline on a declining percentage share. If obesity is rising among children, the response cannot be a few articles followed by silence.

The NFHS-6 also carries a temporal problem. Its data were collected during 2023-24, but the findings entered public debate in mid-2026. In a political system skilled at both claiming credit and avoiding blame, this lag is convenient. A government can celebrate positive indicators as proof of current policy success while dismissing uncomfortable findings as “old data”, influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, past administrative disruptions or conditions that have since improved. The survey then becomes less a compass and more a weapon. This is unfair to the survey and unhelpful to policymaking.

Academicians and public health researchers play a crucial role in interpreting large-scale survey data beyond official reports. In India, however, such analysis is often delayed because raw data are released late. By the time peer-reviewed studies appear, three to five years may have passed since data collection. Policymakers can then dismiss critical findings as outdated and no longer relevant. As a result, data lose their impact: when reports are released, raw data are unavailable for scrutiny; when analysis finally arrives, the opportunity for policy action has often passed.

From data to action

There is a need to reflect on how India continues to miss these opportunities. Data improve health outcomes only when they are linked to timely and relevant policy decisions. Countries that make effective use of health data do not wait years for perfect academic papers or definitive solutions. Instead, they have robust systems and empowered institutions that generate rapid policy briefs, identify lagging districts and regions, conduct regular reviews, compare performance, allocate resources efficiently and adapt programmes as needed. The translation of data into action is not merely a slogan; it is a discipline. India needs to cultivate that discipline if it is to realise the full value of the vast amounts of health data it collects.

First, every major national health survey should be followed, within 30 to 45 days, by a national and State-level action note jointly prepared by the government and independent academic institutions. The note should candidly identify what has improved, what has remained stagnant and what has deteriorated. Each finding should be linked to a specific programme and a clearly accountable authority. If child nutrition has stagnated, the nutrition programme must

respond. If hypertension detection remains inadequate, the primary health-care system must respond. If out-of-pocket expenditure on medicines remains high, the drug procurement system must respond. Data should not merely describe problems; they should trigger accountability and corrective action.

Second, there should be State-level health data review meetings, not ceremonial events but working sessions. Health Secretaries, Finance Departments, District officials, public health experts, civil society representatives, other key stakeholders and independent subject experts should examine the findings together. The question should not be, “What can we highlight?” It should be, “What must we change?”

Third, India needs systems for the optimal and timely use of survey data. It has started developing the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP), but that is primarily for real-time data. Survey data, Health Management Information System (HMIS) data and IHIP data must be combined to generate analytical information. Fragmented data produce fragmented policy.

Fourth, primary data and source files from surveys should be made available early so that independent researchers and public institutions can produce quick analysis. There is no reason to wait years for serious interpretation. Data should not sit like a guarded file. They should be available as a public good.

Fifth, findings should influence budgetary allocation. If a survey shows rising NCDs, primary care budgets must reflect the need for NCD prevention and treatment. If households are spending heavily on medicines, public facilities must strengthen essential drug availability. If obesity is rising in children, school health, food regulation and urban planning must respond. Data without budgetary consequence are merely information.

Looking ahead

Economist Aaron Levenstein said in 1951 that “statistics are like bikinis. What they reveal is suggestive, but what they conceal is vital”. Health data should be like an x-ray. They are useful only when interpreted correctly, discussed honestly and followed by policy actions. Data and statistics are only as useful as their interpretation; interpretation is only as useful as the action it produces. The next time survey findings are released, the real question should not be what the numbers show. The real question should be: what will change in programmes in a month’s time, in six months and in a year? Alongside this, India definitely needs more and timely health data. However, what we need even more is accountability.

Health data should guide accountability, budgets and programme reform

GS Paper II: Social Justice

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "Data without accountability has limited value in public health governance." Discuss in the context of recent health surveys in India. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

Context :

Recently, three important health survey reports were released in India: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), National Statistical Office (NSO) Survey on Household Consumption on Health (80th round), and National Health Accounts Estimates 2022-23. According to Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, former World Health Organization (WHO) expert, there is a 'strange paradox' (Paradox) with health data in India. Instead of policy reforms (Course Correction), health surveys are being used for taking political credit, creating media headlines, and seeking market opportunities by private industries. The article emphasizes connecting health data with 'action' and 'accountability' (Accountability).

Key Points of Analysis Current 'Ritualistic' Use of Health Data

- **Political Use vs Real Reform:** Governments select and celebrate only those statistics in which improvement has occurred. Uncomfortable data (such as stunting of malnutrition or anemia remaining stagnant) are dismissed by calling them 'old data' or the 'impact of the pandemic (COVID-19)'. Data becomes a political weapon instead of becoming a 'compass' (Compass).
- **Aggressiveness of the Market (Commercialisation of Diseases):** The rising statistics of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like obesity, diabetes (Diabetes), and hypertension (Hypertension) are used by private companies for marketing their weight loss products, apps, gyms, and private clinics. Due to the weakening of public health messaging, every disease becomes a 'business model'.
- **Time Lag in Data Release (Data Lag):** The data for NFHS-6 was collected in 2023-24, but it came into public debate in mid-2026. Due to this 2-3 year lag, the data loses its immediate effectiveness.

Challenges in Academic and Research Sector

- **Delay in Raw Data (Raw Data):** Researchers get the primary data for analysis very late. By the time peer-reviewed (Peer-reviewed) studies come out, the data has become 3 to 5 years old and policymakers declare it "irrelevant".
- **Locking of Data:** Instead of making data immediately available for independent scrutiny as a 'public good' (public good), it is kept hidden like a secure government file.

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

5-Point Strategic Steps to Turn Data into Action The author has given five practical suggestions to reform India's health framework:

1. **Immediate 'Action Note' and Accountability:** Within 30 to 45 days of the release of every major national survey, the government and independent academic institutions together should prepare an 'Action Note'. In this, it should be clear which department holds the accountability. (e.g., If malnutrition among children has increased, then the nutrition program should be held accountable immediately).
2. **State-Level Operational Review Meetings:** These meetings should be working sessions rather than just ceremonial (Ceremonial). These should include the Health Secretary, Finance Department, district-level officers, and public health experts, whose focus is on "what we need to change", rather than "what we can highlight".
3. **Integration of Data (Integrated Data Systems):** India has started developing the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) for real-time data. But to strengthen policy making, survey data, Health Management Information System (HMIS), and IHIP data must be linked (Combine) together. Fragmented data (Fragmented data) leads to fragmented policies only.
4. **Early Release of Raw Data:** Primary data files should be made available immediately to independent researchers and public institutions so that quick and accurate policy analysis can take place.
5. **Linkage with Budgetary Allocation (Data-Driven Budgeting):** Statistics must show a direct impact on the budget. If non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are rising in the survey, the budget of Primary Health Centers (PHCs) must increase. If people are spending heavily out-of-pocket on medicines (Out-of-Pocket Expenditure), the budget should be allocated for the availability of essential medicines in government hospitals. "Without budgetary impact, data is merely a piece of information."

Conclusion:

Citing the statement of famous economist Aaron Levenstein ("Statistics are like bikinis; what they reveal is suggestive, but what they conceal is vital"), the article concludes that health data should be like an 'X-ray' (X-Ray). An X-ray is useful only when it is interpreted correctly and after that, the doctor immediately starts the treatment (action). India does not just need more and timely health data, but most importantly needs to fix 'administrative accountability' (Accountability) on the basis of that data. The next time a health report comes, the question should not be what the numbers are, but rather what change will come in the programs on the ground in the next one month or one year.