

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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The recent horrific gang rape of a minor in a public park in southeast Delhi, perpetrated by individuals falsely posing as law enforcement officers, brings to light deep-seated structural gaps in urban policing and public spaces management. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this incident serves as a crucial case study for GS Paper-II (Governance, Vulnerable Sections, and Law & Order) and GS Paper-III (Internal Security).

Three men posing as police rape girl in Delhi

Lavpreet Kaur

NEW DELHI

A 17-year-old girl was gang-raped by three men who posed as police personnel at Astha Kunj Park near Kalkaji Mandir in southeast Delhi on Monday night. The girl's 17-year-old male friend was also assaulted.

The accused were identified as Asif, 31, a resident of Tughlakabad; Hemanth, 31, who claims to be an advocate practising at the Saket court; and his brother Mukesh, 24, a B.Sc. student from Palwal in Haryana. The brothers are residents of Srinivaspuri.

All three accused were arrested on Tuesday. Asif was shot in the leg during a police operation on Tuesday morning.

It was the girl's birthday on Monday. A resident of Faridabad, she had come to southeast Delhi to meet her 17-year-old friend. The two visited Kalkaji Mandir before entering Astha Kunj Park.



Probe on: Special staff of the Delhi Police conduct an investigation at the encounter site after one of the accused was arrested. ANI

"The three accused approached them, claimed to be policemen, and used police and legal terminology to intimidate the two, telling them that they were minors, had done something wrong, and could face a case. The trio then separated the girl by taking her to a secluded spot while restraining the boy, and sexually assaulted the girl one after another," Joint Commissioner of Police (Southern Range) Vijay Kumar told *The Hindu*.

The police said Asif had

allegedly threatened the girl with a firearm and a knife before sexually assaulting her.

The girl made a distress call at 8.45 p.m., after which Amar Colony police personnel reached the Astha Kunj Park.

The girl was medically examined at AIIMS, while the Crime Team and Forensic Science Laboratory personnel examined the scene and collected evidence, police said.

A case was registered under Sections 70(2), 61(2),

115(2), and 351(3) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Sections 6 and 17 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The police will seek custody of the accused for more questioning.

This is the latest in a slew of recent sexual assaults against minor girls in Delhi. On September 10, a 16-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped and killed in Swaroop Nagar. Four people, including three juveniles, were apprehended. On September 16, a minor girl was allegedly sexually assaulted inside a shop in Sadar Bazar. On September 21, a six-year-old girl was allegedly sexually assaulted in Kishan Ganj.

The Delhi Commission for Women has taken *suo motu* cognisance of the latest case, seeking a detailed report from the police on the incident and action taken so far.

Delhi Lieutenant-Governor T.S. Sandhu stressed

that women's safety was "non-negotiable". He directed the city police to establish a dedicated women-centric 'Pink Force', with trained women personnel deployed near schools, colleges and Metro stations.

'Deteriorating situation'

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress on Tuesday hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in Delhi over the deteriorating law and order situation in the capital.

AAP Delhi chief Saurabh Bharadwaj said the police functioned as a political tool instead of acting against criminals operating openly across the city.

The Congress said that the rape of four minors in a span of 10 days in the capital showed the worsening law and order, rising crimes against women and the failure of the government in protecting women.

Key News Context

- **The Incident:** Three men exploited poor environmental design and inadequate lighting at Astha Kunj Park to isolate and assault a 17-year-old girl under the pretext of police interrogation.

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Daily News Analysis

- **Institutional Response & Action:** Swift police intervention led to the arrest of all accused under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, alongside administrative scrutiny over urban safety lapses.

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **The Phenomenon of Impersonation and Extortion:**
 - Criminals frequently weaponize institutional authority, utilizing official jargon and intimidation tactics in isolated public zones to prey on citizens—particularly youth—fearing social stigma or legal reprisal.
 - This erodes public trust in law enforcement agencies and highlights a breakdown of beat-policing deterrence in public recreational spaces.
- **Static Dimension: Urban Design and "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" (CPTED):**
 - **C-PACE & Infrastructure Deficits:** Parks with broken boundary walls, dense unmonitored shrubbery, and absent CCTVs transform into safe havens for anti-social elements. Urban planning in metropolitan cities often neglects safety audits for public utilities.
 - **Vulnerability of Minors:** The recurrence of crimes against children emphasizes that existing child-protection frameworks require rigorous ground-level enforcement rather than purely reactive legislative amendments.
- **Static Dimension: Legal and Institutional Safeguards:**
 - **POCSO Act, 2012:** Provides stringent punishments, child-friendly reporting mechanisms, and shifts the burden of proof in specific contexts to protect minors.
 - **BNS Provisions:** Incorporates stringent timelines and expanded definitions for sexual offenses, aiming to fast-track criminal justice delivery.

Way Forward

- **Smart Urban Policing:** Mandate regular foot patrols, installation of high-definition CCTV coverage, and emergency panic buttons in major urban parks and transit hubs.
- **Civic Accountability:** Fix administrative responsibility for maintaining perimeter security, lighting, and functional entry/exit gates in public spaces managed by civic bodies.
- **Community Engagement:** Implement awareness programs to educate adolescents about their rights during interactions with persons claiming to be law enforcement personnel.

Conclusion

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Ensuring the safety of women and children in urban spaces requires shifting from isolated, reactive crackdowns to an integrated framework combining secure urban architecture, vigilant community policing, and swift judicial accountability. Protecting the vulnerable is fundamental to upholding the constitutional promise of dignity and equality.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, consider the following statements:

1. The Act provides for special procedures for recording the statement of a child.
2. The Act is applicable only when the victim is a girl child.
3. The Act provides for special courts for the trial of offences under the Act.
4. The Act incorporates provisions intended to make the judicial process more child-friendly.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 3 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Protection of children from sexual offences requires not only stringent laws but also effective institutional implementation and safer public spaces." Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

President Droupadi Murmu's address at the 72nd National Film Awards ceremony, emphasizing ethical responsibilities, labour welfare, and gender representation in cinema, highlights the intersection of art, governance, and societal ethics. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this topic is relevant for General Studies Paper-IV (Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude — Corporate and Media Ethics) and General Studies Paper-I/II (Indian Society and Women Empowerment).

Don't endorse harmful products: Murmu

President makes appeal to actors; she says when successful artistes speak about benefits of a disciplined lifestyle, millions of youth follow them; she urges film industry to ensure social security for workers, small-scale artistes, assistants, and calls for greater participation of women on award juries

Press Trust of India
GUJARAT

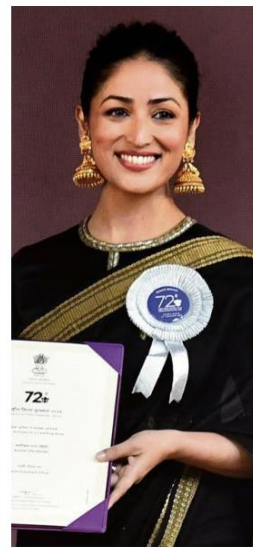
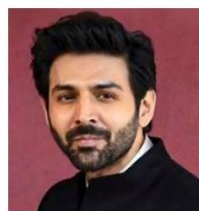
President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday urged popular film artistes not to endorse products harmful to people's health, saying a "true star" spreads light, not darkness, highlighting the impact of words and actions of celebrities on young minds.

Ms. Murmu distributed the 72nd National Film Awards for 2024 in various categories of cinema at Ekta Nagar (Kevadia), near the Statue of Unity, in a glittering ceremony.

"When successful artistes speak about the benefits of a disciplined lifestyle, millions of children and young people emulate them. I urge popular artistes not to endorse products that are harmful to people's health. A true star is the one who spreads light, not darkness," Ms. Murmu said. Highly popular artistes possessed immense potential to influence citizens, especially the youth, she said.

The President also called for greater participation of women on juries selecting films for the National Film Awards.

She appealed to the film industry to ensure respect and social security for



Starry event: President Droupadi Murmu presents the Dadasaheb Phalke Award to veteran actor Anant Nag and the National Awards to Yami Gautam, Dhanush, Mammooty, and Kartik Aaryan at Kevadia in Narmada district of Gujarat on Tuesday. ANI/PTI

workers, small-scale artistes, assistants, and others who contribute to the creative economy while struggling to make their mark.

Ms. Murmu recalled that at the previous National Film Awards ceremony, she had urged the industry to make respect and sensitivity towards every member of the film crew an integral part of its work

culture. "I hope you are paying heed to these requests," she said.

'Illustrious journey'

Veteran Kannada actor Anant Nag received the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke award, the highest honour in cinema, "for his contribution to Indian cinema and an illustrious cinematic journey that has inspired generations".

Yami Gautam, Mammooty and Kartik Aaryan were conferred with best actor awards in male and female categories.

Hindi film *Article 370*, directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale, received the Best Feature Film award.

Mammooty's win for *Bramayugam* was a record-equalling fourth, placing him alongside veteran Amitabh Bachchan. In the su-

pernatural drama directed by Rahul Sadasivan, Mammooty played the role of Kodumon Potty, a malicious and powerful spirit.

While Ms. Gautam grabbed the best actor award for her role in *Article 370*, Mr. Aaryan won the award for his portrayal of Paralympian gold medalist Murlikant Petkar in the film *Chandu Champion*.

Tamil actor Dhanush

was honoured with a Special Mention for his performance in the period drama *Captain Miller*.

Actor-turned-director Randeep Hooda took home the Best Debut Film of a Director award for *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*. Rajkumar Periasamy received the Best Direction award for the Tamil movie *Amaran*.

Bhangaar, directed and produced by Sumira Roy, got the Best Non-Feature Film award. Sanjeev Shrivastava received the Best Film Critic award in Hindi.

Sachana Namidass received the Best Actress in a Supporting Role award for the Tamil movie *Maharaja*, while Ropashree Varkady received the second Best Actress in a Supporting Role award for the Kannada movie *Mithya*.

Telugu film *Pushpa: The Rule* was given the Best Costume Design award, while Sukumar received the Best Screenplay award for the film. R Kalaivannan bagged the Best Editing award for the Tamil movie *Amaran*.

Shashwat Sachdev of *Dhurandhar* fame received the Best Music Direction award for songs in *Article 370*, while G.V. Prakash Kumar was honoured for the background music of *Amaran*.

Key News Context

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Daily News Analysis

- **The Appeal:** The President urged prominent film artistes to refrain from endorsing products harmful to public health (such as tobacco, high-sugar products, or surrogate goods), stressing that youth heavily emulate celebrity lifestyles.
- **Welfare and Inclusion:** The address called for institutional social security for backstage workers and small-scale artistes, alongside greater participation of women on award selection juries.

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **Media Ethics and Celebrity Endorsements:**
 - **Social Influence & Asymmetric Power:** Celebrities possess immense cognitive capture over impressionable youth. Endorsing unhealthful products creates moral hazards, conflicting with public health goals like the National Health Mission and POSHAN Abhiyaan.
 - **Regulatory Scrutiny:** The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) guidelines mandate that celebrity endorsers exercise due diligence, making misleading endorsements a legal and ethical violation under consumer protection laws.
- **Static Dimension: The Creative Economy and Labor Rights:**
 - **Informal Workforce Vulnerability:** The entertainment sector heavily relies on contractual, unorganized labor—spot boys, junior artists, technicians, and daily-wage crew members—who often lack social security, medical insurance, or formal employment contracts.
 - **Labour Codes Integration:** Bringing creative production units under formal occupational safety, health, and working conditions codes is essential for safeguarding marginalized workers within the multi-billion-dollar media industry.
- **Static Dimension: Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:**
 - Cinema acts as India's primary cultural soft power vector globally. Ethical storytelling and value-driven narratives enhance national branding, promoting national integration and social values ("Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat").

Way Forward

- **Self-Regulation and Codes of Conduct:** Film bodies and guilds should establish internal ethical charters barring members from endorsing public health hazards and ensuring fair minimum wages for crew members.
- **Institutionalizing Welfare Boards:** State governments should establish dedicated welfare boards for cine-workers to manage provident funds, health insurance, and insurance coverage against workplace hazards.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Diversifying award juries and technical committees to include gender representation ensures balanced artistic evaluation and promotes gender-sensitive content creation.

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Conclusion

Art carries profound social resonance and moral accountability. Transitioning the entertainment industry toward ethical endorsements, labor dignity, and inclusive representation is crucial for ensuring that creative capital fosters holistic national development rather than public harm.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to celebrity endorsements in India, consider the following statements:

1. Celebrity endorsers may have obligations under consumer protection law regarding misleading advertisements.
2. Endorsers are expected to exercise due diligence in relation to claims made in advertisements.
3. Celebrity endorsement is completely outside the regulatory framework governing advertisements.
4. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has powers relating to misleading advertisements.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Celebrity endorsements involve a conflict between commercial freedom and social responsibility. Discuss the ethical issues involved when influential personalities endorse products that may adversely affect public health. **Marks, 150 Words)**

With India scaling up its renewable energy targets to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070, acquiring vast tracts of land for ground-mounted solar projects has become a major socio-economic and logistical challenge. Canal-Top Photovoltaics (CTPV) presents an innovative, land-neutral alternative. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this topic is vital for General Studies Paper-III (Environment, Conservation, and Infrastructure).

India's vast canal network offers a land-free path to solar power

Similar to floating solar, the biggest advantage of canal-top photovoltaics is that they require virtually no additional land, especially as land acquisition for large-scale solar is also becoming increasingly expensive; in Punjab, the installation of 20 MW of canal-top systems is estimated to have saved nearly 100 acres of land

Shantanu Roy

As India expands its clean energy capacity, finding land for solar projects is becoming a challenge. This is driving interest in innovative solar solutions that can generate power without needing more land.

The recently approved PM Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) is a step in this direction, aiming at developing 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity on reservoirs and other inland water bodies across the country.

However, India's water infrastructure has more to offer: the country's vast canal network – one of the largest in the world – is another under-explored avenue to generate solar power. Built over existing irrigation and water-supply canals, canal-top photovoltaics (CTPV) provides a unique approach to turn them into clean energy assets.

In CTPV, solar panels are mounted on specialised structures built over canal stretches. Unlike floating solar systems, where panels are installed on floating platforms on water bodies, CTPV systems use elevated structures above the canals.

Systems can be built based on the canal's width, design, and orientation. The elevated structures may span the canal or can be installed along the canal banks. In all cases, the design must allow unobstructed water flow.

Advantages of CTPV

Similar to floating solar, the biggest advantage of CTPV is that it requires virtually no additional land. With land acquisition for large-scale solar becoming increasingly challenging and expensive, CTPV offers a promising way by using India's canal infrastructure. For instance, in Punjab, the installation of 20 MW of CTPV systems is estimated to have saved nearly 100 acres of land.

CTPV offers another advantage. With solar panels covering canal stretches, the amount of water lost to evaporation can be reduced. This can be particularly useful in India's water-stressed regions. The cooling effect of the water beneath the panels could improve panel performance in hot weather. A 1-MW CTPV system over the Narmada Canal in Mehsana, Gujarat, commissioned in 2012, reportedly saves close to 9 million litres of water every year while generating 1.6 million units of electricity annually.

While CTPV remains largely a niche application, India has been an early adopter, with its first installation in Mehsana in 2012. Between 2014 and 2017, two 10-MW CTPV systems were commissioned in Vadodra, Gujarat, and 20 MW of CTPV systems were commissioned in Punjab between 2017 and 2018.



Solar panels seen installed above the Narmada canal in Chandrasan village, Gujarat, in 2012. The State hosted India's first canal-top photovoltaics. AP

In September 2025, the Punjab Energy Development Agency invited 'expressions of interest' for 40-MW CTPV projects across Punjab's canal network, spanning over 10,000 km. Haryana has also initiated efforts to explore CTPV systems over six of its irrigation canals.

CTPV also received policy support in 2014, when the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) launched a pilot-cum-demonstration scheme for grid-connected CTPV and canal bank projects with a target of 50 MW each for CTPV and canal-bank projects. The scheme also included financial assistance of Rs 3 crore and Rs 1.5 crore per MW or 30% of project cost, whichever was lower, for CTPV and canal bank systems, respectively.

An assessment in 2024 (co-authored by CSTEP, where the author works) estimated India's CTPV and canal bank potential at around 131 GW (for canals up to 30 m wide and vertical bifacial

installations for canals over 30 m wide). Considerations such as solar irradiation, canal characteristics, distance from substations, and protected areas were included in the assessment to identify the best-suited canal stretches across India. The five States with the highest potential were Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab.

Potential roadblocks

Despite India's early progress, deployment has remained limited for more than a decade after the first installation.

High system cost is the primary bottleneck. CTPV systems are more expensive than ground-mounted ones as they require elevated structures to span canal stretches. These structures need to be designed to not disrupt canal operations and be sturdy enough to withstand winds. They also need additional structural steel, foundations,

and access provisions for operations and maintenance, all of which add to the overall costs.

Maintenance tasks, including cleaning panels and replacement and repair work, can also prove difficult when the structures are elevated above a working canal.

The linear nature of CTPV systems, which run along the course of canals, can also pose challenges when canals follow irregular paths or change direction. This can increase the cost of producing electricity, especially when electrical substations or transformers are not strategically located.

Renewed policy approach

PM-SSY is expected to revitalise the floating solar segment and drive its adoption across India, signalling growing policy interest in exploring land-neutral solar applications. This focus could extend to other solutions like CTPV, potentially giving the technology greater policy attention and momentum.

However, to overcome the aforementioned structural challenges and scale CTPV deployment, identifying and prioritising suitable canal stretches will be critical. Factors such as land scarcity, nearby electricity demand and grid connectivity, and canal orientation and geometry should be considered while selecting sites to maximise the economic viability of CTPV systems.

CTPV also requires accessible and tailored financing mechanisms, including viability gap funding and low-cost debt, to make it an attractive option for developers. This will help support early projects, allowing developers to build experience and eventually reducing costs through scale and standardisation.

However, the 2014 MNRE scheme on CTPV shows that financial support alone may not suffice to convert pilots into large-scale deployment.

A renewed policy approach that includes financial assistance and standardised specifications and guidelines, capacity building of state nodal agencies, irrigation departments, and other concerned agencies, and streamlined process flows is required.

While CTPV may not fully substitute ground-mounted or rooftop solar, they offer an untapped opportunity for India's renewable energy expansion. Even if a fraction of CTPV's technical potential is realised, it could significantly boost India's renewable energy capacity without adding to the pressure on land resources.

(Shantanu Roy is the Sector Coordinator for Renewables and Energy Conservation at the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a research-based think tank. shantanu@cstep.in)

THE GIST

▼ In CTPV, solar panels are mounted on specialised structures built over canal stretches

▼ Systems can be built based on the canal's width, design, and orientation and elevated structures may span the canal or can be installed along the canal banks

▼ With solar panels covering canal stretches, the amount of water lost to evaporation can be reduced, which can be particularly useful in India's water-stressed regions



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Daily News Analysis

- **The Potential:** India possesses an extensive canal network, with recent assessments estimating the potential for CTPV and canal-bank solar at roughly 131 GW across states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Punjab.
- **Policy & State Initiatives:** Following early pioneering projects in Gujarat and Punjab, states like Punjab and Haryana are renewing interest through new proposals, supported by broader land-neutral solar frameworks like the PM Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY).

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **Dual Ecological and Economic Benefits:**
 - **Land Conservation:** CTPV eliminates land acquisition costs, litigation delays, and agrarian displacement by utilizing existing water infrastructure.
 - **Water Security & Efficiency:** Covering canals with solar panels significantly mitigates water loss via evaporation—a critical asset for water-stressed agricultural states. Furthermore, the micro-climatic cooling effect of flowing water beneath enhances photovoltaic efficiency.
- **Static Dimension: Structural and Engineering Challenges:**
 - **High Capital Expenditure (CapEx):** Elevated heavy-duty structures, reinforced foundations, and extra structural steel required to span canals make CTPV substantially more expensive than conventional ground-mounted solar farms.
 - **Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Bottlenecks:** Cleaning panels, managing repairs over active water bodies, and navigating the linear, irregular geometry of canals complicate grid connectivity and substation alignment.
- **Static Dimension: India's Renewable Energy Strategy:**
 - Aligns with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement to expand non-fossil fuel capacity and promote decentralized, innovative green technologies.

Way Forward

- **Targeted Financial Incentives:** Reintroduce robust capital subsidies, viability gap funding (VGF), and low-interest green financing specifically dedicated to offset the high structural costs of CTPV.
- **Technological Innovation:** Standardize modular, lightweight, and corrosion-resistant mounting frameworks designed to withstand high wind loads and adapt easily to winding canal paths.
- **Integrated Infrastructure Planning:** Align future canal modernization projects executed by state irrigation departments with CTPV deployment blueprints to minimize retrofitting expenses.

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Conclusion

Canal-top photovoltaics transform traditional water management assets into dual-purpose clean energy generators, addressing both land scarcity and water conservation. Scaling this technology requires dedicated financial backing and technological innovation to turn niche pilot projects into a mainstream pillar of India's green energy transition.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to Canal-Top Photovoltaics (CTPV), consider the following statements:

1. CTPV involves installing solar photovoltaic panels over canals or canal-related infrastructure.
2. It can reduce the requirement for additional land for solar power generation.
3. It can potentially reduce evaporation losses from exposed canal water.
4. CTPV necessarily eliminates all environmental impacts associated with solar power generation.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Canal-Top Photovoltaics offers the possibility of addressing both land constraints and water losses associated with conventional solar expansion. Examine its potential and limitations in India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Punjab's severe agrarian and ecological crisis—marked by a staggering groundwater extraction rate of 152%—is no longer just an environmental challenge; it is a critical socio-economic threat. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this issue holds high relevance for General Studies Paper-III (Agriculture, Economic Development, Environment, and Resources) and General Studies Paper-II (Governance and Welfare Schemes).

Key News Context

- **The Crisis:** Recent assessments show 72% of Punjab's blocks remain in the 'red zone' due to intensive rice-wheat cultivation heavily reliant on free/subsidized electricity and groundwater irrigation.
- **The Agrarian Divide:** Ground studies indicate that depleting water tables disproportionately harm small and marginal farmers who cannot afford deeper tube wells, forcing them to buy water from wealthy landowners and deepening rural inequality.

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **The Roots of the Food-Water Nexus:**
 - **Green Revolution Legacy:** Historical policy incentives (assured Minimum Support Prices, free electricity, and procurement guarantees) successfully averted national food insecurity but locked Punjab into an unsustainable monoculture of water-guzzling paddy.
 - **Perverse Subsidies:** Unmetered power supply decouples electricity consumption from conservation, accelerating over-extraction.
- **Static Dimension: Socio-Economic Disparities & Smallholder Vulnerability:**
 - **Asymmetric Adaptive Capacity:** Wealthier large-scale farmers possess the capital to deepen tube wells and install heavy submersible pumps, whereas smallholders face escalating operational costs and debt traps.
 - **Inverse Productivity Hypothesis:** Research indicates that smaller farms often achieve higher physical water productivity yet record lower economic returns due to lack of market leverage and heavy reliance on rented groundwater markets.
- **Static Dimension: Institutional and Governance Challenges:**
 - Lack of robust crop diversification infrastructure, processing units, and

Water wealth

Groundwater exploitation in Punjab disincentivises small farmers

That Punjab is over-extracting groundwater is not news. According to the 2025-26 Dynamic Groundwater Assessment, its groundwater extraction rate was 152%. While interventions reduced the number of 'over-exploited' blocks by five over the last two assessments, 72% of its 153 blocks are in the 'red zone', the highest among States. The principal consumer is irrigation for rice and wheat, amounting to nearly 25 billion cubic metres a year in the latest estimate. Data also show that the fraction of observation wells with water below 40 metres in the post-monsoon period grew by two percentage points between 2022 and 2025. What began as a strategy to improve food security eventually yielded a concentrated rice-wheat cropping system, in which assured procurement, subsidised electricity and access to groundwater made high-yield varieties, intensive irrigation and fertilizer use and mechanisation less risky than alternative modes of cultivation. In the same vein, the reluctance of the region's farmers to pursue other crops due to uncertainties in storage options, prices, processing infrastructure, and supply chains has gone relatively unaddressed. But as the water crisis persists, the wealth gap among farmers is also widening. A recent study in the *Economic and Political Weekly* noted that while farmers with marginal landholdings use water more efficiently, wealthier farmers are better equipped to access lower water tables as well as draw higher volumes. So, as the water table drops, those unable to afford the requisite tube wells are forced to buy water, transferring their wealth to larger landowners and creating unregulated dependencies. A different study by two members of the same team, published in *Discover Sustainability*, reported that in Sangrur and Barnala, larger farms earned higher returns but recorded lower groundwater productivity *vis-à-vis* paddy, than smaller farms. Effectively, groundwater depletion raises the capital required for irrigation, which systematically privileges those farmers with better access to finance. State governments continue to attempt to address the demand pressure in multiple ways even as the scale continues to overwhelm the resulting gains in efficiency. At this juncture, together with those efforts, the State should also endeavour to protect farmers' incomes and access to irrigation while rendering the cost of additional extraction prohibitive. The 'Pani Bachao, Paise Kamao' scheme, in which farmers are entitled to cash for every unused kilowatt-hour (for pumping) under a threshold, is already promising, albeit with low enrolment. Broadly, the State should use part of the electricity subsidy bill to directly support smallholder farmers, help collectivise irrigation infrastructure, and/or support farmers' transition to other crops. When benefits follow the cultivator, including tenants, rather than owners of the land or pumps, welfare can subsidise access to water rather than groundwater extraction.

storage supply chains for alternative crops (like pulses, oilseeds, or coarse grains) deters farmers from moving away from paddy.

Way Forward

- **Targeted Power Subsidy Reforms:** Scale up direct benefit transfer (DBT) or incentive-based models like the 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' scheme, rewarding farmers financially for saving electricity and water.
- **Crop Diversification Support:** Build integrated value chains, cold storage networks, and assured procurement frameworks for climate-resilient, less water-intensive crops.
- **Community-Led Irrigation Collectivization:** Subsidize shared solar-powered irrigation grids and cooperative water-sharing systems to ensure equitable access for tenant and smallholder farmers.

Conclusion

Addressing Punjab's groundwater crisis requires shifting policy focus from input-heavy subvention to resource-neutral agrarian reform. Protecting small farmers' livelihoods while disincentivizing unchecked extraction is vital for long-term food security, ecological sustainability, and social equity.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Punjab's groundwater crisis represents a structural imbalance between agricultural incentives and ecological sustainability. Examine the factors responsible and suggest a sustainable policy framework. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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Maharashtra's historic enactment of the **Women Farmers' Empowerment Act**—becoming the first Indian State to legally recognize women as farmers independently of land ownership—marks a paradigm shift in Indian agriculture. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this topic is central to General Studies Paper-I (Indian Society and Women Empowerment) and General Studies Paper-II/III (Governance, Welfare Schemes, and Inclusive Growth).

Towards recognising women farmers

Maharashtra's passage of the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership, brings into focus the structural bias against the female agricultural workforce, highlights the need for a database of women farmers and using it to ensure access to welfare schemes

ECONOMIC NOTES

Sanchit Gupta
Tanu M. Goyal

Picture a farmer. The image that comes to mind is of a man. But when one looks at who is actually farming, she is increasingly likely to be a woman. This perception-reality mismatch is caused by age-old practices of collecting data, designing policies and defining who a farmer is. It makes millions of women who work on farms, make agricultural decisions and contribute to production nearly invisible. That may, however, finally be beginning to change.

In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership, through a Woman Farmer Certificate. This is the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer' that the National Policy for Farmers set out in 2007 but never operationalised. The Bill arrives nearly two decades after that policy, and 15 years after a comparable law was first proposed at the national level (a lapsed bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2010). It is, in effect, the culmination of three decades of women farmers' movements backed by civil society organisations.

State-level efforts have also sought to recognise women farmers before this. Kerala's Kudumbashree collectives have enabled women to participate in group farming, while Odisha's KALIA scheme has reached landless and sharecropper women. But a women farmers' registry delinked from land records had been missing. Maharashtra's legislation, therefore, represents a potentially important shift, from recognising the owner of agricultural land to recognising the person who actually farms. This matters because women's participation in agriculture has risen sharply.

The recognition gap

In 2025, agriculture employed roughly 110 million women and 127 million men (rural, as per the PLFS, Census adjusted), bringing the sector close to gender parity. Women's agricultural workforce has more than doubled since 2017-18, and nearly three-quarters of all rural women workers are engaged in agriculture, compared with less than half of men. Regrettably most women work without pay. In 2025, more than 41% of female agricultural workers were unpaid, against 20% of men (Chart 1). By contrast, nearly 63% of men were own-account workers compared with 39% of women. While women's position has improved over time, the gap remains stark. This is where the question of recognition becomes critical, as women are increasingly farming but are not necessarily recognised as farmers.

The worker-owner dichotomy

In India, women largely work on the family lands, even though they may not own it or have their name on the land records, as patriarchal norms have meant that the land records are primarily in men's names. Subsequently, only 14% of operational agricultural land holdings (as measured primarily through land records) are with women (according to the Agricultural

Unseen workforce

All States have women engaged in farming, but many remain unrecognised as farmers, leaving them out of databases and limiting their access to welfare schemes

Chart 1: Employment status of rural workers in agriculture and allied (% within each gender)



1 Nearly three-quarters of all rural women workers are employed in agriculture, compared with less than half of men

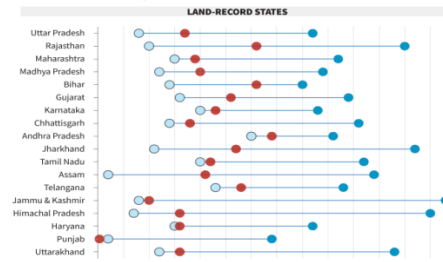


2 Women largely work on family land, though they may not own it or have their names on the land records

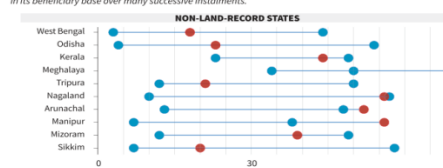
Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025; rural workers aged 15+ in agriculture and allied sectors

Chart 2: Three measures for estimating the recognition gap

Women as % of total agriculture and allied workers (2025, age 15+, usual status, rural-urban) | Women as % of total operational holdings as % of total operational holdings (2015-18) | Women beneficiaries as % of total PM-KISAN beneficiaries (2024, eligible)



PM-KISAN and operational holdings data sit 9 years apart. Where PM-KISAN's share exceeds operational holdings share, it also reflects that the scheme counts individuals per landholding family (including successor widows), while the Census counts each holding once through land records – not necessarily translating into more land in women's names. Punjab's very low PM-KISAN share follows a large reduction in its beneficiary base over many successive instalments.



These States lacked standard land records for the Census and used sample estimates. PM-KISAN either used updated records or alternative methodology for Northeastern States among these, partly explaining the larger share of PM-KISAN women beneficiaries in them. Meghalaya's high share reflects matrilineal inheritance, under which women are the customary landholders.

Note: States are ordered by the number of rural working women in agriculture (2025). Each dot is women's share of a different total, in different years – of all agricultural workers, of all operational holdings, and of all scheme beneficiaries, approximating the recognition gap.

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; Agriculture Census 2015-16; Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; PM-KISAN eligible beneficiary data, 2024

Census 2015-16). The person whose name is in the records gets included in the database and receives the benefits. As a result, not only does the recognition of women agricultural workers as farmers remain ambiguous, but they are also unable to access key Central and State agricultural schemes and incentives linked to land titles (land records).

All States have a large population of women engaged in farming who are never counted as farmers. Since each State uses its land revenue records as the source of truth for administrative purposes, the structural bias against women is carried forward into scheme access and databases. This ultimately translates into women farmers being unable to access credit, subsidies, technology, extension services and

The Maharashtra Act recognises women engaged in agriculture for at least one agricultural season a year, irrespective of the nature of the land

other related opportunities. For instance, only 23% of women have been beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, which provides direct financial assistance of ₹6,000 per year to eligible landholding farmer families to support their agricultural expenses and household needs. For some States, the gap widens (See Chart 2).

Even in States where the share of women in the agriculture workforce is more than 50%, the share of women beneficiaries in most States is less than

one-third. The exceptions are revealing. Meghalaya, where women account for 70% of the beneficiaries, followed by Kerala with 44% stand apart. These States have institutional or social arrangements that provide women with greater recognition or access to land and agricultural resources. In some northeastern States, customary tenure and matrilineal systems matter; in Kerala, collective farming through groups such as Kudumbashree provides an alternative route to participation and recognition.

At the other extreme are States with some of the widest gaps. In Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, women make up nearly two-thirds of the workforce but represent a small fraction of beneficiaries. The binding constraint, therefore, is not land itself but the identification system built on it. Where the land record is the gatekeeper, women are more likely to be filtered out; where an alternative mechanism exists, women's access rises substantially.

Year of the Woman Farmer

While the Maharashtra legislation came after decades of advocacy, it is well timed. With the United Nations naming 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer, Maharashtra has taken a potentially transformative first step and paved the way for other States. The Maharashtra Act broadens the definitions of 'agriculture' and 'farmer' to recognise women residents engaged in agriculture for at least one agricultural season a year, irrespective of the nature of the land, through a 'Woman Farmer Certificate'.

Importantly, it explicitly recognises categories like landless cultivator, landless livestock rearer, agricultural labourer, plantation labourer, and pastoralist. In principle, this creates a route through which women who do not own land can obtain an independent agricultural identity and gain access to state welfare schemes and credit. But recognition on paper is only the beginning. Implementation will require either self-registration or identification of women farmers by the Gram Sabha, including women who have no land or no land titles in their name. In both cases, this will require a robust information campaign.

This also provides for a new database of women farmers. Connecting this database with existing agricultural databases and avoiding duplication or exclusion will need to be worked out, presenting an opportunity for States to work together. A standardised system across States, for establishing common definitions for identifying women farmers, issuing certificates, and maintaining databases, would make it easier to link the identities of women farmers across schemes and administrative platforms, while avoiding multiple registrations.

But recognition must then translate into access. Linking these certificates to the Agri Stack (a digital platform developed by the Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare) and issuing Farmer IDs to the women is essential to integrating them into the broader digital agricultural ecosystem. However, for recognition to translate into empowerment, continuous efforts at the local level will be needed to make women farmers aware of the schemes and effectively ensure their access.

(The authors work at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). Views expressed are personal.)

THE GIST

In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill. This is the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer'

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Key News Context

- **The Legislative Breakthrough:** The Act addresses the systemic invisibility of female agricultural workers by introducing a **Woman Farmer Certificate (WFC)**, operationalizing the long-dormant activity-based definition from the National Policy for Farmers (2007).
- **Broad Inclusivity:** The legislation extends formal status not just to landowners, but also to landless cultivators, tenant farmers, livestock rearers, agricultural laborers, and pastoralists verified through local governance bodies like Gram Sabhas.

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **The Worker-Owner Dichotomy & Structural Exclusion:**
 - **Land Title Barrier:** Traditionally, agricultural welfare benefits (such as PM-KISAN, institutional credit, and crop insurance) require land titles. Given patriarchal inheritance norms, less than 15% of operational land holdings are registered to women, locking out millions of active female producers.
 - **Feminization of Agriculture:** With male out-migration for non-farm employment, agriculture is increasingly managed by women (who constitute a massive share of the rural workforce), yet their economic contributions are mischaracterized as "unpaid household help".
- **Static Dimension: Socio-Economic Impacts of Non-Recognition:**
 - **Financial Isolation:** Without official recognition, women cannot access Kisan Credit Cards (KCC), institutional loans, or subsidized agricultural inputs, forcing them into high-interest informal credit markets.
 - **Targeted Scheme Deficits:** Centralized databases built strictly on revenue land records systematically filter out women, resulting in low beneficiary representation relative to their actual on-ground labor.

Way Forward

- **Replication Across States:** Other states should emulate Maharashtra by enacting complementary legislation to bridge the gap between labor participation and legal entitlement.
- **Digital Integration via AgriStack:** Seamlessly integrate the new Women Farmer databases with national digital public infrastructure like AgriStack and digital land/farmer registries to automate direct benefit transfers.
- **Institutional Credit Reforms:** Mandate commercial banks and regional rural banks to accept the Woman Farmer Certificate as valid proof of identity for extending collateral-free agricultural credit.

Conclusion

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Recognizing women as independent farmers is vital not only for gender justice but also for bolstering national food security in an era of agrarian stress and climate change. Transitioning from land-centric to labor-centric welfare ensures that the backbone of India's rural economy receives its due dignity and economic security.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Land ownership-based identification of farmers can exclude tenant farmers, agricultural labourers and women engaged in cultivation from welfare benefits. Discuss the need for an activity-based approach to farmer recognition. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Using trade treaty policy to strengthen arbitration

India's long-standing negotiations to sign new bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and free trade agreements (FTAs) with its prominent economic partners are bearing fruit. It has signed BITs with the United Arab Emirates (2024), Israel (2025), and Uzbekistan (2024), and FTAs with New Zealand (April 2026), the United Kingdom (July 2025), European Free Trade Association (March 2024), and Oman (signed December 2025). While much of the conversation has understandably focused on the potential economic benefits of these agreements and the mechanism for resolving investor-state disputes under international law (or the omission thereof), an important facet is frequently missing: their impact on commercial arbitration within India.

The opportunity beyond market access

India's expanding network of BITs and FTAs presents an opportunity that goes beyond attracting foreign capital and opening export markets. Properly designed, these agreements can help India strengthen something every international business needs: a dispute-resolution system that is predictable, enforceable and trusted.

India already has the basic statutory architecture. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, covers domestic arbitration, international commercial arbitration and the enforcement of foreign arbitral awards. The question now is how India's treaty policy can reinforce that architecture. The answers vary.

In the first instance, India's recent FTAs have generally omitted an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). However, given that a sizeable share of investment in India is made through contracts between foreign investors and Indian state agencies, future FTAs could better explain the rationale for this policy. For example, when the European Union-Australia FTA was negotiated, the contracting parties clarified that "the agreement does not cover the protection of



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of Arbitration

India's
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investments, which is not necessary given the level of trust in the respective legal systems of both parties".

Taking a cue from this approach, India's future FTAs should include provisions or preambular text that similarly clarify that the absence of an ISDS is justified by the availability of commercial arbitration remedies in India. Such provisions, alongside recent legislative reforms to strengthen India's arbitration framework and the pro-arbitration approach of Indian courts, could help provide a middle ground between the state's reservations about an ISDS and the desire of foreign investors to avoid litigating in Indian courts.

The second instance is where India's BITs, which do provide for an ISDS, explicitly distinguish between the scope of treaty-based arbitration and commercial arbitration pursuant to a contract. For example, the India-Uzbekistan BIT excludes "disputes arising solely from an alleged breach of a contract" between the state and a foreign investor from the scope of an ISDS.

Such treaties also make access to ISDS conditional on foreign investors exhausting local remedies. They require foreign investors to submit their claims to the relevant domestic courts or administrative bodies of the host State for a specified period. The wording appears to exclude commercial arbitration tribunals seated in India. There does not appear to be a cogent policy reason for this exclusion. Accordingly, future BITs could clarify that foreign investors may also satisfy the exhaustion-of-local-remedies requirement by submitting the substance of their investment dispute to commercial arbitration in India.

Finally, India's recent BITs indicate that the Government of India does not favour third-party funding in an ISDS. Since ISDS claims implicate sovereign decisions and can have a chilling effect on States' regulatory policymaking, this approach is understandable. However, these considerations do not apply to commercial arbitration in India.

Given these distinctions, India's future BITs and FTAs should clarify that their prohibition of third-party funding in an ISDS does not, by itself, signal the impermissibility of such funding in commercial arbitration in India. This would, in turn, create room for Indian regulators to develop a coherent and comprehensive policy on third-party funding for the domestic commercial arbitration ecosystem, consistent with global best practices. Such a nuanced approach is also necessary for India to realise its ambition of becoming a global arbitration hub.

What investors look for

Ultimately, investors deciding where to invest their capital do not assess tax rates or market access alone. They also ask what happens when a relationship breaks down. A country that can answer this question convincingly has a significant economic advantage.

India's recent BITs and FTAs already demonstrate an evolution towards more sophisticated dispute-resolution mechanisms that balance investment protection with the country's needs. The opportunity now is to connect that treaty practice with the goal of bolstering commercial arbitration in India.

The goal should be straightforward: agreements that strive to prevent disputes, arbitration proceedings that resolve such disputes efficiently and responsibly, and courts that enforce arbitral awards predictably. From this perspective, India does not need to make every treaty an arbitration treaty. Yet, through subtle adjustments, it can make commercial arbitration an integral part of the infrastructure supporting the country's trade and investment relationships.

If India gets that balance right, its growing treaty network can do more than open markets. It can help establish India itself as a jurisdiction in which international businesses are willing to make commitments, with the confidence that, when those commitments falter, any resulting dispute will be resolved credibly and efficiently.

GS Paper II & III: IR & Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: Bilateral Investment Treaties and Free Trade Agreements increasingly shape the legal environment for cross-border investment. Examine the significance of dispute-resolution provisions in strengthening investor confidence while preserving the regulatory autonomy of the state. **15Marks, 250 Words)**

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Context

India's recent momentum in signing new Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)—such as pacts with the UAE, Israel, the UK, and the EFTA bloc—offers a strategic window beyond mere market access. For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this perspective is vital for General Studies Paper-II (International Relations, Government Policies) and General Studies Paper-III (Indian Economy, Ease of Doing Business).

Key News Context

- **The Treaty Surge:** India has actively reshaped its international economic architecture through recent agreements (e.g., UAE, Israel, Oman, and the UK), focusing on balanced investment protection.
- **The Arbitration Nexus:** While international discourse centers on Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), an equally critical dimension is how these treaties can mutually reinforce domestic commercial arbitration and dispute resolution frameworks within India.

Deep Analysis & UPSC Static Dimensions

- **Bridging FTAs and Commercial Confidence:**
 - **Clarity on ISDS Omission:** Many modern FTAs omit ISDS mechanisms due to past state vulnerabilities. Aligning with global practices (similar to the EU-Australia model), future agreements should explicitly clarify that the absence of ISDS stems from confidence in domestic commercial arbitration remedies.
 - **Refining Local Remedy Rules:** Certain BITs mandate exhausting local judicial remedies before triggering arbitration. Because traditional court litigations can be slow, allowing commercial arbitration seated in India to satisfy this requirement would offer a balanced middle ground for foreign investors.
- **Static Dimension: The Role of Third-Party Funding (TPF):**
 - While restrictions on TPF in state-level ISDS are justified to prevent speculative claims against sovereign policy, a blanket ban should not automatically apply to private commercial arbitrations.
 - Developing a comprehensive, well-regulated policy on TPF for domestic commercial disputes is essential to attract global institutional capital and align with international standards.
- **Static Dimension: India's Institutional Arbitration Framework:**
 - Driven by statutes like the Arbitration and Conciliation Act (1996) and amendments establishing the Arbitration Council of India (ACI), the goal is to position India as a global hub for dispute resolution, lowering legal transaction costs for foreign investors.

Way Forward

- **Strategic Treaty Drafting:** Future BITs and FTAs should be drafted with precise preambular text distinguishing between state-level ISDS provisions and private contract-based commercial arbitration.
- **Institutional Capacity Building:** Scale up world-class arbitral institutions within India, ensuring predictable court enforcement of awards to build long-term investor trust.
- **Coherent TPF Regulations:** Formulate progressive regulatory guidelines for third-party funding in commercial arbitration to enhance liquidity and accessibility for businesses.

Conclusion

India's expanding international trade network provides an ideal catalyst to fortify its domestic dispute resolution architecture. By aligning treaty diplomacy with robust commercial arbitration reforms, India can transition from merely signing market-access pacts to establishing itself as a trusted global hub for swift and predictable justice.

