

## Prelims Exam Topics

### GYAN BHARATAM MISSION

#### Context

The Gyan Bharatam survey has mapped over one crore manuscripts across India.

#### About Gyan Bharatam Mission

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Culture
- **Objective:** National mission to survey, document, and conserve over one crore manuscripts across India.
- **Focus:** Digital preservation, cataloguing, and sharing of India's manuscript heritage.
- **Manuscripts Covered:** Includes palm-leaf, birch bark, and paper manuscripts in Sanskrit, Persian, and regional languages.

#### What is a Manuscript?

- A handwritten composition on materials such as palm leaf, birch bark, cloth, paper, or metal — at least 75 years old and carrying significant historical, scientific, or aesthetic value.
- Unlike printed books or administrative records, manuscripts embody knowledge content spanning philosophy, medicine, astronomy, literature, and the arts.
- Found in hundreds of languages and scripts; a single language may appear in multiple scripts (e.g., Sanskrit in Devanagari, Oriya, and Grantha).
- India's manuscript wealth is estimated at over five million works.

### PRADHAN MANTRI SURAKSHIT MATRITVA ABHIYAN (PMSMA)

#### Context

PMSMA completed 10 years of implementation in 2026.

#### About PMSMA

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, implemented through the National Health Mission (NHM)
- **Objective:** Provide free, high-quality antenatal care to pregnant women for safer pregnancies through early risk detection and timely intervention.
- **Features**
  - **Beneficiary:** Pregnant women in 2nd & 3rd trimesters; priority to high-risk cases and dropouts.

- **Schedule:** 9th of every month at designated government health facilities.
- **Doctor Volunteer System:** Private doctors volunteer on the 9th; recognised via 'IPledgeFor9' Achievers Awards.
- **Service:** Includes clinical examinations, laboratory investigations (blood/urine tests), ultrasonography, medicines, and counselling on nutrition and birth planning.
- **Extended PMSMA Strategy (2022):** Strengthens follow-up care to track high-risk pregnancies until safe delivery, backed by financial incentives for beneficiaries and ASHA workers, and SMS alert systems.
- **Impact & Achievements**
  - Antenatal services provided to over **7.50 crore** pregnant women.
  - **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** declined from **130** (2014–16) to **87 per lakh live births** (2022–24).

#### Convergence with Allied Maternal Health Schemes

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY):** Promotes institutional deliveries; benefited over 11.96 crore women since 2014–15.
- **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK):** Provides free healthcare to pregnant women and newborns; over 18.05 crore beneficiaries.
- **SUMAN, POSHAN Abhiyaan, PMMVY, and LaQshya:** Collectively address nutrition, maternity benefits, and labour room quality.

## INDIA AT BONN CLIMATE TALKS

### Context

India made key interventions at the 64th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SB64) underway in Bonn, Germany

### About UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies

- The UNFCCC operates through two permanent Subsidiary Bodies that meet twice a year to advance technical and procedural work between COPs:
  - **SBI (Subsidiary Body for Implementation):** Oversees implementation of UNFCCC commitments and reviews national communications.
  - **SBSTA (Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice):** Bridges scientific findings and policy, advising the COP on technical matters.

- Their mid-year Bonn session (SB64) prepares **draft decisions** for adoption at the annual COP; outcomes here become negotiable text ahead of COP31.
- **Next COP:** COP31 to be hosted in Antalya, Türkiye (November 2026); Australia presiding over negotiations.

### India's Key Positions

- Called for tackling the **shrinking climate finance pool** and widening **adaptation finance gap**.
- Urged dedicated agenda space for the Paris Agreement provision obliging developed nations to fund developing countries.
- Pressed for dialogue on **unilateral trade measures** (e.g., EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism — CBAM) and their adverse effects on developing nations' climate action, anchored in **Article 3.5** of the UNFCCC Convention.
- Cautioned against making the **Mitigation Work Programme** prescriptive; urged it retain its facilitative character.

### Mitigation Work Programme (MWP) or Sharm el-Sheikh Mitigation Ambition and Implementation Work Programme

- Established at COP26, launched at COP27.
- Aims to urgently scale up global GHG emission reductions to help close the gap between current trajectories and the 1.5°C Paris Agreement goal.
- Operates as a facilitative, non-prescriptive platform and shares solutions, best practices, and investment opportunities without imposing new obligations on nations.
- Mandates at least two global dialogues and investment-focused events annually, covering sectors like circular economy, energy, waste, and transport.

## SAGITTARIUS A\*

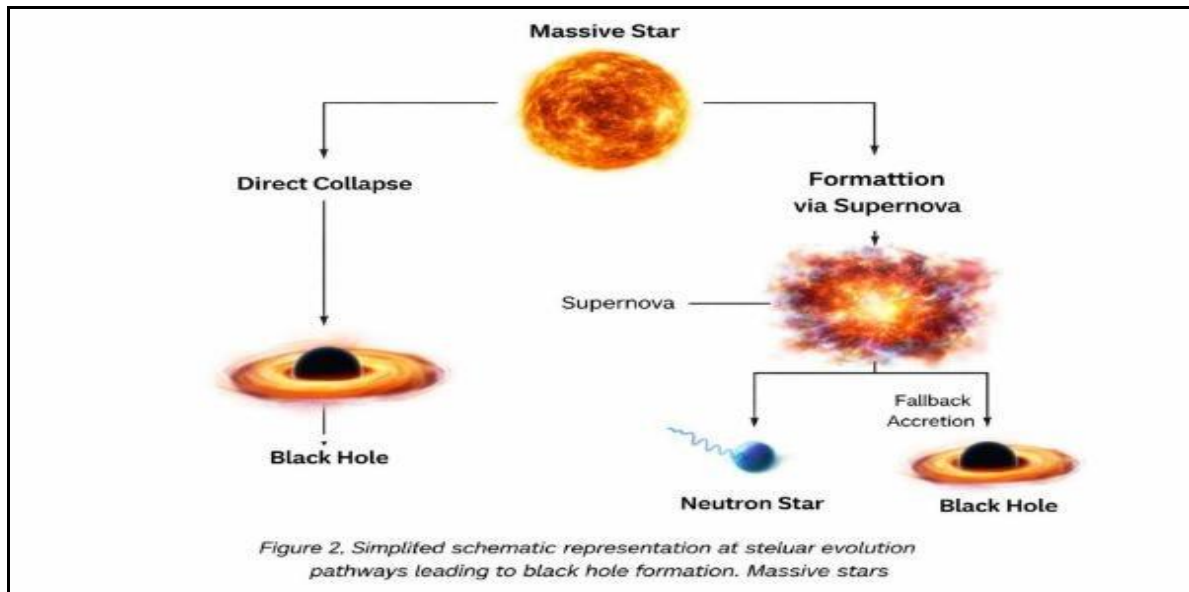
### Context

A new study using the ALMA telescope (Chile) has provided the first definitive evidence of an active wind blowing from Sagittarius A\*

### Key Findings

- **Formation of the Wind:** Gas swirling near the black hole heats into a superhot plasma, just 1g of which can push away 100 kg of surrounding gas, forming the wind.
- **Significance:** The wind regulates star formation, preventing runaway supernovae from stripping the galaxy of gas needed for its long-term evolution.

- **Sagittarius A (Sgr A):** It is the supermassive black hole located exactly at the Galactic Center of the Milky Way.
  - Situated roughly 27,000 light-years from Earth in the direction of the Sagittarius constellation, it is roughly 4.3 million times more massive than our Sun
- **ALMA (Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array):** A high-precision radio telescope array located in the Atacama Desert, Chile, used to observe cold gas, dust, and molecular clouds in space.



## FCNR(B) DEPOSITS

### Context

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a special swap scheme for **Foreign Currency Non-Resident Bank (FCNR(B))** deposits until September 2026, allowing banks to mobilise fresh foreign capital into Indian markets.

### About FCNR(B) Deposits

- Opened in India by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- Maintained in foreign currencies such as the US dollar, pound sterling, euro, Japanese yen, and Canadian dollar
- There is no exposure to Rupee depreciation
- The funds and the Interest earned is exempt from income tax in India as long as the depositor qualifies as a non-resident under Indian tax laws.

### About the Swap Scheme

- Banks can mobilise **3- to 5-year FCNR(B) deposits** and swap them with the RBI at a concessional rate, with RBI absorbing the **hedging** cost (the risk arising from currency value fluctuations)
- Makes FCNR(B) deposits a more attractive overseas funding source for lenders.
- RBI may attract an additional **\$70 billion** in foreign capital through this scheme.

1. **NRE (Non-Resident External)**: Deposit of foreign income converted into rupees; cannot be held in foreign currency.
2. **NRO (Non-Resident Ordinary)**: Rupee-denominated current/savings account; best for NRIs earning income within India (pension, rent). Foreign deposits accepted but converted to rupees.

## ELECTION SYMBOLS

### Context

The image of a cockroach used by the satirical Cockroach Janata Party (CJIP) triggered debate over whether a political party can use a cockroach as its election symbol.

### How Are Election Symbols Allotted?

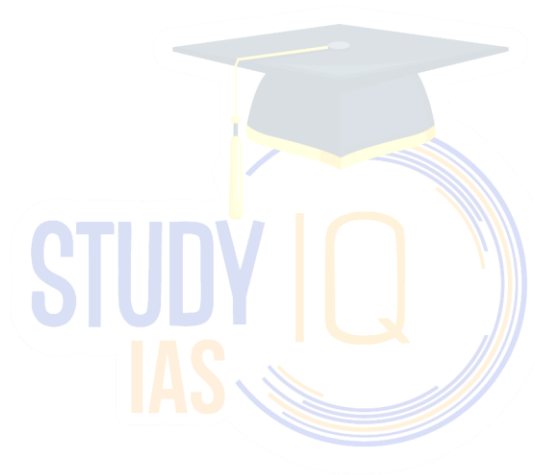
- Governed by the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**.
- **Recognised national and state parties** are allotted reserved symbols by the EC- e.g., lotus for BJP, hand for Congress.
- **Unrecognised registered parties** and **independent candidates** can request a symbol from the EC's list of "**free symbols**", but are not assured of getting their preferred choice.

### What Symbols Are on the Free List?

- The EC maintains a list of free symbols, revised periodically, including fruits, vegetables, household appliances, farm equipment, and sports equipment.
  - The latest list (May 2025) has 184 symbols
- Certain symbols like the **apple** can be allotted freely except in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka where it is reserved for a recognised state party.
- Two different recognised parties in two different states **can share the same election symbol**; there is no rule against it, and they are unlikely to contest against each other.

### Can a Creature Be an Election Symbol?

- Following representations from animal welfare activists in the 1990s, the EC **stopped allotting animals** as election symbols.
- Legacy animal symbols that are still retained include the Elephant (Bahujan Samaj Party - BSP, though barred in Assam) and the Lion (All India Forward Bloc).



## Mains Exam Topics

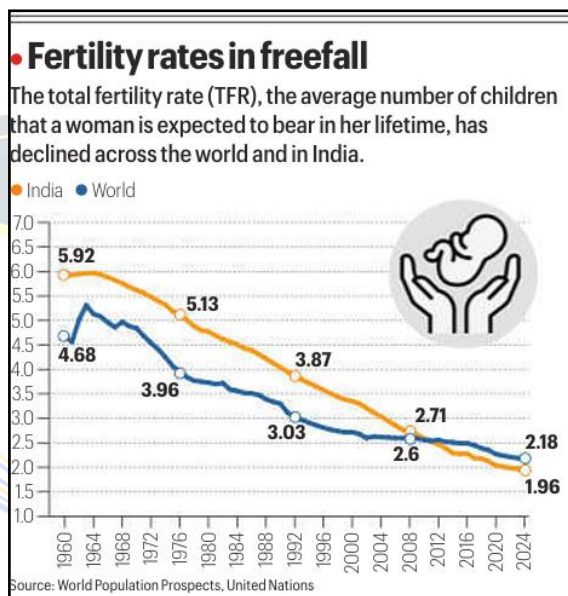
### INDIA'S FERTILITY TRANSITION AND THE ROAD AHEAD

#### Context

India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen to 1.9 in NFHS-6 (2023–24), below the replacement level of 2.1, signalling a significant demographic transition with important economic and social implications.

#### What Does the Global Picture of Falling Fertility Look Like?

- **Sharp Global Decline in Fertility:** According to UN World Population Prospects, the global TFR has collapsed from 4.68 in 1960 to 2.18 in 2024
- **East Asia at the Epicentre of the Fertility Crisis:** driven by urban cost pressures, hyper-competitive education systems, and weak parental support infrastructure.
  - E.g., South Korea's TFR has fallen to 0.72 - the world's lowest.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa as the Demographic Outlier:** Sub-Saharan Africa will increasingly dominate global birth numbers, creating a stark "baby boom vs baby bust" geopolitical divide.
- **Long-Term Global Transition:** According to a Lancet projection, 198 of 204 countries and territories are expected to have below-replacement fertility by 2100, indicating that declining fertility is a **structural global transformation rather than a temporary trend.**



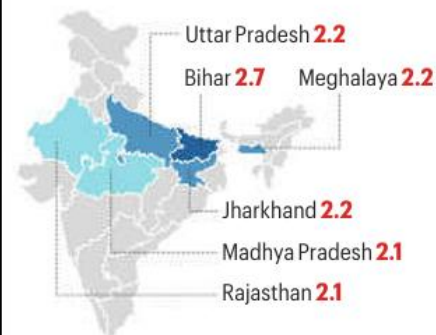
#### Why Are Fertility Rates Declining Across India?

- **Rising Female Education and Workforce Participation:** As women attain higher education and enter formal employment, the opportunity cost of childbearing rises, directly suppressing fertility decisions.
  - E.g., Kerala and Tamil Nadu, with the highest female literacy rates, record TFRs of 1.8 and 1.7 respectively, among the lowest in India.

- **Urbanisation and Rising Cost of Child-Rearing:** Urban housing costs, private schooling fees, and competitive parenting norms make children economically burdensome, reversing the traditional rural calculus of children as economic assets.
- **Expansion of Contraception and Declining Child Mortality:** Modern contraceptive use has expanded significantly across income groups, while falling infant mortality has reduced the incentive to bear additional children as insurance against child death.
- **Decline of the "Old-Age Security" Motive:** As pension coverage expands and financial instruments grow, rural households no longer depend exclusively on children for old-age support, weakening a historically powerful fertility driver.
- **Delayed Marriage:** Women aged 20–24 married before 18 years declined from 23.3% in NFHS-5 to 16.7% in NFHS-6, shortening the effective reproductive window.

● **In most states, fertility below replacement level**

The map shows the only states with TFR at or above 'replacement level' (2.1 children per woman). This is the level needed to maintain a stable population



Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), 2023-24

**What Are the Key Implications of Sub-Replacement Fertility for India?**

- **Regional Demographic Imbalances:** India's fertility decline is not uniform; it creates a widening economic and political fault line between demographically advanced southern states and still-transitioning northern states (UP, Bihar).
- **Narrowing Demographic Dividend:** A declining fertility rate will gradually reduce the growth of the working-age population, limiting India's demographic advantage in the coming decades.
- **Fiscal Stress on Social Security Systems:** A larger elderly population relative to the workforce will increase pressure on pensions, healthcare systems, and social security spending.
  - By 2050, the proportion of elderly persons in India, is expected to increase to 20.8% of the population, ie, around 34.7crore.
- **Delimitation and Federal Tensions:** Future redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on population may disadvantage states that successfully controlled population growth, intensifying North-South political debates.
- **Risk of Adverse Sex Ratios:** In regions where son preference persists, smaller family sizes may encourage sex-selective practices, affecting gender balance.

### What Are the Concerns with Pro-Natalist Policy Interventions?

- **One-Size-Fits-All Incentives Are Counterproductive:** Financial incentives such as Andhra Pradesh's third-child grant ignore that fertility decline has vastly different structural drivers in urban professional households versus poor rural families.
- **Risk of Coercive Undertones:** : Linking fertility norms to welfare benefits or electoral eligibility can disproportionately affect poor, marginalized, and minority communities.
  - *E.g.*, Andhra Pradesh shifted from disqualifying candidates with more than two children (till 2024) to proposing restrictions on those with fewer than two children (2025), highlighting the inconsistency of using electoral laws to influence fertility behaviour.
- **Fertility Cannot Be Legislated Upward:** International experience shows that fertility decline driven by education, urbanization, and women's empowerment is difficult to reverse through cash incentives or regulatory measures alone.

### What Is the Way Forward?

- **Invest in Enabling Conditions, Not Incentives Alone:** Expand affordable childcare infrastructure, paid parental leave for both parents, and flexible work arrangements to reduce the structural cost of childbearing for working women.
  - *E.g.*, Nordic countries sustain relatively higher TFRs (~1.7–1.8) by treating childcare as public infrastructure, not a private burden.
- **Manage the Transition Through Productivity and Internal Migration:** Rather than attempting to reverse fertility decline, India should accelerate skilling and technology adoption to sustain GDP growth with a smaller future workforce, and develop a structured internal migration policy to channel northern labour surpluses to labour-scarce southern states.
- **Prioritise Elderly Care Infrastructure Now:** Invest immediately in geriatric healthcare, portable pension systems, and community care models to prepare for the demographic shift already underway in southern and western India.
  - *E.g.*, Singapore's ElderShield and Japan's Long-Term Care Insurance Act provide scalable models for state-funded elderly support systems.
- **Address Son Preference Proactively:** Strengthen Beti Bachao Beti Padhao with community-level behavioural interventions in high son-preference districts to prevent fertility decline from triggering sex-selective outcomes and reversing gains in the child sex ratio.

## INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS AT A CROSSROADS

### Context

Nepal PM's parliamentary acknowledgement that the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura dispute may involve claims from both sides, coupled with a series of high-level diplomatic engagements during 2025-26, has opened a fresh opportunity to reset India-Nepal relations.

### What Makes India-Nepal Relations Uniquely Important?

- **Civilisational and Cultural Bonds:** India and Nepal are linked by centuries-old cultural, religious, and familial ties, often described as the "*Roti-Beti*" relationship.
  - Shared heritage sites such as Pashupatinath and Lumbini reinforce these connections.
- **Strategic Geographic Importance:** Nepal sits as a buffer state between India and China along India's most sensitive northern frontier, bordering five Indian states, making its internal stability a direct Indian security concern.
- **Strong Economic Interdependence:** India drives over 64% of Nepal's foreign trade and serves as its primary lifeline for energy, food security, and transit access.
- **Open Border:** The 1,700 km open border enables visa-free movement and daily cross-border livelihoods for millions.
- **People-to-People Connectivity:** Approximately 8 lakh Nepali citizens serve in Indian Army Gorkha regiments, a military bond with no parallel in any other bilateral relationship.

### What Are the Key Pillars of Bilateral Cooperation?

- **Energy Partnership:** India has committed to purchasing up to 10,000 MW of Nepali hydropower, transforming Nepal's water resources into a shared prosperity engine.
  - *E.g.*, Projects like Arun-III and Upper Karnali
- **Connectivity Infrastructure:** Significant progress has been made across physical, digital, and energy connectivity, including roads, bridges, cross-border railways, and Integrated Check Posts.
  - *E.g.*, The Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline, India's first cross-border petroleum pipeline, directly supplies fuel to Nepal's heartland.
- **Digital and Financial Integration:** India has extended UPI-based cross-border QR payments to Nepal, deepening daily economic integration far beyond formal trade statistics.
  - *E.g.*, RBI's 2025 reforms permitting Indian banks to lend in INR to Nepalese entities
- **Defence and Disaster Cooperation:** Joint military exercises and India's consistent role as first responder in crises establish India as Nepal's most reliable security partner.

- *E.g.*, Exercise *Surya Kiran* is held annually; India led relief operations during Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquake,

### What Are the Key Challenges Straining the Relationship?

- **Border Dispute:** Conflicting interpretations of historical treaties over Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura, coupled with their political salience in Nepal, continue to hinder bilateral relations.
- **China's Growing footprint:** After the 2015 trade disruption, Nepal joined China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2017.
  - Chinese-funded projects like Pokhara International Airport give China a visible strategic presence inside Nepal, directly challenging India's traditional primacy.
- **Nepal's Political Instability:** Frequent changes in government often lead to shifts in policy priorities, making long-term cooperation and implementation of agreements difficult.
- **Anti-India Nationalism as a Political Tool:** Issues such as the 2015 border disruption and the 2020 map controversy continue to influence public opinion and are occasionally used for domestic political mobilisation.
- **Security Vulnerabilities of the Open Border:** While the open border is a major strength, it also creates challenges related to smuggling, illegal migration, and transnational criminal activities.

### Why Does the Current Diplomatic Phase Present a Unique Opportunity?

- **Emergence of a Pragmatic Leadership:** Nepal's younger, development-oriented leadership appears more focused on economic growth and regional cooperation than historical disputes, creating space for constructive engagement.
- **Renewed High-Level Engagement:** A series of bilateral visits by senior Nepalese leaders during 2025–26 reflects a shared commitment to rebuild trust and deepen cooperation across sectors.
- **A Strategic Opportunity for India:** The current convergence of interests provides India with a valuable opportunity to strengthen ties before Nepal's fluid domestic politics potentially alters the diplomatic environment.

### What Is the Way Forward?

- **Time-Bound Bilateral Border Resolution:** A time-bound bilateral mechanism supported by technical and cartographic expertise should be established to resolve outstanding boundary issues without external involvement.
- **Leverage the Indian Army-Nepal Army Bond:** The long-standing institutional relationship between the Indian and Nepalese armies should be formally activated as a backchannel to facilitate practical boundary management.

- **Fast-Track the Energy Partnership:** Accelerating hydropower projects and electricity trade can create strong economic incentives for stability and long-term partnership.
- **Modernise the 1950 Treaty Framework:** The Treaty of Peace and Friendship should be modernised to reflect contemporary realities, ensuring greater reciprocity, sovereign equality, and mutual benefit.
- **Treat Nepal as a Partner, Not a Protectorate:** India should engage Nepal as an equal strategic partner, strengthening its influence through connectivity, investment, and development cooperation rather than relying on historical advantages alone.

