

Prelims Exam Topics

HOW ASHOKA'S GRANDSON CHAMPIONED JAINISM

Context

The inauguration of the Samrat Samprati Museum in Koba, Gandhinagar, marks a significant cultural effort to highlight the often-overlooked Mauryan contribution to Jainism through Ashoka's grandson, Samprati.

The Mauryan-Jain Lineage

While the Mauryan Empire is globally celebrated for Ashoka's Buddhist missions, Jainism remained a powerful thread within the dynasty:

- **Chandragupta Maurya** (Ashoka's grandfather) is credited by the Digambara tradition with migrating to **Shravana Belgola** (Karnataka) and ending his life through the Jain practice of *Santhara*.
- **Queen Padmavati**, Ashoka's first wife and mother of Kunala, was a devout Jain.
- **Samprati** (reigned c. 230–220 BCE), the son of Kunala, became the most significant royal patron of Jainism after his grandfather's death.

Samprati and the spread of Jainism

- **Conversion and Spiritual Guidance:** Samprati's personal devotion was solidified under his **primary mentor, Arya Suhastin**. Suhastin was the eighth leader of the Jain congregation established by Mahavira and played a key role in Samprati's religious transition.
- **Literary Records of Patronage:** His life and administrative efforts are documented in the "**Samprati Nripa Charitra**", a significant **461-verse Sanskrit work** that details his religious deeds, temple constructions, and his standing as a "model for ethical kingship" within Jainism.
- **Infrastructure and Iconography:** Samprati is credited with the construction and renovation of thousands of Jain temples (basadis) across the subcontinent.
 - He initiated a massive movement of installing Jina icons, many of which are still attributed to him in the oral and temple traditions of Western India.
- **Missionary Outreach to "Non-Aryan" Lands:** Much like the Buddhist missions to Sri Lanka and Greece, Samprati facilitated the movement of Jain monks into distant and difficult terrains.
 - His efforts extended the reach of Jainism to **South India** and regions as far as **Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar**.
- **Administrative Support:** He utilized the Mauryan state machinery to provide safety and support for Jain monastic travel, ensuring that the ascetic tradition could move beyond the Magadha heartland and establish roots in regional centers like Ujjain.
- **Ritual Institutionalization:** Beyond just building structures, Samprati helped institutionalize Jain ritual culture, mirroring the Ashokan culture of *stupas* by creating a widespread network of temples and pilgrimage sites that survived long after the Mauryan decline.

RAJA RAVI VERMA

Context

Raja Ravi Varma's Yashoda and Krishna painting sells for ₹167.2 crore, setting a new record for Indian art.

About Raja Ravi Verma

- Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906), born into the royal family of Kilimanoor in the erstwhile State of Travancore (Kerala), is credited with revolutionizing the Indian aesthetic.
- **Title:** Known as the "Koil Thampuran" of Kilimanoor and the "Father of Modern Indian Art."
- **Technique:** Oil on Canvas; European Academic Realism.
- **Style:** Before Varma, Indian deities were often depicted in stylized, two-dimensional forms (e.g., Tanjore or Kalighat styles).
 - Varma gave them human proportions, expressive faces, and realistic textures, making the divine more relatable to the common man.
- **Puranic Themes:** Shakuntala (looking back for Dushyanta), Damayanti Talking to a Swan, and Jatayu Vadha.
- **Major Innovation:** Established the first Lithographic Press in India (1894).
- **Award:** Awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal by Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1904.

CABINET'S ADVICE ON GRANT OF REMISSION TO CONVICTS IS BINDING OF GOVERNOR: MADRAS HIGH COURT

Context

A full bench of the Madras High Court in Eswaran vs State Judgement has held that the Governor is bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers which exercises powers under Article 161 of the Constitution on remission and premature release of convicts.

Power of Remission by the Governor

Article 161 grants the Governor to grant pardons, to suspend, remit or commute sentence to any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.

Power	Impact on Sentence
Pardon	Removes both the sentence and the conviction entirely.
Remission	Reduces the duration of the sentence but keeps the nature of the punishment the same.
Commutation	Changes the punishment to a lighter form .
Respite	Awards a lesser sentence due to special circumstances of the convict.
Reprieve	Provides a temporary stay on the execution of a sentence.

Conflicting views on Governor's Discretion under Article 161

A. G. Perarivalan vs. State through Superintendent of Police	Governor is bound by the advice of State Cabinet in exercise of his powers under Article 161 of the Constitution
M. P. Special Police Establishment vs State of MP	Article 161 permits the Governor to act in his own discretion when, on facts, bias becomes apparent or the decision of the State Cabinet is shown to be irrational.

Important case laws

Maru Ram vs UoI (1981)	Established that the Governor is the formal head of the executive but is incapable of acting except on the advice of the Council of Ministers. (Constitution Bench Judgement)
Shamsher Singh vs State of Punjab (1974)	7 Judge Bench Judgement by SC held that the Governor is a shorthand expression for the State Government.
A.G. Perarivalan vs State (2004)	Advice of the State Cabinet is binding on the Governor for powers under Article 161. It also ruled that inexplicable delay by the Governor in exercising this power is subject to judicial review.
Epuru Sudhakar vs Govt. of A.P. (2006)	Established that if the Council of Ministers acts irrationally or ignores relevant factors, the Court must exercise judicial review ; it is not open for the Governor to act in his own discretion.

Key Takeaways from Eswaran vs State Judgement

- **Binding nature of advice:** Governor is strictly bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers regarding remission and pre-mature release.
- **No discretion of Governor:** Governor cannot exercise discretion to take a different view, regardless of whether they personally agree with the advice.
- **Judicial review of irrational advice by Council of Ministers:** If the Council of Ministers acts irrationally or fails to consider relevant factors, the remedy lies in **judicial review** by the Courts, not in the Governor's independent discretion.

ISRO INVITES ANNOUNCEMENT OF OPPORTUNITY (AO) ON ADITYA L1 MISSION

Context

ISRO has released the second Announcement of Opportunity (AO) inviting proposals from the Indian solar physics community for observation time on the Aditya L1 mission.

About Aditya L1 Mission

- Aditya L1 mission is India's first dedicated space based solar mission. The mission has been making continuous observations of the sun from the sun-earth L1 point.

- Launched by ISRO on **September 2, 2023**, the mission reached its destination—a halo orbit around the **Lagrange Point 1 (L1)**.
- **Importance of L1:** The L1 point is a "gravitational sweet spot" where the gravitational pull of the Sun and Earth, combined with the centripetal force of the spacecraft's motion, allows it to remain relatively stable.
- **Objectives of Aditya-L1 Mission:** Broadly, study of solar activities and its effect on space weather.
 - Study of coronal heating
 - Study of solar wind acceleration
 - Study of Coronal Mass Ejections (CME)
 - Dynamics of solar atmosphere and temperature anisotropy.
- **Payloads of Aditya L1 Mission**
 - **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC):** VELC is the prime payload designed as a reflective coronagraph with a multi-slit spectrograph.
 - **Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS):** SoLEXS is a soft X-ray spectrometer designed to measure the solar soft X-ray flux to study solar flares.
 - **Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA):** PAPA is designed to understand solar winds and its composition and do mass analysis of solar wind ions.
 - **High Energy L1 Orbiting X-Ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS):** HEL1OS is a hard X-Ray spectrometer designed to study solar flares in the high energy X-Rays.
 - **Solar Ultra-violet Imaging Telescope (SUIT):** SUIT is a UV telescope to image the solar disk in the near ultra-violet wavelength range.
 - **Aditya Solar wind Particle EXperiment (ASPEX):** ASPEX payload comprises 2 sub-systems: SWIS & STEPS.
 - **Solar Wind Ion Spectrometer (SWIS)** is a low-energy spectrometer designed to measure the proton and alpha particles of the solar wind.
 - **Supra-Thermal & Energetic Particle Spectrometer (STEPS)** is a high energy spectrometer designed to measure high-energy ions of the solar wind.
 - **Magnetometer:** MAG will measure the low intensity interplanetary magnetic field in space. It has two steps of Magnetic sensors.

Other Solar Missions

Mission	Agency	Launch Date	Location / Orbit	Primary Science Focus
Parker Solar Probe	NASA (USA)	2018	Elliptical (Closest to Sun)	Sampling the solar corona and magnetic fields directly.
Solar Orbiter	ESA &	2020	Inclined Elliptical	High-res imaging and first-ever look

(Solo)	NASA			at the Solar Poles .
Hinode (Solar-B)	JAXA (Japan)	2006	Sun-synchronous (Earth)	High-resolution "microscopic" detail of magnetic structures.
Proba-3	ESA	2024	High Earth Orbit (Formation)	Studying inner corona via a 150m artificial eclipse created by two flying craft.
SWFO-L1	NOAA (USA)	2025	Lagrange Point 1 (L1)	Operational space weather forecasting and early warning (Solar-1).
SMILE	ESA & CAS (China)	2026 (To be launched)	High Earth Orbit	How solar wind "dents" the Earth's magnetosphere.
SOLAR-C (EUVST)	Led by JAXA, collaboration with NASA and European Space Agencies	2028	Sun-synchronous Earth orbit (approx. 600 km altitude) for continuous solar viewing.	Observe the entire solar atmosphere simultaneously with unprecedented resolution. Captures everything from the "cool" chromosphere (5,000 K) to the super-hot flaring corona (20 million K) at the same time.

INDIA CONDEMNS KILLING OF PEACEKEEPERS

Context

- India condemned the killing of **three Indonesian UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) peacekeepers in south Lebanon** amid **Hezbollah-IDF clashes**,

About UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)

- **Establishment:** Created by **UNSC Resolutions 425 & 426 (1978)** after Israel's **Operation Litani** invasion of south Lebanon (in response to 'coastal road massacre where Palestinian militants killed a number of Israelis).
- **Mandate:** Ensure **Israeli withdrawal, restore peace, and assist Lebanese government authority in southern Lebanon**.
- **Expanded Role:** After **Israel-Hezbollah war (2006)**, **UNSC Resolution 1701** expanded mandate to **monitor ceasefire and support Lebanese Armed Forces**.

- **Deployment:** Mission includes ~10,000 peacekeepers from 40+ countries (HQ: Naqoura, south Lebanon).
 - India is a **major troop contributor** (~600 personnel including infantry & medical units).
- **Legal Protection:** Attacks on peacekeepers violate **International Humanitarian Law and UNSC Resolution 1701** (may constitute **war crimes**).
- **Current Challenges:** Rising **Israel–Hezbollah clashes, attacks on peacekeepers, and wider West Asia conflict escalation** threaten mission stability.

About UN Peacekeeping Missions (PKOs)

Legal Basis: Not explicitly mentioned in **UN Charter**; evolved as UN practice to maintain peace (authorised by UNSC mandates; based broadly on **Chapter VI – dispute settlement & Chapter VII – action against threats**).

Core Principles of UN Peacekeeping

- **Consent:** Deployment requires **host state/major parties’ approval** (e.g., (e.g., **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon – UNIFIL**).
- **Impartiality:** UN forces must **not favour any side**, operating strictly under mandate & international law.
- **Limited Use of Force:** Force allowed only for **self-defence or defence of mandate**

Procedure for Establishing a Mission

- **Assessment:** If Conflict escalates, **UN Secretary-General report & consultations** assess need.
- **Mandate Approval:** **UN Security Council resolution** defines tasks, troop strength & duration.
- **Leadership Appointment:** UN appoints **Head of Mission, Force Commander, Police Commissioner**.
- **Force Generation:** Troops provided **voluntarily by member states roop Contributing Countries (TCCs) and Police Contributing Countries (PCCs)** (e.g., **India, Bangladesh, Nepal major contributors**).
- **Deployment Framework:** Host state signs **Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)**; operations guided by **Rules of Engagement (ROE)**.

Contribution and Funding

- **Troops & Police:** Provided voluntarily by **Troop/Police Contributing Countries** (UN reimburses at standard rates).
- **Funding:** Financed through **assessed contributions approved by the UN General Assembly** (major contributors: **USA, China, Japan**).

UNITED STATES MAY BE LOSING STRATEGICALLY IN THE IRAN WAR

Context

- The ongoing U.S.–Iran conflict highlights a critical distinction between **military success and strategic victory**. While American forces possess overwhelming military superiority, the broader geopolitical outcomes may weaken U.S. influence and reshape global power balances.

Strategic Loss to USA

- **Demonstration of Limits of American Power:** If Iran survives the combined military pressure of the world's leading superpower and its strongest regional ally, it signals that U.S. power has practical limits.
- **Strategic Distraction From Indo Pacific:** Resources and attention spent in the Middle East reduce the United States' ability to focus on long-term strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific due to China.
- **China as the Strategic Beneficiary:** China benefits indirectly as the U.S. attention on the Iran conflict, gaining strategic advantage without direct involvement.
- **Echo of the Suez Moment:** Just as the 1956 Suez crisis exposed the limits of European imperial power, the Iran war could signal a similar turning point for U.S. global influence.
- **Survival of the Iranian Regime:** If the war ends with the regime in Tehran intact despite sustained U.S.–Israeli pressure, Iran's endurance itself becomes a strategic victory.
- **Internationalisation of the Conflict:** Iran has framed the confrontation as a broader geopolitical struggle with the United States and Israel, strengthening its resistance narrative domestically and regionally.

How Iran Could Become Stronger After the War

- **Shift in nuclear doctrine:** Earlier, Iran's Supreme Leader had issued a religious injunction (fatwa) against nuclear weapons. However, IRGC may push to **overrule this restriction**, potentially moving Iran closer to nuclear weapon development if enriched uranium remains under its control.
- **Rising minimum agenda:** Iran's **ceasefire demands have become more ambitious** compared to pre-war negotiations, including lifting sanctions, removal of U.S. military bases from the region, and international recognition of its strategic interests.
- **Strategic maritime leverage:** Iran has effectively asserted influence over the Strait of Hormuz—through which **about 20% of global oil supplies transit**—demonstrating its ability to disrupt global energy flows and increase geopolitical leverage.
- **Survival despite military pressure:** Iran has reportedly moved drones and missiles into fortified mountain facilities, preserving retaliatory capability despite US–Israeli air superiority.
- **IRGC consolidation:** Elements closely aligned with the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** have gained stronger political control, potentially hardening Iran's strategic posture.
- **Energy weapon strategy:** By demonstrating its ability to disrupt energy flows and threaten regional infrastructure, Iran may deter future military actions against it.

FCRA AMENDMENT BILL 2026

Context

The Union government has deferred discussions on the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, following intense opposition and concerns regarding its impact on minority-led institutions.**

Key Provisions Proposed

- **Creation of a Designated Authority:** The Bill empowers the Central government to appoint a Designated Authority to take over, supervise, and manage foreign contributions and assets if a registration is cancelled, surrendered, or ceases.
- **Expansion of Ceased Registration:** A registration certificate is deemed to have ceased if no renewal application is made, if renewal is denied, or if it is not obtained before the expiry date.

- **Provisional vs. Permanent Vesting:**
 - **Provisional:** Assets vest temporarily with the Authority during suspension or renewal delays; they are returned if registration is restored.
 - **Permanent:** Assets vest permanently if the person fails to renew registration within a prescribed period or if the entity becomes defunct.
 - **Asset Disposal:** The Authority can transfer permanently vested assets to government departments or dispose of them via sale, with proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Religious Places of Worship:** For places of worship, the Authority can entrust management to a prescribed person, ensuring the religious character of the site is maintained.
- **Expanded Prohibitions:** The Bill expands the category of persons prohibited from accepting foreign aid to include any person (not just associations/companies) engaged in news production or broadcast.
- **Legal Protections and Penalties:**
 - **Appeals:** Aggrieved persons can appeal an order of the Authority to a District Judge within 90 days.
 - **Reduced Penalties:** The maximum imprisonment for contravening the Act is reduced from five years to one year.
 - **Prior Approval:** Central government approval is now required to initiate any investigation for offences under the Act.

REBATE OF STATE AND CENTRAL TAXES AND LEVIES (ROSCTL) SCHEME

Context

Recently, the Ministry of Textiles has extended the **Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) Scheme for exports of apparel/garments and made-ups up to 30th September 2026.**

About Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) Scheme

- It is operational from 7th March 2019.
- It aims to reimburse all embedded State and Central Taxes/Levies for exports of manufactured goods and garments.
- It has been established as a successor for the old “Rebate of State Levies (RoSL) Scheme.
- The difference between RoSL & RoSCTL Scheme is that under the RoSL Scheme, there was no benefit on the central tax and levies. But in the RoSCTL scheme, the exporter will get rebate of both State and Central tax and Levies.
- **Objective:** To compensate for the State and Central Taxes and Levies in addition to the Duty Drawback Scheme on export of apparel/ garments and Made-ups by way of rebate.

Features of RoSCTL Scheme

- The rebate under the Scheme shall be in the form of duty credit scrips.
- The scrips shall be issued electronically on the Customs system.
- The duty credit scrips shall be used for payment of Basic Customs Duty on import of goods. These scrips shall be freely transferable.

- The duty credit available in an e-scrip shall be transferred at a time for the entire amount in the said e-scrip to another person and transfer of the duty credit in part shall not be permitted.
- **Validity of e-scrip:** The period of validity of the e-scrip, of one year from its creation, shall not change on account of transfer of the e-scrip.
- **Eligibility:** All exporters of garments/Apparel and made-ups manufactured in India are eligible to take benefit under this scheme, except entities/ IECs under the Denied Entity List of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).
- **Implementing agency:** It is implemented by the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.

INDIA WAIVES CUSTOMS DUTY ON 40 PETROCHEMICAL PRODUCTS AMID WEST ASIA CRISIS

Context

Faced with supply disruptions, rising crude prices, and industrial stress across textiles, pharma, and automobiles, New Delhi has announced a sweeping three-month customs duty exemption — a targeted but temporary lifeline for India's import-dependent chemical ecosystem.

~40
Petrochemical products exempted from customs duty
₹1,800 Cr
Estimated government revenue foregone
June 2026
Deadline for the exemption window

What Are Petrochemicals and Why Do They Matter?

Petrochemicals are chemical compounds derived from crude oil and natural gas. Far from being niche industrial inputs, they are embedded in the fabric of everyday life from the PET bottles that carry drinking water, to synthetic fibres in clothing, to packaging materials, paints, adhesives, and pharmaceutical intermediates. In India, the petrochemical industry sits at the intersection of energy policy, industrial strategy, and trade. It feeds directly into sectors such as textiles, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, agriculture (fertilisers), packaging, and consumer goods. A disruption in petrochemical availability does not stay contained — it cascades rapidly across downstream industries, raising costs and constricting output.

Key Products in Scope

Major product categories covered by India's petrochemical sector include polymers (polyethylene, polypropylene), synthetic fibres, chemical intermediates (styrene, toluene), and industrial chemicals like methanol and ammonia.

The Announcement: What the Government Has Done

The Union government has granted a full customs duty exemption on approximately 40 critical petrochemical products. The measure is explicitly framed as temporary, running until June 30, 2026, and targeted — applying to specific inputs that have faced acute supply stress rather than a blanket sectoral relief.

The list of exempted products includes:

Methanol Acetic Acid Toluene Styrene Polypropylene Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) Polycarbonates PTA (Purified Terephthalic Acid) MEG (Mono Ethylene Glycol)

In parallel, the government has increased the allocation of commercial LPG to industries, addressing the feedstock crunch that has been a structural trigger of the current supply stress.

The Crisis Behind the Policy: Geopolitics Meets Supply Chain Fragility

India imports a significant share of its petrochemical requirements, with West Asia — particularly Iran and Gulf states — serving as a dominant sourcing hub due to geographic proximity and long-standing trade relationships. The ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region, including conflicts involving Iran, have hit India on two fronts simultaneously.

First, rising crude oil prices have directly elevated the cost of petrochemical feedstock. Second, disruptions to shipping routes in and around the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz have created delivery delays and logistics bottlenecks, further inflating landed costs of imports.

Sectoral Impact: Who Stands to Benefit?

The duty exemption is expected to provide tangible near-term relief across several industrial sectors:

- **Textiles:** Lower input costs for PTA and MEG will ease pressure on synthetic fibre producers and garment exporters facing global competition.
- **Automobiles:** Improved availability of paints, coatings, and chemical inputs will help reduce production delays and input cost inflation in vehicle manufacturing.
- **Pharmaceuticals:** Stabilisation of supply for chemical intermediates used in API manufacturing will reduce import dependency risks for the drug industry.
- **Packaging & Plastics:** Reduced polymer costs will benefit FMCG packaging, food processing, and consumer goods sectors with downstream price moderation.

The government has indicated that the relief is expected to moderate end-consumer prices, not merely benefit industrial producers. In a high-inflation environment, this consumer dimension adds political weight to the decision.

The Road Ahead: Building a Resilient Petrochemical Sector

- Duty relief is a useful short-run stabiliser, but India's petrochemical sector requires a longer-term strategic framework to reduce structural vulnerabilities. Analysts and industry bodies have broadly converged on several priorities.
- Expand domestic production capacity — India needs to scale up domestic crackers, aromatics complexes, and downstream polymer units to reduce dependence on imports for commodity chemicals.

Diversify import sourcing — Over-reliance on West Asia creates geopolitical concentration risk. Sourcing agreements with North America, Southeast Asia, and Russia can provide supply chain redundancy.

NCERT GRANTED DEEMED UNIVERSITY STATUS: A NEW PHASE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Context

The Centre has conferred the status of an “Institution deemed to be University under a distinct category” on the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

Provisions

- **Power to award degrees:** With this designation, NCERT and its six regional institutes can independently design academic programmes and grant degrees.

- **Compliance with regulations:** All courses must follow the standards set by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and remain aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- **Expansion of academic activities:** NCERT is expected to launch research-oriented, doctoral, and innovative programmes, and may also set up off-campus and overseas centres as per UGC norms.
- **Non-profit character:** The institution must operate strictly on a non-commercial basis, with no scope for profit-making activities.
- **Accreditation requirements:** It is required to obtain institutional accreditation from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and programme-level evaluation from the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- **Participation in rankings:** NCERT must take part in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) rankings each year.
- **Adoption of digital credit system:** The institution is obligated to implement the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), including generating student IDs and uploading academic credits to a digital platform linked with the ABC system.

CBSE INTRODUCES REVISED CURRICULUM WITH AI FOCUS AND LANGUAGE REFORMS

Context

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has unveiled an updated curriculum to be implemented in phases in the coming years. It is aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023.

Key highlights

- **Mandatory third language:** Students will be required to study a third language from Class 6 onwards.
- **Computational thinking and artificial intelligence:** A compulsory course in AI and computational thinking will be introduced from Class 9 beginning in the 2027–28 academic session.
 - The first board exams for these subjects are scheduled for 2029.
- **Advanced-level assessments in STEM:** Optional higher-level assessments in mathematics and science will be offered in Class 10, with the first batch appearing in 2028.
- **Art and physical education:** These subjects will become compulsory, supported by newly developed textbooks, while some existing optional subjects may be phased out.
- **Three-language framework:** Languages will be taught at three proficiency levels—R1, R2, and R3.
- **Introduction of R3-level textbooks:** Advanced-level (R3) textbooks will be introduced from Class 6 starting in the 2026–27 session.
- **Broader language choices:** Additional languages such as Maithili, Santhali, Dogri, and Konkani have been included in the curriculum.
- **Implementation strategy:** New textbooks for AI and computational thinking are being developed for Class 9 and will be available from the 2027–28 academic year.
 - The rollout will be gradual, with phased introduction of courses and updated learning materials.

- **Assessment and examination reforms:** Internal assessments will cover newly compulsory subjects like art education and vocational training.
 - Advanced mathematics and science papers will include an additional one-hour test, with recognition given to students scoring above 50%.



Mains Exam Topics

ELECTORAL ROLLS: FORM 6 AND SC INTERVENTION

Context

Ahead of the West Bengal elections, a surge in Form 6 registrations raised concerns over inclusion of voters from other states just before roll finalisation, while the Supreme Court of India reviewed voter deletions during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

About Form 6

- **Definition:** Form 6 is the official application used to register as a new voter, as per the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, issued by the Election Commission of India.
- **Authority involved:** It is submitted to the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), who is responsible for adding, deleting, and maintaining electoral rolls.
- **Eligibility criteria:** Applicant must be:
 - An Indian citizen
 - 18 years or above (as per Article 326 of the Indian Constitution)
 - An ordinary resident of the constituency
- **Documents required:** Proof of age and residence (self-attested). Includes a self-declaration of citizenship (no direct proof required initially)
- **Mode of application:** Can be submitted online (ECINET portal) or offline to the ERO.

Processing of Form 6

- **Step 1:** Submission by the applicant
- **Step 2:** Field Verification by Booth Level Officer (BLO)
- **Step 3:** Final Decision by ERO after satisfaction
- **Types of inclusion**
 - **Special summary revision (SSR):** Pre-election/annual revision
 - **Continuous updation:** Allowed throughout the year except during election period
- **Safeguard:** A minimum 7-day notice period is given for objections before final inclusion.

Significance of Form 6

- **Enables democratic participation:** Acts as the primary gateway for citizens to exercise voting rights.
- **Ensures inclusiveness:** Helps in adding new voters, migrants, and first-time voters to the rolls.
- **Maintains electoral accuracy:** Ensures that only eligible residents are included after verification.
- **Legal accountability:** False declaration can lead to penalty or imprisonment, ensuring seriousness of the process.

SC Judgement on electoral roll exclusions

- **Fair adjudicating authority:** Only the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have the authority to add or delete names after verification to carefully avoid wrongful exclusion.
- **Voting rights cannot be permanently denied:** Removal of names from electoral rolls is temporary, and eligible citizens can be re-included.

- **Strengthening of appellate mechanism:** Independent tribunals led by senior judges will hear appeals of excluded voters.
- **Transparency in decision-making:** Authorities must provide clear reasons for deletion to ensure accountability.
- **Large-scale adjudication recognised:** The Court acknowledged the massive number of claims and objections being processed.
- **Supplementary electoral lists allowed:** Periodic updates ensure continuous inclusion of eligible voters before elections.

Impact

- **Protection of democratic rights:** Reinforces voting as a core right under Article 326 of the Indian Constitution.
- **Balance between accuracy and inclusion:** It ensures electoral rolls are clean (free from duplicates) while remaining inclusive.
- **Clarity in enrolment process (Form 6):** Form 6 enables new voter registration with verification by BLOs and approval by EROs. It further introduces checks and accountability in adding voters.
- **Institutional accountability:** Limits arbitrary powers by ensuring decisions remain with designated authorities (EROs)

Challenges

- **High rate of exclusion:** Large-scale deletions raise concerns about wrongful disenfranchisement.
- **Time constraints before elections:** Pressure to finalise rolls before nominations affects thorough verification.
- **Risk of misuse of Form 6:** Allegations of bulk enrolment and demographic manipulation create political controversy.
- **Administrative burden:** Handling lakhs of claims daily strains institutional capacity.
- **Lack of clarity in appeal timelines:** Ongoing adjudication creates uncertainty for voters seeking inclusion.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen verification with inclusion focus:** Ensure that revision exercises do not exclude genuine voters.
- **Ensure transparency and accountability:** Provide clear reasons and accessible appeal mechanisms for all exclusions.
- **Improve administrative capacity:** Deploy trained officials and streamline processes to handle large-scale revisions efficiently.
- **Regulate form 6 submissions:** Monitor bulk applications to prevent misuse or political manipulation.
- **Balance speed with fairness:** Allow adequate time for verification and appeals before finalising electoral rolls.

POLITICISATION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION BODIES

Context

The high-profile Delhi excise policy case recently fell apart after a trial court refused to even frame charges, observing that there was no prima facie evidence of bribery or criminal conspiracy.

Politicisation of anti-corruption bodies

- **About anti-corruption bodies:** These are specialised institutions tasked with preventing, detecting, and investigating corruption in both public and private sectors. In India, key agencies include:
- **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):** The main investigative body handling corruption and major economic offences.
- **Enforcement Directorate (ED):** Deals with financial crimes such as money laundering and violations of economic laws.
- **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC):** A top advisory body supervising vigilance mechanisms in the central government.
- **Lokpal/Lokayuktas:** Statutory institutions at the central and state levels that examine corruption allegations against public officials.

Factors contributing to politicisation

- **External influence on FIR Registration:** Investigations may be initiated due to political pressure rather than strong evidence.
 - **Eg:** The Delhi excise case raised concerns when it collapsed despite months of intense media coverage.
- **Executive control over agencies:** Dependence on the political executive can undermine institutional autonomy and credibility.
 - **Eg:** Arrests of leaders in Delhi influenced political discourse before charges were established.
- **Use of criminal law for political ends:** Legal action is increasingly viewed as a political tool rather than a purely judicial process.
 - **Eg:** High-profile arrests linked to public contracts often dominate media narratives during elections.
- **Weak evidentiary basis:** Cases are sometimes built on suspicion rather than robust forensic or financial evidence.
 - **Eg:** The excise policy case failed due to the inability to establish a prima facie case of conspiracy.

Implications

- **Loss of institutional credibility:** Failure of cases at early stages weakens public trust in anti-corruption agencies.
- **Rising public distrust:** Frequent allegations without convictions foster cynicism about the justice system.
- **Damage to Reputation and Liberty:** Individuals may face prolonged detention and reputational harm without proven guilt.
 - **Eg:** Former Delhi ministers spent months in custody before courts found insufficient evidence.
- **Inefficient use of resources:** Focusing on politically sensitive but weak cases diverts attention from pressing developmental priorities.

Challenges in addressing politicisation

- **Complex nature of corruption:** Illicit activities are often concealed through indirect channels like shell companies and regulatory manipulation.
- **Judicial caution in policy matters:** Courts avoid criminalising policy decisions unless clear evidence of mala fide intent exists.
 - **Eg:** The Supreme Court has emphasised that policy changes alone do not constitute a crime without proof of dishonest intent.
- **Limited investigative capacity:** Agencies often rely on testimonies instead of advanced financial and data analysis techniques.
- **Lack of coordination:** Fragmentation among agencies like the CBI and ED hampers a unified and specialised approach.

Way Ahead

- **Enhance forensic capabilities:** Adopt tools such as forensic accounting and data analytics to track financial transactions and ownership structures.
- **Ensure institutional autonomy:** Decisions on FIRs and prosecutions should be evidence-based and free from political interference.
- **Meet judicial standards:** Cases should only be pursued when supported by strong and legally sustainable evidence.
- **Promote political restraint:** Political actors must avoid misusing investigative agencies for partisan purposes.
- **Improve inter-agency coordination:** Develop a streamlined and expert-driven investigative framework, similar to models in countries like Singapore and Hong Kong.

REGULATION VS RIGHTS: THE FCRA AMENDMENT DEBATE

Context

The Union government has deferred discussion on the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026, which aims to tighten regulation of foreign funding under the 2010 Act to protect national interest and security, but has sparked political controversy over concerns of its impact on minority institutions, especially ahead of the Kerala Assembly elections.

About FCRA

- **Definition and purpose:** The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) governs the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds by individuals, NGOs, and associations in India, ensuring such contributions do not compromise national interests.
- **Historical background (1976):** The law was first enacted in 1976 amid concerns over foreign interference in domestic affairs through financial support.
- **Core objective:** Its primary aim has been to ensure that organisations function in alignment with the principles of a sovereign democratic republic.
- **Recent amendments:** Over time, the Act has undergone amendments in 2016, 2018, and 2020 to strengthen regulatory mechanisms. The 2020 amendment, in particular, significantly enhanced government oversight and scrutiny of foreign contributions received by NGOs.

Key provisions of the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026

- **Creation of a ‘designated authority’:** A special authority will be appointed to manage or dispose of assets created from foreign funds.
 - This applies when an NGO’s registration is suspended, cancelled, or not renewed, ensuring assets are not misused or left unmanaged.
- **Wider definition of ‘key functionary’:** The term will now include directors, trustees, partners, committee members, and others managing the organisation.
 - This ensures that all individuals involved in decision-making are clearly identified and accountable.
- **Liability of key functionaries:** Key persons in NGOs can be held responsible for violations under the law.
 - However, they can avoid liability if they prove lack of knowledge or that proper care was taken.
- **Prior approval for investigations:** Any investigation by State agencies or police into FCRA-related matters will require prior approval from the Central government.
 - This is aimed at ensuring uniformity and preventing multiple or overlapping inquiries.
- **Framework for asset management:** The law earlier regulated only the flow of foreign funds, not the assets created from them.
 - The amendment introduces clear rules for handling such assets, especially during suspension or cancellation of registration.
- **Timelines for use of funds:** NGOs receiving funds under prior permission must utilise them within a fixed time period.
 - This prevents indefinite holding of funds and ensures timely use for intended purposes.
- **Automatic expiry of registration:** Registration will automatically end if not renewed, removing ambiguity about the status of organisations.
 - This creates clarity and avoids misuse by inactive entities.
- **Rationalisation of penalties:** The maximum jail term for violations is proposed to be reduced from 5 years to 1 year.
 - The focus shifts towards administrative compliance rather than harsh punishment.

Concerns and criticism

- **Impact on NGOs:** Civil society groups and religious organisations have raised concerns that the amendment could affect the functioning of NGOs and minority institutions that depend on foreign funding for their activities in areas such as education, healthcare, and social welfare.
- **Government’s justification:** The government has defended the Bill, stating that it is intended to address legal and administrative gaps and to curb misuse of foreign funds, particularly in activities like alleged forced religious conversions.
- **Risk of asset takeover:** Concerns over loss of assets due to delays or denial in registration renewal.
- **Fear of excessive control:** Criticism that the law may increase central government control and reduce NGO autonomy

- **Kerala's political sensitivity:** The issue has gained prominence ahead of Assembly elections in Kerala, where a large Christian minority (over 61 lakh out of 3.34 crore population) makes it electorally significant.

Way forward

- **Clear and transparent asset management framework:** Establish well-defined, time-bound procedures for takeover, return, or transfer of assets.
 - **Best practice: The UK charity commission model** ensures independent oversight of charitable assets with judicial safeguards.
- **Independent oversight mechanism:** Create a quasi-judicial or independent regulatory body instead of complete executive control.
 - **Eg: NITI Aayog** has recommended participatory governance models involving civil society in regulatory processes.
- **Time-bound and predictable renewal process:** Ensure automatic reminders, digital tracking, and strict timelines for registration renewal decisions.
 - **Best practice: The Ministry of Corporate Affairs MCA-21 portal** provides a model for time-bound digital compliance systems.
- **Differentiated regulation based on risk:** Adopt a risk-based approach rather than uniform restrictions for all NGOs.
 - **Global practice: Financial Action Task Force** recommends targeted monitoring of high-risk entities instead of blanket controls.
- **Transparency through technology:** Use real-time disclosure portals for foreign funding receipts and utilisation.
 - **Eg: India's public financial management system (PFMS)** can be leveraged for end-to-end fund tracking.
- **Capacity building of NGOs:** Provide training and compliance support, especially for smaller organisations.
 - **Eg: United Nations Development Programme** highlights that capacity-building improves regulatory adherence in developing countries.