

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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The inauguration of three key sections (326 km) of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) connecting Dadri (Uttar Pradesh) to the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) in Navi Mumbai marks the full operationalisation of India's ~2,843 km Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) network. From a Civil Services examination perspective, this development represents a major shift in India's infrastructure, supply chain dynamics, and macroeconomic competitiveness.

PM slams critics as he opens freight corridor

PM inaugurates key sections of Dedicated Freight Corridor connecting U.P. to port in Navi Mumbai

He dismisses Rahul's campaign against his govt. as an 'echo of lies', attempt to mislead the youth

Modi says his opponents will continue to find fault with 'major infrastructure milestones'

Press Trust of India
VADODARA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a dig at the Opposition over a newly inaugurated dedicated freight corridor, saying critics would still complain like a "naraz fufa" (grumpy uncle) and manufacture grievances, while dismissing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's campaign against the government as "jhooth ki goonj" (echo of lies).

Speaking at the inauguration of three key sections of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, connecting Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Navi Mumbai with Dadri in Uttar Pradesh, and marking the project's completion, Mr. Modi praised his administration's pace of execution and called the former UPA regime's working speed "sluggish".

"After 2014, with your blessings, when I reached Delhi, and as soon as we arrived there, we began ac-

celerating this project. Work on the dedicated freight corridor has been completed today," he said.

The "jhooth ki goonj" jibe appeared to mock the *Chhatron Ki Goonj* student dialogue campaign launched by the Congress. Through the campaign, the Congress is trying to corner the BJP on issues such as exam question paper leaks, costly education, irregularities in government recruitment and unemployment.

'Finding fault'

Targeting Mr. Gandhi without naming him, Mr. Modi said opponents would always find fault with major infrastructure milestones such as the newly inaugurated freight corridor.

"Now, the *naraz fufa ji* (grumpy uncle) will start shouting: What will happen to the truck drivers? Where will the trucks go? What about the trucks people have purchased? Now, *fufa ji* has found something



Grand welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the event in Vadodara on Tuesday. PHO

new to complain about," the Prime Minister said.

He pointed to "rapid modernisation" under his decade-long tenure compared to the previous administration's shortcomings.

"After 2014, India built 50,000 modern rail coaches. The previous regime could not build even

50,000 toilets in 10 years," he said.

Taking aim at the Opposition's youth outreach efforts, specifically Mr. Gandhi's *Chhatron Ki Goonj* campaign in Pune last month, the Prime Minister cautioned the youth against "falling for political misdirection".

"At every nook and cor-

ner, you will find people who will try to mislead you through lies, but today's youth will stand with the truth," Mr. Modi said, urging youngsters to align with factual progress over political narrative.

He said the youth could see how focused the government was on working across sectors, including

solar, wind, hydro, and nuclear energy. Describing the dedicated railway freight corridor as the life-line of a rapidly developing nation, the Prime Minister noted that India's economic transformation was accelerating due to the modern freight structure. Earlier, passenger and goods trains were forced to run on the same tracks, which severely hampered both passenger travel and freight movement, but the dedicated corridor altered that dynamic, he said.

Criticising the administrative delays under the previous government, he pointed out that though the concept originated in 2004 and a special purpose vehicle was set up in 2006, files remained stuck without progress until 2014.

"Unfortunately, even these files were not fortunate enough to get a dedicated corridor. Files would get stuck, hang around, wander aimlessly," Mr. Mo-

di said. India is scripting a new saga of manufacturing, spanning "chips to ships", with components, final products and the supply chain for self-reliance being set up in the country, Mr. Modi said.

At an event in Mumbai later in the day, Mr. Modi said the Indian economy's 7.8% real GDP expansion gave confidence to the world at large because the performance came in a challenging quarter when the impact of the West Asia conflict was the highest.

He said India had emerged as a major manufacturer of railway coaches, metro coaches and locomotives in the last decade.

A 100-km journey that earlier took 6.5 hours for a freight train can now be covered in less than half the time, while a 30-hour journey by truck can be completed in 10-12 hours on the Dedicated Freight Corridor, the Prime Minister noted.

Key Technical & Economic Dimensions

• Logistic Efficiency & Cost Reduction:

- The dedicated track reduces freight transit time from ~66 hours to ~58 hours between Dadri and JNPA, cutting travel times by over 50%.
- India's logistics cost currently stands at around 13–14% of GDP; the DFC aims to bring it closer to the global benchmark of 8–9%.

• Modal Shift & Decongestion:

- By segregating heavy cargo from passenger lines, line capacity utilization on trunk routes drops from overburdened levels (115–150%) to optimal limits.

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Daily News Analysis

- It supports a structural shift from road to rail, targeting a rail freight share increase from ~27% to 45% by 2030 under the National Rail Plan.

- **Capacity Augmentation & EXIM Boost:**

- Enables operations of heavy-haul, double-stack container trains, where a single train can carry cargo equivalent to over 250 trucks.
- Directly links manufacturing hubs in North and Central India with major Western ports (JNPA, Pipavav, Mundra).

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

- **Infrastructure (Railways & Logistics):**

- PM Gati Shakti Master Plan: Integrated planning aligning rail, road, and port connectivity.
- DFCCIL (Special Purpose Vehicle): Set up under the Companies Act, 1956, showcasing public sector execution mechanisms and international financing (World Bank & JICA).
- Industrial Corridors: Complements the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) by serving as its physical backbone.

- **Environment & Sustainable Development:**

- Decarbonisation: Electric-powered heavy-haul corridors lower carbon emissions compared to diesel-based road transportation, aligning with India's Panchamrit targets (Net Zero by 2070).

- **Geography & Economics:**

- Spatial Distribution of Industries: Improved freight mobility allows manufacturing hubs to be established away from coastal regions without incurring high transportation overheads.

Conclusion

The completion of the Dedicated Freight Corridor network transforms India's freight transport from a legacy, shared-track model to a modern logistics infrastructure. By drastically cutting turn-around times and lowering transport costs, the DFC strengthens multi-modal connectivity, enhances EXIM trade, and acts as a multiplier for national industrial growth.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Double-stack container trains are particularly advantageous because they:

- A. Carry two locomotives instead of one
- B. Allow containers to be stacked vertically, increasing freight-carrying capacity per train
- C. Operate simultaneously on two railway tracks
- D. Carry only passenger containers

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Dedicated Freight Corridors can transform India's logistics architecture from capacity-constrained transportation to integrated supply-chain infrastructure." Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

The virtual briefing by Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov ahead of the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi highlights the evolving strategic, economic, and diplomatic ties between India and Russia. Against the backdrop of the prolonged conflict in Eastern Europe, the engagement reflects India's position as a mediator and non-aligned economic actor balancing ties between the Global South and Western powers.

Key Highlights of the Briefing

• Peaceful Resolution to Ukraine Conflict:

- Russia welcomed India's constructive role in mediating peace, noting that both nations share a common stance on resolving the dispute through diplomatic means.
- Addressal of the discharge of 24 Indian nationals currently deployed in frontline forces who were fraudulently recruited.

• Upcoming Bilateral Summit & Defence Ties:

- Bilateral talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin are scheduled prior to the BRICS Leaders' Summit.
- Key topics on the agenda include technology transfer for Su-57 fighter jets, joint production of BrahMos missiles, and fulfillment of remaining S-400 missile system deliveries.

• Energy Trade & De-Dollarisation:

- Bilateral energy imports have reached record highs despite Western pressure.
- Over 90% of trade within BRICS members is conducted using national currencies, framed by Moscow as a mechanism for economic stability rather than anti-dollar hostility.

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

• Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings (India & Its Neighbourhood / Major Powers):

- Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership: Underlines the defense-heavy relationship established through defense platforms (Su-57, S-400) and civil nuclear energy collaboration (Kudankulam).

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Russia welcomes India's efforts to end Ukraine war

Both India and Russia want peaceful end to the war that has gone on for four-and-a-half years, says Kremlin spokesperson, adding Indian citizens deployed on the frontline will be sent back

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

A week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated his call for an end to the long-running Ukraine-Russia war on the sidelines of the SCO summit, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov in a virtual press interaction with the Indian media said on Tuesday that both India and Russia want a peaceful end to the war that has continued for more than four-and-a-half years.

Mr. Peskov gave a positive outlook of the upcoming BRICS summit in India on September 12 and 13 and announced that President Vladimir Putin will hold talks with Prime Minister Modi ahead of the summit on September 11.

Welcoming India's contribution to end the war, he said: "We know the position of India on the Ukrainian conflict, and to a great extent, it corresponds with our own position, because we do want the solution to the Ukrainian conflict by



Boosting ties: Narendra Modi and Vladimir Putin will hold talks ahead of the BRICS summit in New Delhi. FILE PHOTO

peaceful means, and Russia is open to this process." Mr. Peskov added: "We welcome the willingness of the Indian side to contribute."

He noted that there are Indian citizens who are on the frontlines in Ukraine, saying that Russia has asked for a list of such individuals who India claims were fraudulently lured to fight in Ukraine on Russia's behalf. "They will be sent back," said Mr. Peskov.

The External Affairs Ministry on Tuesday said there are 24 Indian citizens

who continue to remain deployed in Russian forces and are engaged in frontline.

Mr. Peskov said Mr. Modi and Mr. Putin will meet ahead of the BRICS summit, and added: "Like always, they will touch on the bilateral agenda. Trade and economic cooperation have a very wide scope."

He referred to the challenges of sanctions from the U.S. for Indian energy purchase from Russia and said, "You know that lots of issues cannot be discussed publicly, having some un-

friendly countries that are trying to put obstacles in the way of further development of our cooperation. So it is being discussed discreetly, but in a very, very constructive manner."

India has been arguing that purchase of Russian oil is a policy that is taken keeping in mind domestic energy requirements. Mr. Peskov exuded confidence about increase in the bilateral energy trade and said, "I won't give you a figure. Every month, we have a new record."

On the expectations and challenges before the BRICS summit that will be chaired by India this time, Mr. Peskov said BRICS is not "anti-western" and that it is a grouping of countries who share an outlook.

Earlier in May 2026, strong differences between Iran and the UAE had prevented the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting from coming out with a joint statement and there are lingering feelings that these differences could hamper a joint statement at the summit as well.

Daily News Analysis

- Strategic Autonomy & Multi-alignment: Demonstrates India's foreign policy doctrine—maintaining trade ties with Russia while managing relations with Western partners like the U.S.
- **International Institutions (BRICS):**
 - BRICS Governance: Examines the institutional evolution of BRICS as an economic grouping navigating internal dynamics (such as West Asian regional developments) and expanding trade in local currencies.
- **Security & Human Mobility:**
 - Human Trafficking & Overseas Indian Diaspora: Highlights the MEA's consular mechanisms and legal frameworks required to prevent forced recruitment in foreign military operations.

Conclusion

The Russia-India engagement ahead of the BRICS Summit illustrates India's effort to navigate complex global geopolitics. By prioritizing diplomatic resolution in Ukraine, safeguarding its energy security, and protecting the welfare of its overseas citizens, India continues to utilize its strategic autonomy to foster regional stability and multi-polar cooperation.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following best describes de-dollarisation?

- A. Complete elimination of the US dollar from international trade
- B. Replacement of all national currencies by a common BRICS currency
- C. Reduction of excessive dependence on the US dollar through greater use of alternative currencies and payment mechanisms
- D. Prohibition of dollar-denominated international transactions

Ans: C)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "India-Russia relations are undergoing a transition from a predominantly defence-centric partnership towards a broader strategic and economic relationship." Discuss.(10 Marks, 150 Words)

The CosmoCube mission led by the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) and India's PRATUSH project represent a technological frontier in observational cosmology. By placing radio radiometers in lunar orbit, these missions leverage the Moon's far side as a natural shield against terrestrial Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) and ionospheric distortion to study the universe's formative epochs.

From moon's far side, a satellite to look for the first radio signal

The 21-cm radio signal emitted by neutral hydrogen is like the proverbial needle in a haystack as it is buried beneath foreground radio emissions thousands of times stronger; to isolate it and reveal how the first stars and galaxies formed is a great challenge even for advanced platforms like the planned CosmoCube and India's PRATUSH

Prakash Chandra
KOCHI

Cosmologists are literally over the moon at the prospect of listening to the universe telling its story like never before. At the heart of this excitement is a small satellite named CosmoCube, which scientists from the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) plan to send to the far side of the moon, which permanently faces away from the earth.

Two-year mission
The compact satellite will have around 40 minutes on the lunar far side during its orbit every two hours, when it will be cut off from all radio noise from the earth. This is when it can capture ultra-faint cosmic signals, particularly one emitted by neutral hydrogen atoms – the most abundant element in space. “While passing behind the moon, the satellite would listen for an extremely faint radio ‘whisper’ produced by hydrogen in the very young universe, before the first stars and galaxies had fully formed,” Eloy de Lera Acedo, head of the Radio Astronomy and Cosmology research group at the University of Cambridge, who is leading the project, said via email.

A study on the CosmoCube project was published in *Nature Astronomy* on August 14.

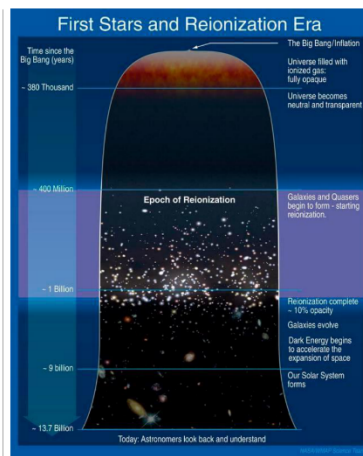
The RAS researchers expect the satellite to gather more than a thousand hours of data during its two-year mission.

During its scientific observations, CosmoCube would ideally remain radio-silent while behind the moon, so that its own communications did not contaminate the measurement. The recorded data could then be transmitted to the earth during a different part of its orbit,” Dr. de Lera Acedo said.

“The satellite carries a very sensitive and accurately calibrated radio receiver, or radiometer, operating at low frequencies (10-100 MHz) which would separate the incoming radio waves into many frequency channels so that scientists [can] search for the characteristic fingerprint of early hydrogen.”

Dark Ages

Current models of the universe suggest that once upon a spacetime, right after being engendered by the Big Bang, the



Cosmic dawn: A timeline of the early universe, from the Big Bang to the present. NASA

universe must have been a very dark place filled with neutral hydrogen.

This inky black period is called the Cosmic Dark Ages. It stretched from about 380,000 years to around 200 million years after the Big Bang. The first stars and galaxies were yet to ignite their nuclear furnaces and switch on the lights in the universe, ushering in what is known as the Cosmic Dawn.

Today, we can detect blurred pictures of that infant universe in the cosmic microwave background (CMB), the primordial radiation emitted shortly after the Big Bang. But no one quite understands what happened during the subsequent Dark Ages as there is nothing for even the state-of-the-art instruments of today to ‘see’ of that mysterious era.

In that sense, the story of the universe would have been left untold at that point but for a Dutch astronomer, Hendrik van de Hulst. In 1944, Van de Hulst predicted

a rare quantum mechanical phenomenon called a spin-flip transition that could have prompted the neutral hydrogen filling the cosmos to emit a feeble light.

He reckoned that this light could be detected at a specific wavelength of 21 cm. Unlike visible light, this ancient radiation, whose corresponding frequency is 1,420 MHz, penetrates interstellar dust clouds to bring us snapshots from the very beginning of space and time.

(Of course, as the universe expands, this radiation is stretched to wavelengths of many metres by the time it reaches us.)

First lights

In 1951, the U.S. physicists Harold Ewen and Edward Purcell at Harvard University observed the 21-cm radiation for the first time, heralding the age of spectral-line astronomy.

It meant cosmologists could pick up the story of the universe again because they had a means to study the Dark Ages, one of the few periods in cosmic history that has never been directly observed.

Around 150 million to one billion years after the Big Bang, light from the first stars and galaxies split the ubiquitous neutral hydrogen in the cosmos into free electrons and protons. This ‘Era of Reionisation’ lifted the dark cosmic fog from the universe and made it transparent, traces of which we now see as the cosmic microwave background.

CosmoCube will also help investigate the Hubble tension: the difference in results when we measure the expansion of the universe by studying nearby celestial systems and the CMB of the early universe.

“CosmoCube would not simply make another direct measurement of today’s Hubble constant,” Dr. de Lera Acedo said. “Instead, it would examine a largely unexplored period between the CMB and the formation of the first stars.” This will help cosmologists test some of the new-physics explanations proposed for the Hubble tension, including dark matter (which does not emit or reflect light but accounts for more than 80% of the universe’s mass).

‘Extraordinary promise’
As Dr. de Lera Acedo put it, “If a model changes the early expansion history, introduces an additional radio background, or allows new interactions between dark matter and ordinary matter, it may leave a measurable signature in the 21-centimetre signal. CosmoCube could provide an independent test of such ideas.”

The 21-cm signal from neutral hydrogen is like the proverbial needle in a haystack as it is buried beneath foreground radio emissions probably tens of thousands of times stronger.

To isolate it and reveal how the very first stars and galaxies formed is a formidable challenge even for advanced platforms such as CosmoCube and India’s PRATUSH – a proposed radio telescope and radiometer in lunar orbit (its name is short for ‘Probing Reionisation of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen’).

As Dr. de Lera Acedo said, “That combination, extraordinary scientific promise coupled with extraordinary experimental difficulty, is precisely why the radio-quiet environment behind the moon is so valuable.”

(Prakash Chandra is a science writer. prakashitai@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Expected to be launched before the end of this decade, CosmoCube will orbit the moon and use it as a natural shield from radio interference generated on the earth.

The compact satellite will have around 40 minutes on the lunar far side during its orbit every two hours, when it will be cut off from all radio noise from the earth.

CosmoCube will also help investigate the Hubble tension: the difference in results when we measure the expansion of the universe by studying nearby celestial systems and the cosmic microwave background of the early universe.

Key Scientific & Technical Aspects

• Targeting the 21-cm Neutral Hydrogen Line:

- Neutral hydrogen atoms emit radiation at a rest frequency of 1,420 MHz (21-cm wavelength) via a quantum transition known as a spin-flip.
- Due to cosmological redshift (z), this signal from the early universe is stretched across space and time, shifting into low frequencies (10–200 MHz).

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- **Probing Unexplored Cosmic Eras:**

- **Cosmic Dark Ages (380k – 200m years post-Big Bang):** The period when the universe was cold, dark, and filled with neutral hydrogen gas before the first stars formed.
- **Cosmic Dawn & Reionisation (150m – 1b years post-Big Bang):** The era when the first luminous stars and galaxies emerged, emitting UV radiation that reionised surrounding hydrogen.

- **Experimental Hurdles & The Lunar Advantage:**

- **Signal Suppression:** Foreground galactic emissions (synchrotron radiation) are thousands of times stronger than the cosmic 21-cm signal.
- **Lunar Far-Side Solution:** Operates in total radio isolation behind the Moon during orbit, collecting pristine data and buffering it for downlink when passing the near side facing Earth.

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

- **Science & Technology (Space & Astrophysics):**

- **India's Space Initiatives (PRATUSH):** Developed by the Raman Research Institute (RRI) in collaboration with ISRO, PRATUSH (Probing Reionisation of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen) demonstrates indigenous capability in space-based radio astronomy.
- **Fundamental Physics & Cosmology:** Covers atomic physics (spin-flip transitions), the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB), redshift phenomena, and the Hubble Tension.

- **Security & Technology (Electromagnetic Spectrum Management):**

- **Radio Frequency Interference (RFI):** Highlights the impact of anthropogenic radio noise and satellite constellations on ground-based astronomy, justifying multi-billion dollar space and lunar observatories.

Conclusion

Orbiting lunar radiometers like CosmoCube and PRATUSH mark a shift toward deep-space radio astronomy. By overcoming Earth's ionospheric barrier and radio noise, these missions offer a direct method to map the Cosmic Dark Ages and refine fundamental parameters describing the origin and expansion of the universe.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: The term "Cosmic Dark Ages" refers to:

- A. The period before the formation of the universe
- B. The period after recombination but before the emergence of the first luminous stars
- C. The period after complete reionisation of the universe
- D. The period dominated by black holes following galaxy formation

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: What is the significance of the 21-cm neutral hydrogen line in studying the early universe? Explain the role of cosmological redshift in making this signal observable at low radio frequencies. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

The editorial highlights the tension between national infrastructure goals and constitutional safeguards for forest-dependent Scheduled Tribes (STs). The debate stems from a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings recommendation proposing that a "qualified super-majority" (70–75% consent of affected Gram Sabhas) replace unanimous Gram Sabha consent for forest land diversion. Coupled with the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs' stance disclaiming jurisdiction over Stage-II forest clearances, this proposal threatens to weaken the legal autonomy of local indigenous assemblies.

Key Highlights & Issues Raised

- **Dilution of Veto Power (The 70–75% Proposal):**
 - Replaces total community consent with a qualified super-majority.
 - Risk: Developer entities can bypass a directly impacted village (e.g., submerged under a reservoir) if less-affected neighboring villages approve the proposal.
- **Institutional Governance & Jurisdictional Vacuum:**
 - The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) claimed that obtaining Gram Sabha consent for Stage-II forest clearance falls outside its purview under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.
 - Critics point out that as the nodal ministry for FRA, MoTA's recusal leaves tribal communities vulnerable to administrative workarounds by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Demographic Engineering & Alienation:**
 - Altering demographic criteria or splitting village boundaries dilutes tribal consensus, facilitating artificial consent for industrial projects like the long-pending Teesta-IV Hydroelectric Project.

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

- **Governance, Constitution, & Tribal Rights:**
 - Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006: Recognizes individual and community forest rights (CFR). The Gram Sabha serves as the primary statutory body to initiate rights recognition and issue No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) prior to land diversion.
 - Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996: Mandates mandatory consultation and consent of Gram Sabhas in Fifth Schedule areas regarding land acquisition, rehabilitation, and resource management.
 - Judicial Precedents: The landmark Niyamgiri Judgement (2013) established that Gram Sabha consent is mandatory before forest land can be diverted for non-forest industrial purposes.

Perilous retreat
Gram sabhas must have a veto on issues relating to tribal land

Tribal organisations should recognise the Indian state's attempt to lower the legal barriers erected by the Forest Rights Act (FRA) as a threat to their survival. The Committee on Public Undertakings' suggestion that a project require the consent of only most, rather than all, gram sabhas affected by that project, as the FRA intends in spirit, portends a significant jurisprudential change. A regime that deems the acquiescence of 70%-75% of affected gram sabhas to suffice will reduce gram sabhas from democratic bodies protecting the constitutional rights of its specific inhabitants to corporate stakeholders. If the rule enters force, a project developer may bypass the consent of a village located directly within a proposed reservoir, say, while ensuring that less affected villages have provided their no-objection certificates. The matter is of a piece with the political fight over classifying tribal communities: by altering the demographic composition of who qualifies as a community member, the state will have an easier time splitting a village assembly and engineering consent. The refusal of the Tribal Affairs Ministry to claim jurisdiction over this issue creates a dangerous regulatory vacuum that leaves the Centre and State governments unchecked to rewrite the rules by which forested land is diverted for non-forest use. While the FRA does not include a clause requiring a no-objection certificate from every affected gram sabha, it is untrue that there is at present no legal requirement that gram sabha decisions can be bypassed. The government has been rapidly scaling up energy infrastructure, including the long-stalled Teesta-IV project, to meet macroeconomic goals while, in a previous avatar, having passed the FRA to undo "historical injustices" meted out to forest-dependent communities. But the path the state seems willing to pursue, hewing to the notion that the consent requirement was never part of the FRA, is plainly ignoble. If the Environment Ministry entertains the idea, it must change the relevant rules or legislation openly and democratically. The Tribal Affairs Ministry resorting to a technicality, between the FRA and the Environment Ministry's rules, to recuse itself is hardly better as the bureaucratic manoeuvre could strip forest-dependent communities of their most potent legal instrument. The foundation of these communities' livelihoods, culture, identity, and political autonomy is land, so they have fought to resist displacement and dispossession and to secure customary collective ownership. In recognition of the social and environment services ST communities continue to render in India and their contribution to national development, including helping meet India's climate commitments, the Centre and States must also strengthen the powers conferred by the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement and Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Acts to gram sabhas in Scheduled Areas.

- **Environment & Sustainable Development:**

- Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980 / Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules: Dictates Stage-I and Stage-II forest clearance processes, where compliance with FRA processes remains a legal prerequisite.
- Rights-Based Conservation: Affirms that forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes act as natural stewards, aiding India's climate obligations (e.g., net-zero emission targets and creation of carbon sinks).

Conclusion

Bypassing Gram Sabha consent under the guise of procedural simplification undermines participatory democracy and constitutional guarantees granted under the Fifth Schedule and PESA. Achieving macroeconomic goals and building infrastructure should not occur by disenfranchising forest-dwelling communities. True development requires a rights-respecting framework that upholds local veto power, ensures complete recognition of community forest rights, and strengthens Gram Sabhas as autonomous democratic institutions.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "The Gram Sabha is not merely an administrative consultative body but an instrument of participatory self-governance in Scheduled Areas." Discuss in the context of PESA and the Forest Rights Act. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Aim, Think & Achieve

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The notification of the 40-question Household Schedule for the upcoming Census has sparked a public debate regarding statistical integrity, data privacy, and purpose deviation. While traditional censuses aggregate macro-level demographic data for policy formulation, the inclusion of granular personal identity fields (such as parent details, bank account counts, and official identity numbers) raises concerns over a shift from purely anonymous statistical compilation to individualized tracking.

Concerns over the Census questions

The questionnaire for the population enumeration phase of the 2027 Census comprises 40 questions and seek details such as nationality, number of bank accounts and mobile, Aadhaar and voter ID numbers, if available, raising concerns over its potential digression from the purpose of collecting data for policy and planning

FULL CONTEXT

K. Narayanan Unni

The questions to be asked to every individual during the population enumeration phase of the 2027 Census were notified by the Central government last month. In a significant departure from the past, a number of personal details, which cannot be used to generate any useful statistics, are being sought. This prompts a look at the individual questions, their possible uses and the implications of their inclusion in the Census.

The new questions in Census 2027 ask respondents to provide the details of the parents of every individual and spouses of the married persons in the household, nationality as declared, permanent residential address, place of COVID 19 vaccination, total number of bank accounts, mobile number, Aadhaar number and Voter ID number (if available), Passport number (if an Indian passport holder), and driving license availability.

The United Nations defines a population census as, "the total process of planning, collecting, processing, analysing, disseminating and evaluating demographic, economic and social data at the smallest geographic level pertaining, at a specified time, to all persons in a country or in a well-delimited part of a country". It is evident from this definition that a census is viewed as an exercise to generate statistics for the use of the government in particular and the society in general.

One of the essential principles of official statistics is confidentiality of individual information. Principle 6 of the United Nations' Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics states, "the individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes." India has adopted these principles.

Use of 'name' in the Census

As the Census is used to generate data useful for policy and planning purposes, information provided by an individual is used only for compiling the individual statistics. The individual's name has no relevance in the exercise, except to identify them during enumeration. Names have merely been placeholders and have not been present in Census databases. In fact, there have been no attempts in the Indian Censuses to computerise names at all. There are countries that include the name and provide access to past Census data for genealogical studies. For example, past data from the U.S. Census can be accessed 72 years after the Census exercise. There is no such rule or policy in India.

Now, respondents will have to provide the names of every individual in the household, along with those of their parents. This will be a tall order for respondents from institutional households, such as wardens of hostels, old-age homes, jails etc. A large number of children are now studying away from home, living in hostels, as paying guests, etc. February, being towards the end of the academic year, means they may not be at home. So, they would not be eligible for enumeration at their normal households. Even in normal households, the respondent may not know the details regarding the grandparents who may be



Field day: Census enumerators at a house in Sathuvachari in Vellore, Tamil Nadu. C. VENKATACHALAN/ANI

living with them.

COVID 19 vaccination is now an old story. After the pandemic subsided, people have not been taking any vaccination and there have been no suggestions from the government to the people to get vaccinated. In view of this, it is highly doubtful whether information on the place of vaccination, which could have been as much as five years ago, could be put to any meaningful use.

Personal details

Information on mobile number, Aadhaar number and voter ID number are being asked 'if available'. Also required is the passport number for those holding Indian passports. The meaning of the phrase 'if available' is not clear. A person may have one or more of these identifiers. However, it is possible that the respondent may not have these numbers, possibly with the exception of the mobile number.

The question is whether 'if available' refers to availability with the concerned member of the household or with the respondent. If the phrase is interpreted as availability with the respondent, then it will not be available to the Census as a large proportion of the respondents are likely to be the housewives or elderly parents who may not keep these details of every member of the household. A similar problem arises with institutional households.

These numbers are not data items that could be used for any useful tabulations, except to determine whether these numbers are available. It is impossible to visualise more than 30 lakh Census enumerators spending time with the households to correctly record these numbers. The enumerators may not have the time and patience to obtain the relevant records and record the information. Respondents in institutional households would find it impossible to provide the information, as they may not have these records with them. Even the individuals living there may have left their records back home. In normal

households, visitors and domestic servants living for the entire duration of the Census enumeration period are to be enumerated. Would the respondent be able to obtain these details from them? If the respondents in domestic households with visitors/servants eligible for enumeration there and those in institutional households misuse the information, is there any protection for the individual, as the respondent is not a Census functionary?

Nationality as declared may also not serve any useful purpose. Illegal immigrants may declare that they are Indian nationals. After trying this question in the 1951 and 1961 censuses, it was discarded from 1971 onwards. It is worth noting here that after a lot of debates, the U.S. Census decided not to include the question on citizenship in the 2020 Census.

The total number of bank accounts held by each person is useful for preparing a distribution of persons by the number of bank accounts. For those with bank accounts, this information can probably be obtained by tabulating the number of accounts against each PAN, which is necessary to open a bank account. If the plan is only to determine the number of persons without any bank account, then it is enough to ask whether the person has a bank account. It is difficult for a simple schoolteacher appointed as an enumerator to ask the question on the number of bank accounts and get a correct answer from the upper-class respondents, who may not even be ready to answer the simpler questions.

Possible information for NPR

While preparing for the 2021 Census there were proposals for updating the National Population Register (NPR) during the Census exercise. However, several States objected to it. The Census is conducted by enumerators appointed by the State government under section 42 of the Census Act, 1948. Hence, the State

governments may have the right to refuse the use of their staff to do any work that is not part of the Census. The Citizenship Act does not mention anything about the State government's role in the preparation of the NPR.

The information on the parents of individuals, permanent address, nationality, etc is very useful for preparing/updating the NPR, which is to form the basis for preparing the National Register of Citizens. It appears that the collection of such information through the Census questionnaire, though it does not add the generation of any additional statistics, is aimed at the preparation/updating of the NPR.

However, including such information in the Census questionnaire and extracting it later to share it to another organisation within the government may violate the principle of confidentiality. There is no objection to preparing a population register or a citizen register, and its importance and uses are well recognised. However, collecting information required for creating an NPR should be done through a process that is transparent and has legal basis, without jeopardising the Census.

The length of the questionnaire

With 40 questions, many requiring descriptive answers, the time taken for a household is likely to result in respondent fatigue. The respondent is required to answer similar questions for every individual in the household. This may result in the respondent becoming uninterested and potentially giving casual replies.

Furthermore, by adding questions that require recording the names and addresses, the workload of the enumerator has increased significantly.

By loading the Census with questions that are of no use for generating statistics, the quality of Census data may be seriously affected.

(K. Narayanan Unni is a retired officer from the Indian Statistical Service)

THE GIST

The new questions in Census 2027 ask respondents to provide the details of the parents of every individual and spouses of the married persons in the household, nationality, permanent address, place of COVID 19 vaccination, number of bank accounts, mobile number, Aadhaar number and Voter ID number (if available), among others.

This prompts a look at the individual questions, their possible uses and the implications of their inclusion in the Census.

With 40 questions, the time taken to enumerate a household is likely to result in respondent fatigue. Furthermore, it has also increased the workload of the enumerators.

Key Technical & Methodological Concerns

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- **Data Confidentiality vs. Personal Identifiers:**

- **UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (Principle 6):** Mandates that individual data collected by statistical agencies must remain strictly confidential and be used exclusively for aggregate statistical output.
- **Risk of Individual Tracking:** Collecting specific identity numbers (like Aadhaar, Voter ID, Passport) and parental particulars introduces individual-level linkage. Historically, Indian Census databases never computerised or stored individual names or identity numbers for cross-referencing.

- **Operational & Data Quality Challenges:**

- **Respondent & Enumerator Fatigue:** Expanding the schedule to 40 complex questions increases the time spent per household, risking casual or inaccurate responses.
- **Information Asymmetry:** Household respondents (often single family members or hostel wardens) may lack access to exact personal identification numbers or bank account counts for all resident members.

- **Overlap with National Population Register (NPR):**

- The collection of permanent addresses, parental names, and identity documents mirrors data points required for updating the NPR. Using a statistical exercise (Census under the Census Act, 1948) to feed administrative registers created under different legal frameworks raises procedural and privacy questions.

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

- **Governance, Rights, & Policy Implementation:**

- Census Act, 1948: Provides the statutory framework for data collection while promising legal confidentiality to respondents against judicial or tax scrutiny.
- Right to Privacy (K.S. Puttaswamy Judgement, 2017): Reaffirms data minimisation, purpose limitation, and storage limitation as essential safeguards under Article 21.

- **Statistics & Public Policy:**

- National Statistical System: Alignment with UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics to ensure public trust and unbiased data collection.

- Data Governance Framework: Balancing evidence-based policy formulation with secure, de-identified data processing.

Conclusion

The decennial Census is the bedrock of national planning, delimitation, and resource allocation. To preserve the trust of respondents and ensure high-quality socio-economic data, statistical collection must remain strictly decoupled from administrative population registers. Upholding data anonymisation and purpose limitation is essential to safeguard civil liberties while fulfilling public policy objectives.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "The effectiveness of inflation targeting depends critically on the structural characteristics of the economy in which it is applied." Examine with reference to India **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

India-Japan defence cooperation breaks new ground

The August 2026 visit of Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi to India marks an important moment in the evolution of a partnership that has often been more developed institutionally than operationally. The agreements that were announced suggest that New Delhi and Tokyo are now attempting to connect these disparate strands into a more coherent security relationship, having spent more than a decade building the institutional vocabulary of defence cooperation through annual dialogues, the 2+2 mechanism, exercises, logistics arrangements and defence technology discussions.

Convergence into operational capability

This matters because the India-Japan defence relationship has reached a stage where additional declarations of strategic convergence have diminishing returns. Both countries already share concerns about coercive attempts to alter the status quo, the security of maritime commons and the growing militarisation of the Indo-Pacific. The challenge has been translating these convergences into arrangements that improve their ability to operate together. The new maritime framework seeks to address this issue.

The emphasis on information sharing and Maritime Domain Awareness is significant as India and Japan occupy critical positions at opposite ends of the Indo-Pacific's principal maritime theatre. Japan's immediate security concerns are concentrated in the East China Sea and the waters surrounding Taiwan, while India's geographical position gives it a central role in the Indian Ocean maritime space. A closer information-sharing architecture could gradually create a more continuous strategic picture across these interconnected maritime spaces. The objective is to develop greater awareness, interoperability, and operational familiarity between the two major maritime powers.

The discussions on naval shipbuilding may prove equally important with an exploration of joint development in naval shipbuilding and



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India and Japan
are advancing a
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Indo-Pacific
partnership
beyond
China-centric
security
concerns

design by combining Japanese technological expertise with Indian production capabilities. There was also agreement to deepen discussions on Japan's use of Indian production capabilities under the 'Make in India' framework and to move towards reciprocal arrangements for ship repair facilities. This could address a long-standing weakness in the bilateral relationship by giving a fillip to defence-industrial cooperation, which has consistently lagged behind strategic and political convergence.

The proposed transfer of Japan's UNICORN integrated communications antenna system remains the most visible symbol of this effort. While the Japanese Ministry of Defence describes UNICORN as the first defence equipment transfer project between the two countries, the project itself is not new. A memorandum of understanding for the co-development of UNICORN masts, involving Bharat Electronics Limited, was signed in November 2024. The August meeting therefore represented a further step towards implementation rather than the initiation of a new project. New Delhi and Tokyo have struggled to convert their 2015 agreement on defence equipment and technology transfer into concrete outcomes. The commitment now to early implementation, alongside plans to deepen cooperation between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation and Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency, suggests a recognition that credibility today depends on delivering projects rather than solely identifying possibilities.

On exercises

Japan's fighter aircraft are participating in the Veer Guardian exercise in India (September 9-22, 2026) for the first time. The two sides have agreed to increase the complexity of bilateral exercises, integrate unmanned systems and explore exercises organised at short notice. They also discussed cooperation between special operations forces and India's future integrated theatre commands. These initiatives point

towards a defence relationship increasingly concerned with operational preparedness.

Before travelling to New Delhi, Mr. Koizumi visited the Western Naval Command in Mumbai and INS Chennai. His visit thus extended beyond the familiar strategic geography of the Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca. The western seaboard is central to India's wider maritime interests, encompassing critical sea lanes, energy flows and India's growing responsibilities in the western Indian Ocean.

The broader regional context is impossible to ignore. The joint statement reiterated opposition to unilateral actions that impede freedom of navigation or seek to alter the status quo through force or coercion. Neither country needed to name China for the strategic message to be clear. Yet, the significance of India-Japan cooperation lies precisely in its ability to move beyond a China-centric agenda. Maritime security, resilient supply chains, defence industrial capacity, logistics and third-country cooperation are all becoming components of a wider regional security architecture.

Building a more resilient partnership

The visit also plugs into a broader moment of impetus in India-Japan relations. Coming soon after the July 2026 Annual Summit, which expanded cooperation across economic security, critical technologies and resilient supply chains, the defence ministerial engagement demonstrates that security is increasingly intertwined with the wider strategic partnership. Defence cooperation can provide the connective tissue between these agendas, linking India's industrial capabilities and Japan's technological strengths while reinforcing their shared interest in shaping a more resilient Indo-Pacific. The real test will now be implementation. India and Japan are building the strategic foundations, with Mr. Koizumi's visit suggesting that both are finally beginning to focus on the harder task, which is converting strategic convergence into usable capability.

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "India-Japan strategic partnership is moving from convergence of interests to convergence of capabilities." Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Context :

The bilateral visit of Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi to India in August 2026 marks a pivotal transition in India-Japan defense relations—shifting the focus from diplomatic declarations to concrete operational integration. By focusing on joint naval equipment transfer, maintenance infrastructure, and enhanced operational exercises, both Indo-Pacific powers aim to translate shared strategic objectives into practical defense capabilities.

Key Highlights of the Bilateral Engagement

- **Transition to Operational Capability:**
 - **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** Establishes an information-sharing network to bridge Japan's operational focus in the East China Sea and Taiwan Strait with India's primary area of interest in the Indian Ocean.
 - **Defence-Industrial Integration:** Explores joint naval shipbuilding and maintenance, leveraging Japanese technical precision alongside India's production capacity under the Make in India framework.
 - **UNICORN System Transfer:** Implementation of the UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) integrated stealth communication mast project, serving as a flagship initiative for bilateral defense technology transfer.
- **Expanded Operational Scope:**
 - **Naval Port Call in Mumbai:** Minister Koizumi's visit to the Western Naval Command and INS Chennai in Mumbai underscores Japan's expanding operational interest in the western Indian Ocean, extending beyond the traditional eastern seaboard.
 - **Veer Guardian 2026:** Scheduled for September 2026 at Air Force Station Jodhpur, this exercise marks the first time Japanese F-2A fighter aircraft will operate directly from an Indian airbase.
 - **Institutional Evolution:** Plans to integrate Special Operations Forces and coordinate with India's emerging Integrated Theatre Commands.

Static UPSC Syllabus Connections

- **Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings (India & Major Powers):**
 - **Special Strategic and Global Partnership:** Underpins defense alignment across multilateral groupings like the Quad (India, Japan, US, Australia) to preserve a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).
 - **Logistics & Military Agreements:** Builds upon the Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services (2020) framework to facilitate mutual port access and logistical support.
- **Security & Defence Technology:**

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Daily News Analysis

- Indigenisation & Make in India: Facilitates defense technology transfers via DRDO and Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency (ATLA) to develop domestic manufacturing ecosystems.
- Maritime & Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) Security: Safeguards vital Indo-Pacific trade corridors against unilateral revisionism and anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) challenges.

Conclusion

The evolution of India-Japan defense ties reflects a maturity that moves beyond static summits toward functional military and industrial integration. By linking defense-industrial capacity with joint operational training, New Delhi and Tokyo are establishing a balanced, multi-faceted regional security architecture across the Indo-Pacific.
