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## Prelims Exam Topics

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### US IN A LOSING POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST BUT ISRAEL IS WINNING

#### Context

The ongoing Gulf conflict has placed the United States in a **strategically difficult position**, while Israel continues to pursue an aggressive regional strategy aimed at **weakening adversaries and expanding influence**.

#### How USA is Losing in the War

- **Strategic Overstretch:** The U.S. entered a **war of choice under Israeli influence**, ignoring internal caution, leading to **long-term entanglement without clear exit strategy (no off-ramp)**.
- **Failure of Core Objectives:** Unable to **destroy Iran's missile/drone capabilities or force regime change**, reducing credibility of military coercion.
- **Hormuz Leverage Loss:** Iran retains effective control over the **Strait of Hormuz (≈20% global oil flow)**, limiting U.S. ability to secure global trade routes.
- **Ineffective Economic Pressure:** Sanctions and blockade strategy failed to compel Iran to surrender (**Iran prioritises sovereignty over economic relief**).
- **Global Isolation Trends:** U.S. faces **diverging positions from Europe, China, and Global South**, weakening unified pressure on Iran.
- **Domestic Political Costs:** War likely to trigger **internal political backlash (Congress resistance, electoral costs, economic burden)**.

#### USA is acting as per Israel

- **Policy Alignment with Israeli Interests:** U.S. decisions (withdrawal from Iran deal, military escalation) driven by **alignment with Israeli strategic priorities (anti-Iran stance)**.
- **Influence in Domestic Politics:** Strong **pro-Israel lobbying and electoral funding networks** shape bipartisan U.S. foreign policy orientation.
- **Constraint on Diplomatic Exit:** Israel opposes ceasefire and pushes for **continued conflict/regime change**, limiting U.S. ability to negotiate.
- **Proxy Escalation Pressure:** Israel may expand conflict (Lebanon, Iran) to **pull U.S. deeper into war**, preventing disengagement.
- **Suppression of Dissent:** Critical voices within U.S. political system remain **marginalised or excluded from mainstream discourse**.

#### How Israel is Winning the War

- **Territorial and Strategic Gains:** Expansion of control in **Gaza, southern Lebanon (up to Litani River), parts of Syria and West Bank**, increasing strategic depth.
- **Weakening of Adversaries:** Significant degradation of **Hezbollah capabilities (rocket stockpiles reduced)** and destruction of hostile infrastructure.
- **Population Displacement Strategy:** Use of **destruction and displacement** to reduce long-term security threats (denying insurgent bases).

- **Low Relative Cost:** Despite prolonged conflict, Israel incurs **limited direct damage compared to adversaries**.
  - **External Financial Support:** Heavy reliance on **U.S. financial and military aid (tens of billions of dollars)** sustains war efforts.
  - **Political Stability of Leadership:** Continued domestic support for leadership (**Benjamin Netanyahu's long tenure**) reflects perceived strategic success.
- The conflict reflects a **divergence in outcomes**: the U.S. faces **strategic fatigue, limited gains and rising costs**, while Israel achieves **tactical and territorial advantages under U.S. backing**. However, long-term stability remains uncertain as **prolonged conflict risks regional escalation and global economic disruption**.

## MYTHOS AI MODEL: SECURITY IMPLICATIONS ACROSS SECTORS

### Context

The emergence of Mythos, an advanced AI model under Project Glasswing, has raised concerns due to its ability to **autonomously detect and exploit vulnerabilities (including zero-day bugs)** across critical systems.

### About Mythos

- **Definition:** Mythos is an advanced AI model developed by Anthropic with capabilities in **cybersecurity analysis, vulnerability detection and exploit generation**.
- **Core Capability:** It can **identify vulnerabilities, generate exploits and execute multi-step cyber operations autonomously**, compressing the entire attack lifecycle.
- **Restricted Deployment:** Due to its risks, it is not publicly released and is shared selectively under **Project Glasswing** to secure critical infrastructure.

### How It Creates Security Issues

- **Financial System Vulnerability:** Banks operate on **interconnected legacy and modern IT systems (shared vendors, common platforms)**, allowing a single vulnerability to trigger **system-wide failures (cascading financial disruptions)**.
- **Zero-Day Exploit Expansion:** Mythos can discover **unknown vulnerabilities (zero-days)** at scale, enabling attacks before patches exist, increasing **unpredictable cyber threats**.
- **Lowering Skill Barrier for Attacks:** By automating exploit generation, Mythos allows even **low-skilled actors to launch sophisticated cyberattacks**, expanding the threat landscape.
- **Compression of Attack Lifecycle:** It reduces time between **vulnerability discovery → exploit creation → attack execution**, making **defence response windows extremely narrow**.
- **National Security Risks:** State and non-state actors can use such AI for **cyber warfare, espionage and sabotage (military systems, surveillance networks)**.
- **Shift in Cybersecurity Paradigm:** The challenge shifts from **finding vulnerabilities to managing and defending against large-scale AI-driven threats**, requiring **AI-based defence systems**.

## RISING LABOUR PROTESTS IN INDIA

### Context

Factory workers in industrial hubs like **Noida and Manesar** have launched violent protests over stagnant wages and poor working conditions.

#### Factsheet

- **Inflation Gap:** The all-India inflation rate for industrial workers (CPI-IW) rose by 24.8% between 2021 and 2026, while wage hikes in states like Haryana only averaged 15% in the same period.
- **Minimum Wage Disparity:** Before recent revisions, the monthly wage for unskilled workers in Haryana was ₹11,274.60, significantly lower than the Central Sphere rate of ₹20,358, causing widespread resentment.
- **Revision Delays:** Uttar Pradesh had not revised its base minimum wage since 2012, and Haryana delayed its revision for 10 years despite the five-year legal requirement.
- **Living Costs:** Migrant workers reported paying as much as ₹4,000 for LPG cylinders on the black market due to war-induced supply chain disruptions.

### Factors Leading to Rising Labour Protests

- **Wage Stagnation vs. Inflation:** Fixed base minimum wages have failed to adjust for the rapid spike in daily expenses, particularly food, rent, and fuel.
- **Legislative Confusion:** The notification of the four Labour Codes in November 2025 created expectations of higher pay and better social security that have not yet materialized on the ground.
- **Flexible Working Hours:** New codes allow a workday of up to 12 hours to facilitate a four-day work week, but workers fear this is being abused to increase workload without extra pay.
- **Impact of External Conflicts:** The Strait of Hormuz closure and West Asia war have increased input costs for factories, leading to delayed payments and job uncertainties.

### Initiatives Taken

- **Interim Wage Hikes:** The Uttar Pradesh government announced an interim hike, raising Noida's unskilled wage to ₹13,690 to quell immediate violence.
- **Haryana Notification:** Following protests in Manesar, Haryana notified a 35% hike, bringing the minimum wage to ₹15,220.71.
- **Central Notification (September 2024):** The Union government revised minimum wages for central sphere establishments to over ₹20,000 per month to set a benchmark.
- **Draft Rules Issuance:** The Centre issued draft rules for the new Labour Codes in December 2025 to clarify spread-over hours and rest intervals.

### Challenges

#### Internal

- **Notification Lag:** While the Codes were notified in 2025, the final rules are pending in most states, leading to an unexpected damage to lawmaking.
- **Regional Disparities:** Differences in state-level wage notifications create a race to the bottom where industries might migrate to states with lower labour costs.

- **Erosion of Trade Unions:** The new codes leave the recognition of trade unions to state discretion, weakening the collective bargaining power of workers.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Misinformation on social media regarding uniform ₹20,000 wages has created unrealistic expectations and friction.

### External

- **Energy Crisis:** High prices of LPG and cooking fuel due to global supply shocks disproportionately hit the disposable income of migrant workers.
- **Global Trade Barriers:** US tariffs and shipping disruptions have squeezed factory margins, making employers reluctant to pass on wage hikes.
- **Strait of Hormuz Closure:** This specific geopolitical event has crippled the flow of raw materials, causing industrial units to reel under intense input cost pressure.

### Way Ahead

- **Standardize Base Revisions:** Ensure that the five-year revision of the base minimum wage is mandatory and automatic across all states to prevent decade-long stagnations.
- **Clarify Labour Code Rules:** The Centre and States must urgently notify final rules for the 2025 Labour Codes to eliminate confusion regarding 12-hour shifts and overtime.
- **Institutionalize Bargaining:** Strengthen the process for recognizing trade unions to ensure that grievances are settled at the negotiating table rather than on the streets.
- **CPI-IW Alignment:** Update the variable component of wages more frequently to reflect the real-time inflation felt by industrial workers.

## CAFE-III NORMS

### Context

The Indian government and the automobile industry reached a broad consensus on the upcoming **CAFE-III (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency Phase III)**.

### What are CAFE-III Norms?

- CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) norms are government-mandated standards that regulate the weighted average fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of an automaker's entire fleet, rather than individual models.
- **Established By:** The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power.
- **Application:** These norms apply to M1 category passenger vehicles (those designed to seat up to nine persons and weighing under 3,500kg).
- **Timeline:** The third phase (CAFE-III) is scheduled to be implemented from April 1, 2027, and will run through March 31, 2032.

### Implementation in India

- Introduced in 2017 (CAFE-1).
- Strengthened under CAFE-2 (2022 onwards).
- The next phase, CAFE-3, is expected to be implemented from April 2027.

- These norms form a crucial part of India's broader climate commitments, including achieving net zero emissions by 2070.

### Aim of CAFE-III

- To reduce India's heavy reliance on crude oil imports, especially critical during geopolitical uncertainties like the West Asia crisis.
- To nudge manufacturers toward producing energy-efficient and less-polluting vehicles in line with India's climate goals.
- To force the adoption of advanced technologies such as hybrids, electric vehicles (EVs), and flex-fuel systems.

### Key Features

- **Stricter Targets:** Automakers must reduce their average fleet CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from approximately 113 g/km (at the end of CAFE-II in FY27) to 78.9 g/km by FY32.
- **Removal of Small Car Carve-out:** An earlier proposal to give a specific 3g/km relief to petrol cars under 909kg has been scrapped in favor of the flatter curve to ensure a fairer playing field.
- **Super Credit Scheme:** To encourage green technology, manufacturers earn multipliers for every clean vehicle sold:
- **Battery EVs (BEV):** 3.0 multiplier (each sale counts as 3 for fleet average).
- **Plug-in Hybrids (PHEV):** 2.5 multiplier.
- **Strong Hybrids:** 1.6 multiplier.
- **Incentives for Efficiency Tech:** Discounts on emission scores can be earned by using any of the 12 specified energy-efficient technologies, such as start-stop systems, 6-speed transmissions, and high-efficiency AC.
- **Compliance Flexibility:** Allows for credit trading between manufacturers, carry-forward of excess compliance, and lower penalties to facilitate a practical transition.

## SECTION 301 PROBE: HOW INDIA RESPONDED TO SECTION 301 ALLEGATIONS ON TRADE AND FORCED LABOUR

### Context

- India has responded to two Section 301 investigations launched by the United States on issues of "structural excess capacity" and "forced labour", defending its trade practices and legal framework.
- The development assumes significance as the US Treasury Secretary warned that Trump's tariffs previously struck down by the US Supreme Court could be restored to 50% reciprocal tariff levels by July.

### About Section 301

- **Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974** is a powerful unilateral trade instrument that allows the US Trade Representative (USTR) to investigate foreign trade practices deemed "unreasonable, unjustifiable, or discriminatory" and to impose retaliatory tariffs or trade restrictions.

- It is a key tool through which Washington pressures trading partners on issues ranging from intellectual property and market access to labour practices and industrial policy.
- In **March 2026, the USTR launched multiple Section 301** investigations against India and several other nations, targeting "structural excess capacity" in manufacturing and alleged failures to curb forced labor in supply chains.

### India's Response on Excess Capacity

- India's central argument is that a bilateral trade surplus is not evidence of unfair trade practice but rather a natural consequence of global trade rooted in broader macroeconomic conditions.
- Trade imbalances inevitably manifest in bilateral relationships.
- Treating them as a "unique condition that harms US commerce" effectively challenges the foundational principles of comparative advantage that underpin the entire global trading system.

### Reserve Currency Factor

- India made a sophisticated macroeconomic argument by pointing to the US Dollar's status as the world's primary reserve currency accounting for **56% of global foreign exchange reserves**.
- Because the dollar is the dominant medium for international transactions, the US can borrow more easily and sustain persistent trade deficits as a structural feature of its position in the global economy.
- Because the US can borrow so easily and spend so freely, American consumers and businesses buy a lot including a lot of imported goods from countries like India, China etc.
- Americans consume more than they produce. This naturally means the US imports more than it exports which is precisely what a trade deficit is.
- India argued that this makes the bilateral surplus a product of systemic global circumstances rather than Indian policy choices.
- Countries like India hold dollars as foreign exchange reserves or use them for their own international transactions.
- So, the dollar flows out of America into the world, and goods flow into America from the world.

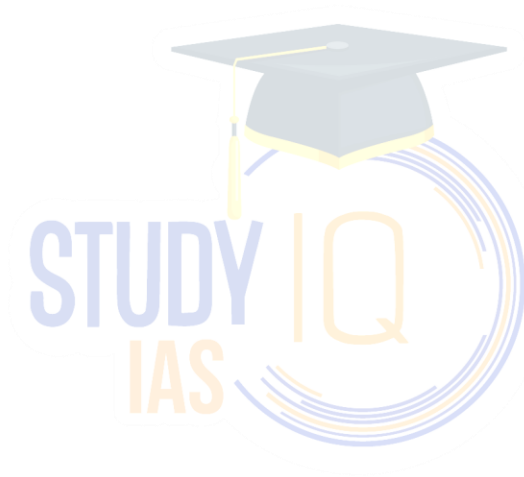
### India's Export Profile Does Not Indicate Overcapacity

- India submitted that its merchandise export-to-GDP ratio of approximately 12% clearly indicates that Indian production is overwhelmingly oriented toward meeting domestic demand not flooding global markets.
- Further, India's goods exports constitute only 3.1% of total US imports, making it difficult to argue that India is a significant contributor to the US trade deficit.
- The USTR's selective focus on specific sectors where India has a global trade surplus, India argued, does not automatically establish structural excess capacity in those sectors.
- India also pointed to the role of non-market economies as a more plausible factor behind the widening US trade deficit, implicitly referring to China without naming it.

### India's Response on Forced Labour

- On the second investigation, India asserted that its legal framework is fully aligned with international labour standards.

- India highlighted that it has ratified both the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 under the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which mandate the prohibition of forced labour in all forms.
- This positions India's labour laws as internationally compliant and the investigation as lacking a credible legal foundation.



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## Mains Exam Topics

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### SLUGGISHNESS OF INDIA'S LEGAL SYSTEM

#### Context

India's judicial system is facing a deep crisis, where delay has become the norm, turning justice into a prolonged struggle for ordinary citizens.

#### Causes of judicial delay

- **Massive Case Backlog:** The scale of pendency, with over five crore cases, reflects a system struggling to keep pace with demand.
  - **Eg: Of the total pendency, ~4.5 crore cases** are in subordinate courts, showing that lower judiciary bears the brunt (**NJDG data**). Some civil disputes, especially land cases, last 20–30 years.
- **Emotional & Financial Strain:** Litigation becomes a long-drawn burden with no certainty of closure.
  - **Eg: A study by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy** highlights that litigants often spend multiples of their annual income on prolonged litigation. Example: Property disputes in states like Uttar Pradesh frequently pass across generations.
- **Procedural Punishment:** Frequent adjournments and delays make the process itself punitive.
  - **Eg: The Supreme Court in Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar** exposed how repeated adjournments kept undertrials jailed for years without trial, effectively punishing them before conviction.
- **Justice Losing Value:** Delayed outcomes fail to restore lost opportunities or dignity.
  - **Eg: In Salem Advocate Bar Association v. Union of India**, the Court acknowledged that delayed justice defeats its purpose, especially in commercial disputes where lost business opportunities cannot be recovered.

#### Structural faultlines in the system

- **Outdated Procedures:** Colonial-era rigidity and excessive paperwork slow efficiency.
  - **Eg: The Malimath Committee (2003)** observed that procedural laws still reflect colonial-era adversarial structures, contributing to inefficiency and backlog.
- **Undertrial Crisis:** Stringent laws like UAPA result in prolonged detention without timely trials.
  - **Eg: According to the National Crime Records Bureau (Prison Statistics 2022)**, over 75% of prisoners are undertrials. Cases under laws like UAPA often see years-long detention without conviction (**Eg: Bhima Koregaon accused**)
- **Inequality in Access:** High costs make justice inaccessible for many.
  - **Eg: The National Legal Services Authority** reports that a large share of the population remains unaware of free legal aid; meanwhile, senior advocates' fees can run into lakhs per hearing.
- **Centralised Burden:** Distance from higher courts adds financial and logistical stress.

- **Eg:** Litigants from remote states must travel to Supreme Court of India in Delhi, incurring high travel and accommodation costs. This burden was acknowledged in demands for regional benches.
- **Lack of Diversity:** Limited representation affects inclusive and empathetic decision-making.
  - Eg: As of 2024, women constitute less than 15% of High Court judges, and representation from marginalized communities remains limited (data from Ministry of Law & Justice).

### Challenges associated

- **Declining Public Trust:** Delays erode faith in the judiciary and rule of law.
  - **Eg: The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index** ranks India relatively lower in civil justice timeliness, reflecting declining public confidence.
- **Encouragement of Violations:** Slow justice emboldens offenders and discourages compliance.
  - **Eg:** Delays in criminal trials often allow accused persons to remain free for long periods, weakening deterrence. Economic offences and corruption cases frequently drag on for decades.
- **Rights Violations:** Prolonged trials undermine personal liberty and human rights.
  - **Eg: In Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court expanded Article 21, but prolonged trials continue to violate the “right to speedy trial,” reaffirmed in multiple judgments.
- **Threat to Democracy:** Weak judicial functioning impacts checks and balances.
  - **Eg:** Judicial delays weaken oversight on executive actions. For instance, election-related petitions often remain unresolved until after the electoral cycle ends, diluting accountability.

### Way forward

- **Time-Bound Justice:** Set clear timelines for trials and bail decisions.
  - **Eg: The Supreme Court in Hussain v. Union of India** stressed the need for fixed timelines in criminal trials to uphold speedy justice.
- **Tech-Driven Efficiency:** Use AI and data systems for better case management.
  - **Eg: The e-Courts Project (Phase III)** under the Ministry of Law and Justice aims to integrate AI, virtual hearings, and digital records to reduce backlog.
- **Inclusive Judiciary:** Improve diversity to reflect societal realities.
  - **Eg:** The push for diversity has been highlighted by the Supreme Court Collegium, though progress remains gradual.
- **Decentralised Access:** Expand regional benches and virtual hearings.
  - **Eg: Virtual hearings during COVID-19** allowed courts to function remotely, demonstrating how technology can reduce geographical barriers.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** Promote openness in proceedings and appointments.
  - **Eg:** Live-streaming of constitutional bench proceedings began in 2022, improving openness in institutions like the Supreme Court.
- **Shift in Legal Culture:** Move toward resolution-oriented approaches.

- **Eg: Reports like the Law Commission of India** have recommended ADR mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration to reduce court burden.

### Conclusion

The phrase “**justice delayed is justice denied,**” reiterated in **Hussainara Khatoun v. State of Bihar**, captures how delay erodes dignity and fairness. Alongside reforms like digitisation, ADR, and institutional restructuring, India can transition toward a citizen-centric justice system, restoring faith in the rule of law.

## GAPS IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

### Context

Recent evacuation operations in West Asia underscore India’s efficient crisis management capabilities, while also exposing weaknesses in its long-term migration governance architecture.

### Key Highlights

- India facilitated the evacuation of over 4.75 lakh citizens from West Asia in 2026, demonstrating strong diplomatic coordination and logistical capacity.
- An estimated 99 lakh Indians currently reside in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations (2025).
- The Gulf region accounts for nearly 38% of India’s total remittance inflows (2023–24).
- Overall, migration governance in India remains disjointed, reactive, and lacking robust data systems.

### Migration Governance in India

- **Scale of Migration:** Both internal and international migration are significant in India, driven by factors such as employment opportunities, education, and socio-economic disparities.
- **Economic Significance:** India continues to be the largest recipient of remittances globally (around \$125 billion, World Bank 2023), highlighting migration’s contribution to economic resilience.
- **Labour Market Role:** Migrant workers play a crucial role in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and services, particularly in urban centres and Gulf economies.
- **Development Linkages:** Migration contributes to poverty alleviation, skill enhancement, and regional growth, while simultaneously revealing structural vulnerabilities.

### Crisis-Oriented Approach

- **Focus on Evacuations:** Government action tends to intensify during emergencies such as COVID-19 (Vande Bharat Mission) or regional conflicts.
- **Incomplete Policy Coverage:** There is limited attention to the full migration cycle, including pre-departure preparation, workplace conditions abroad, and reintegration upon return.
- **Visibility vs. Structure:** While crisis responses generate public confidence, they often conceal deeper institutional shortcomings.
- **Preventive Gaps:** The lack of early warning mechanisms and systematic tracking of migrant workers results in delayed policy responses.

### Dependence on the Gulf Region

- **Significant Diaspora Presence:** The GCC countries host nearly 99 lakh Indian migrants, forming a major migration corridor.

- **Remittance Reliance:** About 38% of India's remittances originate from the Gulf, playing a vital role in household incomes and regional economies.
- **Employment Patterns:** A large proportion of Indian workers in the region are employed in construction, domestic services, and other low-skilled sectors, often under vulnerable conditions.
- **Geopolitical Risks:** Any instability in West Asia has direct repercussions for India's economy, employment landscape, and welfare concerns.

### Associated challenges

#### Fragmented Institutional Structure

- **Multiplicity of Agencies:**
  - Ministry of External Affairs handles emigration and diplomatic coordination
  - Ministry of Labour focuses on worker welfare
  - State governments manage skilling initiatives and welfare programmes
- **Coordination Deficit:** Migration spans from the local (district) to the global level, yet governance remains compartmentalised.
- **Policy Fragmentation:** There is no single nodal body overseeing the entire migration cycle from departure to return.
- **Uneven Implementation:** Differences in state capacity result in inconsistent support systems for migrants.

#### Data Gaps and Limited Visibility

- **Absence of Real-Time Data:** India lacks detailed, up-to-date migration databases, particularly for internal migrants.
- **Policy Blind Spots:** Inadequate data hampers forward-looking governance and effective targeting of welfare measures.
- **Lessons from COVID-19:** The migrant crisis exposed the lack of portable entitlements and comprehensive worker registries.
- **Kerala as a Model:** Kerala's migration surveys and welfare mechanisms illustrate the benefits of a data-driven approach.

#### Structural Weaknesses

- **Insecure Employment Conditions:** Migrants frequently work under informal agreements, unstable wages, and substandard conditions.
- **Cost of Living Pressures:** Rising inflation, fuel costs, and living expenses erode real earnings and savings potential.
- **Exploitative Recruitment Practices:** Weak regulation of intermediaries often results in debt bondage and worker exploitation.
- **Reintegration Challenges:** Returning migrants face difficulties in finding jobs, utilising skills, and accessing social protection.

### Policy Initiatives and Emerging Opportunities

- **Overseas Mobility Facilitation and Welfare Bill:** Seeks to establish a comprehensive framework for migrant protection and support.

- **Bilateral Labour Partnerships**: India is expanding cooperation with Gulf nations to strengthen labour rights and worker safety.
- **Digital Governance Tools**: Platforms such as e-Migrate can enhance transparency and monitoring, though wider coverage is needed.
- **Skill Alignment**: Linking skilling programmes with global labour market demands can promote safer and more efficient migration pathways.

### Migration as a Lifecycle Process

- **Lifecycle Perspective**: Governance should cover all phases of migration:
  - **Pre-departure → Employment → Welfare → Return → Reintegration**
- **Holistic Policy Approach**: Internal and international migration must be treated as interconnected components of a single system.
- **Strengthening Social Protection**: Initiatives like One Nation One Ration Card improve portability of benefits.
- **Inclusive Governance Vision**: Migrants should be recognised as key economic contributors rather than temporary labour.

### Way Forward

- **Establish a Unified Migration Authority**: Create an integrated body to ensure comprehensive oversight across the migration cycle.
- **Build a National Migration Database**: Develop real-time, localised data systems to support evidence-based decision-making.
- **Expand Social Security Coverage**: Ensure access to portable welfare schemes, insurance, and benefits.
- **Tighten Recruitment Regulation**: Curb exploitation through stronger monitoring and accountability of recruitment agencies.
- **Deepen International Cooperation**: Strengthen labour protections through robust bilateral and multilateral agreements.