UPSC DARPAN

शीलं परं भूषणम्

Sheelam param bhushanam · Character is the highest ornament

The motto of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, from Bhartrihari's Shatakatraya

Your one-stop solution for UPSC CSE examination resources.

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Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge.

Quote of the Day

"Taxes are what we pay for civilized society."

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., US Supreme Court, dissent in Compañía General de Tabacos v. Collector (1927)

The Hindu & The Indian Express (Delhi Editions) — 9 October 2026

General Studies · Daily Current Affairs · Concept Matrix · Point-Wise Analysis

Ability · Anonymity · Austerity

Free, and meant for every aspirant — whatever they can or cannot pay.

A Letter from the Editor

Why this magazine exists, and how it is meant to be read

This magazine begins with an admission rather than a promise. The Civil Services Examination is not, in the end, a test of how much you have collected. Our own reading of the last decade's papers is that well over sixty per cent of what this examination actually asks — across the General Studies papers, the essay and the interview — is not a fact you can look up. It is a critical issue: a live public problem with competing interests inside it, on which you are expected to have thought, weighed, and arrived somewhere. The candidate who has memorised a thousand facts and thought about none of them is the candidate who writes four hundred marks and cannot understand why.

That is the whole reason this magazine exists in the form it does. Every story here is turned into a study card that does the thinking work with you and not for you: what happened, which line of the syllabus it sits on, why the examiner keeps returning to this theme, the handful of facts that could actually decide a Prelims option, an analysis broken into named points so the argument can be read from the headings alone, a Mains question in the exam's own phrasing, a model approach to it — and then the question a District Magistrate or a Joint Secretary would actually have to answer on this very issue. That last part is the one most compilations leave out, and it is the one the examination is really testing.

The second reason is simpler and harder. Too many capable candidates fall behind for reasons that have nothing to do with ability. They do not know which sources matter. They cannot reach the good material, or cannot pay for it. They study in Hindi and find that the honest, current, well-organised version of a topic exists only in English. We have seen this, and we do not accept it as the natural order of things. Nothing in UPSC Darpan is behind a payment, and nothing assumes a coaching class. Whatever we read each morning — the newspapers, PIB, PRS, the court's own record, the research journals — is read once, properly, and handed on in full. No aspirant should be left behind because of where they were born, what their family earns, or which language they think in.

The third reason is the one we do not say out loud very often. The kind of officer this examination is supposed to produce was described long ago in Mussoorie, and the description has not improved since: a Karma Yogi, a civil servant whose soul is suffused with the principles of Ability, Anonymity and Austerity. Ability, because good intentions administered incompetently still hurt people. Anonymity, because the officer whose name is in the newspaper every week is usually not the officer whose district is working. Austerity, because the distance between the officer's life and the citizen's life is exactly the distance at which empathy fails. We are not there. But that is the standard this magazine is trying to be worth, and the standard we are asking you to prepare against — not the cut-off.

So read it slowly. Do not try to finish it. Take three cards, understand them to the point where you could argue either side, and write one answer. That is a better morning than reading all twenty-five and remembering none. And when you sit in that room, remember what you are actually being selected for.

— The Editor

UPSC Darpan · 9 October 2026

We want to become the Mussoorie-wala Karma Yogi — a civil servant whose soul is suffused with the principles of Ability, Anonymity and Austerity. And we shall become, my man.

Our Inspiration

Our inspiration, and the reason this initiative exists



Rakesh Verma Sir

Indian Administrative Service, 1981 batch

Every initiative has a person standing behind it who never asked to be named. Ours is Rakesh Verma sir — an IAS officer of the 1981 batch, who spent a career inside the administration and then, after retiring from it, went back to the classroom to teach the next set of officers. What he gave us was not a strategy. It was a way of looking at the work.

WHAT HE TAUGHT US

1. **सेवा परमो धर्मः — service is the highest duty, and it is a duty, not a favour —** He would not let the word 'service' stay decorative. A civil servant does not confer a benefit on a citizen; the citizen is entitled, and the officer is discharging an obligation. Once you accept that, the tone of an office changes — the file moves because someone is waiting on the other side of it, not because a note demanded it.
2. **The Mussoorie-wala Karma Yogi: Ability, Anonymity, Austerity —** Ability, because good intentions administered incompetently still hurt people. Anonymity, because the officer whose name is in the newspaper every week is usually not the officer whose district is working. Austerity, because the distance between the officer's life and the citizen's life is the distance at which empathy fails. He taught these three as one instruction, not three virtues to be picked from.
3. **Begin with the last person, not the average person —** His constant test for any scheme, any circular, any decision: what happens to the person at the end of the line — the one with no documentation, no connection, no way to complain, and no idea the scheme exists. A policy that works for the median citizen and fails the last one has not worked. It has only been measured generously.
4. **Reach the last mile, because the last mile is where the state actually is —** Delivery, he insisted, is not the boring part that follows policy; it is the policy. The budget line means nothing until the money reaches the panchayat, the entitlement means nothing until the beneficiary is on the list, and the list means nothing if the person who was left out has no way back onto it. He made us look at the exclusion errors, not the coverage numbers.
5. **Understand the system before you criticise it —** He had no patience for the easy cynicism aspirants pick up online. Learn how a file actually moves, who signs, where the discretion sits, what the officer on the spot is trading off. Criticism that comes after that understanding is worth something; criticism that replaces it is noise — and it writes a shallow answer, too.
6. **Karma yoga at the desk: do the work, stay with the work —** He taught the Gita's instruction as an administrator's working rule, not as a sermon. You control the effort and the honesty; you do not control the transfer order, the posting, the recognition or the result. An officer who needs the outcome to feel the work was worth it will not last a career. Nor will an aspirant who needs the result to justify the year.
7. **Teach what you know, to whoever cannot pay for it —** The clearest thing he did was the simplest: after a full career, he went back and taught. Not to a selected batch that could afford it — to whoever turned up. That is where this initiative came from. The idea that good preparation material should not be a function of what a family can spend is not our idea; it is his.

> *We are not his equals and this is not his page. It is the receipt for something we were given for free, by a man who spent forty years serving the country and then spent his retirement teaching other people how to do it properly. सेवा परमो धर्मः — and we shall become.*

Quotes of the Day

Carry one into the introduction of an essay — not into every paragraph. Each is quoted from a documented source, so it can be attributed with confidence.

> *"प्रजानामेव भूत्यर्थं स ताभ्यो बलिमग्रहीत् । सहस्रगुणमुत्स्रष्टुमादत्ते हि रसं रविः ॥ — He took tax from his subjects only for their welfare, as the sun draws up water only to return it a thousandfold."*

— Kalidasa · *Raghuvamsha, Canto 1, verse 18 (on King Dilipa)*

Use in: Today's 57th GST Council, which removed officers' power to arrest before prosecution, raised the prosecution threshold from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore and promised 90% of refunds within three working days. Use it in GS3 answers on mobilisation of resources and tax administration, in GS4 answers on the ethics of public finance, and as an opening in essays on trust and the State: taxpayers comply willingly when they can see the return. Balance it: a visible return does not stop fake-invoice rings, which is why four States objected; trust must be paired with data-based detection and certain prosecution.

> *"The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition."*

— Constitution of the World Health Organization · *Preamble (adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 22 July 1946)*

Use in: Today's decision to cap trade margins at 30% of MRP on non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs, after the NPPA found average mark-ups of about 170% and up to 700%, and the Balaghat child deaths where vacant epidemiologist posts and a village without an ASHA for over a year left a fever cluster undetected. Use it in GS2 answers on health as a right, drug-price regulation and primary health care. Note "economic or social condition": price caps address the first barrier, surveillance and village health workers the second. Balance it: price controls must not starve supply or new drug launches, so pair caps with monitoring of availability.

> *"... a humane, participative, informed and transparent process for land acquisition ... with the least disturbance to the owners of the land and other affected families ..."*

— Parliament of India · *Long title, Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013*

Use in: Today's month-long jal satyagraha in Panna against the ₹693-crore Majhgaon dam, which displaces 1,450 families, where protesters allege undervalued houses, wrongful exclusions and bribe demands, and a revenue officer was caught taking ₹47,000. Use it in GS1 and GS2 answers on development-induced displacement, tribal rights and rehabilitation, and in GS4 answers on probity: the law itself sets the standard of a humane process, so the test is delivery, not intent. Its closing words ask that affected persons become "partners in development". Balance it: the dam will irrigate 8,370 hectares in 43 villages, and most landowners have been paid; the remedy is fixing the pending cases fast, not abandoning irrigation.

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Start here — today's top 5

The whole magazine is about a two-hour read. If you are short of time, read these five cards first.

1.1	**Chhattisgarh High Court seeks State's reply on staying 2026 conversion law** ***Why it matters:*** *GS2 rights: Article 25 and Stainislaus for Prelims; free choice of faith versus checks on coercion for Mains.*
2.1	**GST Council drops arrest power, lifts prosecution threshold, speeds refunds** ***Why it matters:*** *GS3 resource mobilisation and GS2 fiscal federalism: Article 279A for Prelims; trust-based tax administration for Mains.*
3.1	**Stubble fires return as water law and procurement squeeze farmers** ***Why it matters:*** *GS3 agriculture and pollution: the 2009 Punjab water law and CAQM for Prelims; policy-made farm fires for Mains.*
4.1	**US suspends six IT firms from PERM labour certification** ***Why it matters:*** *GS2 developed countries' policies: GATS Mode 4 and green-card caps for Prelims; skilled-migration curbs as trade barriers for Mains.*
5.1	**WMO: strong El Niño into 2027, worsening Delhi's winter air** ***Why it matters:*** *GS1 climatology and GS3 pollution: Niño 3.4 and monsoon LPA for Prelims; weather amplifying emissions for Mains.*

> *How to use this magazine — each story is a study card: what happened (The News), the syllabus topic it sits on (Static Linkage), why examiners return to this theme (Trend), the facts that could decide a Prelims option (Prelims Nuggets), a point-wise Analysis, a Mains question in the exam's own phrasing with a Model Approach, and the questions a District Magistrate or Joint Secretary would actually face on it. Every long field is broken into numbered points with its own heading, so the argument reads from the headings alone. Where a story works through a sequence of effects, the whole chain is given in one line before the points explain each link.*

1. Polity & Governance

Both stories put the State between a citizen and a choice. In Chhattisgarh the choice is a faith, and the law asks the convert to announce it and wait for objections. In Punjab the choice was a councillor, and police let rivals' nomination papers be torn so that voters never got to make it.

1.1 Chhattisgarh High Court seeks State's reply on staying the 2026 Freedom of Religion Act

ISSUE THREAD **State anti-conversion laws** (new thread) **LENS** Liberty and order · Tradition and social justice

> *STORY SO FAR* *Several States punish conversion by force, fraud or inducement and require notice before a conversion; the Supreme Court upheld the earliest such laws in 1977. Chhattisgarh's Assembly passed a stricter law in March 2026.*

THE NEWS Raipur, October 8. A Chhattisgarh High Court Bench of Chief Justice Krushna Ram Mohapatra and Justice Santosh Sharma has given the State three weeks to reply on interim relief in a petition challenging the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Act, 2026 and its Rules, The Indian Express reports. Nothing has been stayed yet. Senior advocate S. Muralidhar argued that faith should not depend on State approval or prior notice, yet even voluntary converts must make public disclosures and obtain several clearances. Per the petitioners, priests and pastors facilitating conversions must register, and offences carry at least seven years' imprisonment, extendable to life, and fines up to ₹10 lakh. They seek a stay on the public notice and objections clauses. An earlier challenge was dismissed as premature on April 24, per that order, because the Act was not yet notified.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Supreme Court upholds early conversion laws (1977) → Chhattisgarh passes a stricter Act (March 2026) → first challenge fails as premature → Act and Rules take effect → High Court seeks the State's reply on a stay

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Article 25 protects the right to propagate, and Stainislaus held this is not a right to convert —** Article 25(1) gives all persons freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health. In Rev. Stainislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh (1977), a Constitution Bench read "propagate" as spreading one's faith, not converting another, upholding the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa laws on public-order grounds. 2. **Later judgments place the choice of faith inside privacy and liberty —** K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017), a nine-judge Bench, held privacy a fundamental right under Article 21, including autonomy over intimate choices. In Shafin Jahan v Asokan K.M. (2018), the Hadiya case, the Court held that an adult's choice of faith and partner is her own.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Anti-conversion laws test Article 25 against Article 21 —** GS2 covers "significant provisions and basic structure" of the Constitution, and GS1 asks about "communalism, regionalism and secularism"; this case sits at both.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 25(1) guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health. • In Rev. Stainislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh (1977), the Supreme Court held that the right to propagate religion does not include a right to convert another person. • Article 226 empowers a High Court to issue writs, and grant interim relief, to enforce Fundamental Rights.
ANALYSIS	1. **The real dispute is over the voluntary convert, not the coerced one —** No petitioner defends conversion by force or fraud. The challenge is to what the law asks of an adult who converts willingly: public notice, a wait for objections and official clearance. The State will say notice is the only way to catch inducement in time.

	2. **Lens — Liberty and order: punishing proven coercion is proportionate, screening every convert is not —** Stainislaus rested on public order; a private change of faith rarely threatens it. Punishing proven force or fraud is a narrow, necessary measure. Making every convert announce the decision reaches people who harmed no one and invites the pressure the law claims to prevent. A thoughtful officer would keep the penal clauses and expect the notice regime to fail proportionality. 3. **The interim order may matter more than the final verdict —** Courts rarely stay a statute, and final judgments take years. If the notice clauses operate meanwhile, conversions will be deterred in practice. Seeking a stay only on procedure makes relief easier to grant.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A law against forced conversion must not burden the free choice of faith." Critically examine with reference to the Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Act, 2026. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Critically examine —** Weigh public order against liberty; reach a judgement. 2. **Introduction — propagation is protected, conversion of another is not —** Stainislaus and today's challenge. 3. **Body — the State may punish force, fraud and inducement —** Protecting vulnerable communities. 4. **Body — prior notice and objections burden voluntary converts and fail proportionality —** Value addition: Puttaswamy (2017) and Shafin Jahan (2018). Flowchart: notice, objections, inquiry, prosecution. 5. **Conclusion — keep the penal core, drop prior publicity —** Punish proven coercion; let adults change faith freely.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As District Magistrate, you receive a conversion notice and many objections from local groups. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would confine the inquiry to whether the applicant is an adult acting freely, meeting the person privately. Objections that merely oppose conversion would not be acted on. I would arrange protection against threats and obey any interim order at once.

1.2 Supreme Court's commission report details torn nominations and bogus voting in Punjab civic polls

ISSUE THREAD **Panchayati Raj and local democracy** (update 2) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Centre and States

> *STORY SO FAR The 73rd Amendment, 1992 mandated regular panchayat elections, yet some villages fill seats 'unopposed' for decades as dominant groups decide. On September 28 the Supreme Court set aside 50 Punjab civic wards and ordered fresh polls.*

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 8. The 239-page report of the one-man fact-finding Commission appointed by the Supreme Court, former Punjab and Haryana High Court judge Nirmaljit Kaur, shows how the December 2024 Punjab local body polls were subverted, The Indian Express reports; only the set-aside was known earlier. It found candidates forcibly prevented from filing nominations, illegally detained, and their papers snatched and torn in police presence, besides intimidation and bogus voting. In Patiala it found "chaos, violence, snatching, tearing of nomination papers" on 11.12.2024, after which only Aam Aadmi Party candidates were declared elected unopposed. The State's failure to preserve CCTV footage of the Mini Secretariat was "sheer negligence inviting adverse inference". In Dharamkot (Moga) police ignored High Court directions to escort candidates. It recommended setting aside 50 wards, 28 in Patiala and 22 in Moga; the Court accepted this on September 28.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Civic polls in December 2024 → rivals' nominations blocked and wards returned unopposed → Supreme Court appoints a fact-finding commission → 239-page report finds police connivance and missing CCTV → fresh polls ordered in 50 wards

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The State Election Commission superintends all local-body elections —** Article 243K vests the superintendence, direction and control of electoral rolls and panchayat elections in a State Election Commission appointed by the Governor; Article 243ZA extends this to municipalities. The State Election Commissioner can be removed only in the manner of a High Court judge. 2. **Courts may not question a local election except through an election petition —** Article 243-O, and Article 243ZG for municipalities, says no local election shall be called in question except by an election petition under State law. It mirrors Article 329(b), which N.P. Ponnuswami (1952) read as barring interference with an ongoing election.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Local democracy is tested on the integrity of its elections —** GS2 asks about "devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein"; this report documents one such challenge.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under Article 243K, the State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor and can be removed only like a judge of a High Court. • Article 243ZA extends the State Election Commission's control to elections to municipalities. • Articles 243-O and 243ZG provide that local-body elections can be questioned only by an election petition under State law. • The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 added Part IXA on municipalities to the Constitution.
ANALYSIS	1. **An unopposed win is the hardest rigging to undo —** When a rival never reaches the nomination table, no ballot is cast and nothing is left to recount. An election petition suits disputes over counting, and asks the loser to prove a case against a State that holds the records. That explains why the Supreme Court used its own commission despite the usual bar in Article 243-O. 2. **Lens — Independence and accountability: a protected referee is weak if the State controls the stewards —** The State Election Commissioner enjoys a High Court judge's removal protection, yet the returning officers and police the report faults answer to the State government. A thoughtful officer would add accountability where the damage happened: a duty to preserve nomination-day footage and action against complicit officials. 3. **Missing footage now counts against the State —** Punjab argued that no candidate asked for the CCTV to be preserved. The Commission rejected this, because the State is the custodian of records. This shifts the burden of proof onto the authority that controls the evidence.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Unopposed victories in local-body elections may signal manipulation rather than consensus. Examine the role of the State Election Commission in light of Punjab's 2024 civic polls. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Examine —** Probe the SEC's powers and limits using the report's findings. 2. **Introduction — Article 243K makes the SEC the referee —** About 20 words: SEC mandate and the 50 wards set aside.

	3. **Body — torn nominations produced unopposed wins no petition could cure —** Value addition: the Commission's 'adverse inference' for missing CCTV footage. 4. **Body — the SEC depends on State police and returning officers —** Draw a flowchart: nomination, scrutiny, polling, result, marking where State machinery acts. 5. **Conclusion — an SEC that can command its own staff —** Mandatory footage preservation and security on nomination day.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As State Election Commissioner, how would you conduct the fresh polls in the 50 wards?** ***Approach:*** I would deploy observers from outside the two districts and run nomination filing under continuous CCTV, preserved until results are final. Police from neutral units would escort any candidate seeking protection. Any rejected nomination would need written reasons and a same-day review.

2. Economy

Both stories are about trust in a market that the State cannot fully control. At home, the GST Council has decided that an honest taxpayer should not carry the cost of a suspicious officer, and has traded coercive power for faster refunds and clearer rules. Abroad, Indonesia has decided that its palm oil is better burnt as diesel than sold to India, and India's kitchens will pay for it.

2.1 GST Council removes officers' arrest power, lifts prosecution threshold to ₹5 crore, speeds refunds

ISSUE THREAD **GST revenue and its structure** (update 4) **LENS** Centre and States · Market and State

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *GST rates were cut to two main slabs in September 2025; the 5 October card previewed this meeting's agenda of dropping arrest powers and unlocking blocked credit.*

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 8. The 57th GST Council, meeting after 13 months, recommended removing GST officers' power to arrest before prosecution and raising the prosecution threshold from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore; the general penalty falls from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000, and disputes below ₹10,000 will get no show-cause notice. Goods moving between States can be stopped only by officers of the supplier or destination State, on "specific intelligence". Refunds: 90% sanctioned automatically within three working days (now seven), and accumulated input tax credit (tax paid on inputs) becomes refundable for input services from 1 November 2026 and capital goods from April 2027, through an amendment to Section 54(3) of the CGST Act, IE reports. Most changes apply from 1 April 2027; no rates changed. At least four States objected to dropping arrest but agreed.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

GST launched in 2017 with coercive enforcement → September 2025 cuts rates to 5% and 18% plus a 40% demerit slab → firms left with blocked credit and fear of arrest → Council trades coercion for trust → changes due from April 2027

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Article 279A makes the GST Council a joint body that votes by weight —** The Union Finance Minister chairs it; the Union Minister of State in charge of Revenue or Finance and each State's Finance Minister are members. Its quorum is one-half of members; a decision needs three-fourths of the weighted votes present and voting, the Centre counting one-third and the States two-thirds. In Union of India v. Mohit Minerals (2022) the Supreme Court held its recommendations persuasive, not binding. 2. **Arrest and prosecution powers sit in the CGST Act itself —** Section 69 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 lets a Commissioner authorise arrest for specified offences; Section 132 lists offences, such as fake invoicing, with jail terms graded by the amount evaded. Being statutory, they change only when Parliament and State legislatures amend their Acts.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 "mobilisation of resources" meets GS2 "fiscal federalism" —** States objecting yet agreeing is a ready example of cooperative federalism at work.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 279A, inserted by the Constitution (101st Amendment) Act, 2016, provides for the GST Council. • A GST Council decision needs three-fourths of weighted votes of members present and voting; the Centre has one-third of the votes cast. • Under the CGST Act, 2017, Section 69 deals with arrest, Section 132 with offences and Section 54 with refunds. • An inverted duty structure arises when tax on inputs exceeds tax on the output, leaving unused input tax credit.
ANALYSIS	1. **Removing arrest shifts the burden from the taxpayer to the investigator —** An officer who suspected fraud could arrest first and build the case later; now he must assemble

	a prima facie case and go to court. The objecting States' counter-view: fake-invoice rings vanish fast, so slower prosecution may recover nothing. 2. **Faster refunds matter more to small firms than the rate cuts did —** After the 2025 cuts, inputs often stayed costlier than outputs, so a small manufacturer's own money sat locked as unused credit. Automatic refunds turn a tax concession into working capital, the real constraint on small enterprise. 3. **Lens — Centre and States: States gave up a weapon to complete a single market —** Transit States lose the power to stop trucks. States surrendered power for uniformity, but through a joint body, by consensus, keeping revenue and prosecution. A thoughtful officer would call this cooperative federalism working, if States get shared data to catch fraud.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The 57th GST Council marks a shift from coercion to trust in tax administration." Critically examine, with reference to the role of States. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Critically examine —** Weigh gains against risks, then judge. 2. **Introduction — Council recommended no arrest before prosecution and a ₹5 crore threshold —** Effective April 2027. 3. **Body — trust measures cut compliance cost and free working capital —** Automatic refunds, ₹10,000 notice floor; value-addition: average GST rate 10.84% against 11.4% in 2023. 4. **Body — deterrence against fake invoicing is the real risk —** Four States objected; analytics must replace arrest. Draw: suspicion → evidence → prosecution, replacing suspicion → arrest. 5. **Body — States traded transit checks for a single market —** Article 279A consensus; Mohit Minerals: legislatures must still act. 6. **Conclusion — back trust with analytics and timely legislation —** Amend CGST and SGST Acts together before April 2027.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a State GST Commissioner, how would you check fake-invoice fraud without pre-prosecution arrest?** ***Approach:*** I would use data, not force: match supplier returns with buyer credit claims, verify new registrations issuing large invoices early, and build prosecution files fast with the Central GST wing. Honest taxpayers would see fewer visits.

2.2 Edible-oil prices hit a 3.5-year high as Indonesia's B50 mandate diverts palm oil

ISSUE THREAD **Food prices and import policy** (update 5) **LENS** National interest and global commons · Short-term relief and long-term reform

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *The Centre halved duty on crude palm and soybean oil to 5% and scrapped it on crude sunflower oil. With the monsoon deficient, pulse prices rose and drought threatens rabi sowing.*

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 8. The FAO Food Price Index averaged 136 points in September, its highest since November 2022 (base 2014-16 = 100), and its vegetable-oil index reached 198.6, up 18.3% over September 2025 and the highest since June 2022, IE reports. Three forces drive it. Indonesia raised its biodiesel blending mandate to B50 (50% vegetable-oil biodiesel in diesel) in July 2026, the world's first; GAPKI projects palm oil used for biodiesel rising from 12.7 million tonnes in 2025 to 17.4 mt in 2027 and exports falling from 32.3 mt to 26.5 mt. El Niño will hit palm yields with an 8-12 month lag. War has halted Sea of Azov and Black Sea port traffic, trapping sunflower oil. For India, broker GGN International expects domestic output to fall from 9.7 mt to 9.2 mt in 2026-27 and imports to rise to a record 17.2 mt.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Wars keep Brent above $100, making biodiesel attractive → Indonesia moves from B40 to B50 in July 2026 → less palm oil for export as El Niño threatens yields → India, a large palm buyer, faces costlier imports

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **India has two missions to cut edible-oil import dependence —** The National Mission on Edible Oils – Oil Palm (NMEO-OP), launched in 2021, expands oil palm cultivation, especially in the North-East and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with a price-assurance mechanism for fresh fruit bunches. NMEO-Oilseeds, approved in 2024, targets higher output of mustard, groundnut, soyabean and other primary oilseeds by 2030-31. 2. **FAME is biodiesel made by transesterification —** Vegetable oils react with methanol in the presence of a catalyst to form fatty acid methyl esters (FAME), which can replace or blend with petroleum diesel. A "B" number is the FAME share in diesel; India's petrol equivalent is ethanol blending, now at 20%.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 lists "food security" and "issues of buffer stocks"; GS2 "effect of policies of other countries on India's interests" —** The food-versus-fuel trade-off links climate policy abroad to inflation at home, a cross-cutting theme examiners favour.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The FAO Food Price Index uses 2014-16 as its base period (= 100). • B50 means diesel containing 50% biodiesel (FAME); Indonesia is the first country to mandate it. • FAME is produced by transesterification of vegetable oil with methanol. • NMEO-Oil Palm (2021) promotes oil palm cultivation with focus on the North-East and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
ANALYSIS	1. **Lens — national interest and global commons: one country's climate policy is another's food inflation —** Indonesia blends palm oil into diesel to cut fossil imports, a rational national choice, but it removes oil from the world market just as El Niño and war tighten supply. India, importing about 8 mt of palm oil a year, has no say. The judgement: biofuel mandates need food-security safeguards, which India should press for at FAO and the G20. 2. **Cutting import duty is short-term relief that weakens the long-term fix —** Low duties protect consumers now but depress prices for mustard and groundnut growers, undercutting the oilseed missions. On GGN's figures imports are already about 63% of supply. A stable tariff band with assured oilseed procurement serves both goals better than duty swings. 3. **El Niño hurts India twice in edible oils —** The weather that cuts Indonesian palm yields next year also weakens India's own oilseed crops, so import need rises as import supply shrinks. This is why price spikes in edible oils are sharper than in cereals, where India holds large buffer stocks; there is no comparable edible-oil buffer.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	How do biofuel mandates in producing countries affect India's edible-oil security? Examine. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Examine —** Trace the causal links to India. 2. **Introduction — FAO vegetable-oil index at 198.6, highest since June 2022 —** Name Indonesia's B50 mandate of July 2026. 3. **Body — biodiesel absorbs palm oil and shrinks Indonesian exports —** GAPKI: exports 32.3 mt (2025) to 26.5 mt (2027). Draw: Brent above $100 → B50 → lower exports → India's landed price rises. 4. **Body — India's dependence makes it a price-taker —** Record imports of 17.2 mt projected; NMEO missions are the domestic answer.

	5. **Conclusion — diversify suppliers and stabilise oilseed incentives —** Pair import diversification with steady duty policy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Joint Secretary in the Food Ministry, would you cut edible-oil import duty further to tame prices?** ***Approach:*** Duties are already low, so a further cut gives little relief and hurts oilseed farmers before rabi sowing. I would rather diversify suppliers, for instance towards soyabean oil from the Americas, and target relief to poor households where needed. Any duty change needs a fixed review date so farmers can plan.

3. Agriculture & Food

Stubble fires are not a farmer's whim but the logical output of a system the State itself built: a water law that delayed sowing, a procurement regime that rewards only paddy and wheat, and a satellite count that farmers have learned to dodge. Penalties treat the symptom; the incentive structure is the disease.

3.1 Stubble fires return each October as a water law and assured procurement squeeze farmers

ISSUE THREAD **Delhi-NCR winter air pollution** (update 4) **LENS** Development and environment · Market and State

> *STORY SO FAR* *Haryana raised a 'Parali Protection Force' against farm fires; the Centre and Delhi fixed a permanent winter-curbs calendar from November 1.*

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 9. In The Hindu, economist C.S.C. Sekhar (Institute of Economic Growth) explains why stubble burning recurs. Punjab and Haryana produce about 29 million tonnes of paddy straw. Its shift into winter followed the Punjab Preservation of Sub-Soil Water Act, 2009, which pushed the harvest to late October and left a 10-15 day window before wheat. Between 2012 and 2024 paddy procurement averaged 37% of output nationally but 87% in Punjab and 74% in Haryana. The government told the Lok Sabha that burning incidents fell 90% in 2025 against 2022, but that count rests on polar satellites passing only between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm; a multi-satellite estimate put the fall near 30%, and an ISRO-led study found farmers shifting to evening burning.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Combine harvesters, from the late 1970s, leave a foot of stubble → 2009 water law delays transplanting → harvest moves to late October, squeezing the gap before wheat → assured procurement keeps farmers in paddy → fires peak in Delhi's worst air season

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The Punjab Preservation of Sub-Soil Water Act, 2009 fixed paddy dates by law —** It bars paddy nursery sowing before May 10 and transplanting before a notified date (June 10), to align paddy with the monsoon. Officials may destroy violating crops and levy ₹10,000 per hectare for every month of contravention. 2. **The CAQM Act, 2021 created a statutory air-quality body for the NCR —** The Commission replaced the Supreme Court-mandated Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority and covers Delhi-NCR and adjoining parts of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The Act exempts farmers burning stubble from its penal clause and instead lets the Commission levy environmental compensation on them.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 links "major crops-cropping patterns" and "minimum support prices" with "environmental pollution" —** It is the textbook case of farm-price policy producing an environmental cost.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Punjab Preservation of Sub-Soil Water Act, 2009 prohibits paddy transplanting before June 10. • The CAQM, a statutory body under the 2021 Act, replaced the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority for the NCR. • CREAMS, the stubble-fire monitoring protocol, relies on the polar-orbiting MODIS and VIIRS satellite sensors. • Ex-situ residue management uses paddy straw off the field, for example as feedstock for compressed biogas or bio-ethanol.
ANALYSIS	1. **A groundwater law solved one crisis by worsening another —** Delaying transplanting was sound: Punjab's water table fell 0.36 metres a year in 1999-2009. But the harvest moved without widening the gap before wheat, and the 150-160 day PUSA-44 variety

	narrowed it further, so fire became the cheapest way to clear a field. Fixing one resource in isolation moved the damage from aquifers to lungs. 2. **Lens — Market and State: procurement sends a stronger signal than any penalty —** Where the State buys 87% of the paddy at a known price and pump power is free, paddy is the rational choice whatever the water table. Penalties, and the NGT's 2018 view, echoed by the Supreme Court in 2023, that burners could lose MSP, fight that signal; Haryana's ₹7,000-an-acre diversification payment works with it. A thoughtful officer would extend assured procurement to alternative crops rather than add fines. 3. **A falling count may mean better hiding, not fewer fires —** When enforcement relies on a midday satellite, farmers burn in the evening, so recorded fires fall while smoke does not. Sekhar warns penal pressure tempts farmers and officials to collude in 'showing' reduction. Combining geostationary and polar data is the precondition for judging any policy.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Stubble burning is less a farmer's choice than a product of public policy." Critically examine with reference to Punjab and Haryana. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Critically examine —** Weigh policy against farmer agency, then judge. 2. **Introduction — 29 million tonnes of straw, a 10-15 day window —** Link timing to Delhi's winter air. 3. **Body — the 2009 water law and long-duration varieties squeezed the window —** Draw a timeline: June 10 transplanting → late-October harvest → early-November wheat sowing. 4. **Body — procurement and free power lock farmers into paddy —** Value-addition: paddy procurement 87% in Punjab against 37% nationally, 2012-24. 5. **Conclusion — pay for diversification and measure honestly —** Price straw for ex-situ use, as a Parliamentary Committee urged; use multi-satellite data.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Deputy Commissioner of a Punjab district, recorded fires are down but the air is not better. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would check, with geostationary data and field reports, whether burning has moved to the evening. I would offer residue machines through custom-hiring centres with fixed booking slots and link biogas plants to collect bales. Penalties would stay for repeat offenders, but my measure would be cleaner air, not a lower fire count.

4. International Relations

Both stories show India's people abroad paying for decisions India does not make. Washington has shut Indian IT firms out of the first step to a green card, and a war India has no part in now reaches the airports used by 2.74 million Indians in Saudi Arabia. India's tools in both are the same and limited: quiet diplomacy, diversification and plans to protect its citizens.

4.1 US suspends Cognizant, Infosys, Tata, Wipro, HCL and Capgemini from PERM labour certification

ISSUE THREAD **US work visas and Indian IT** (new thread) **LENS** National interest and global commons · Strategic autonomy and partnership

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *Indian professionals reach the US mainly on H-1B visas and then seek employer-sponsored green cards. In September the US suspended Cognizant from the labour-certification step without stating reasons.*

THE NEWS Washington. US Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling announced on October 8 that "some of the largest IT outsourcing firms in the world — Cognizant, Infosys, Tata, Wipro, HCL and Capgemini" are suspended from the Permanent Labor Certification Program (PERM), The Indian Express and The Hindu (Reuters) report; the official notice is not reproduced. Microsoft and Adobe are also suspended. PERM is the first step of an employment-based green card: the employer, after a prevailing-wage determination and a recruitment test, must show the Labor Department that hiring a foreign worker permanently will not hurt US workers. "We will not accept any new or process any pending" applications, Mr. Sonderling said, citing fraud; he claimed these firms got over 2.3 lakh H-1B approvals and over one lakh labour certifications since 2009. Without a PERM filing, a worker gets no "priority date", a place in the green-card queue.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Curbs on foreign workers become central US policy → scrutiny of H-1B use by outsourcing firms → Cognizant suspended from PERM in September → six IT firms, Microsoft and Adobe suspended on October 8 → Indian workers cannot enter an already long green-card queue

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **H-1B is temporary; the green card is permanent, and the queue is capped by country —** The H-1B is a non-immigrant visa for specialty occupations, granted for three years and extendable to six, with an annual cap of 85,000. A green card gives permanent residence; employment-based cards usually need PERM, then an immigrant petition. US law limits any one country to 7% of employment- and family-based green cards a year, which creates India's backlog. 2. **GATS Mode 4 covers temporary, not permanent, movement of workers —** The WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services defines four modes of supply; Mode 4 is the temporary presence of natural persons, such as an engineer posted abroad. Its Annex on Movement of Natural Persons excludes measures on citizenship, residence or permanent employment. Green cards therefore lie outside India's WTO claims.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Migration rules are a GS2 test of developed-country policy —** The syllabus names the "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests" and the "Indian diaspora". Visa curbs touch both.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Mode 4 of the GATS refers to the temporary presence of natural persons to supply a service in another member's territory. • PERM labour certification is administered by the US Department of Labor, not by the immigration service. • US law limits nationals of any one country to 7% of preference green cards issued in a year.
ANALYSIS	1. **The blow falls on tomorrow's workers, not today's —** Workers with approved petitions can still extend their H-1B for up to three years at a time. Those whose PERM was not filed cannot get a priority date, and H-1B holders near the six-year limit can

	extend only if certification was filed early. Firms may simply shift work to India, defeating the policy's aim. 2. **India has no legal remedy, only bargaining —** Because permanent residence falls outside GATS, India cannot take this to the WTO. Framing it as anti-fraud enforcement, with Microsoft and Adobe also named, makes it hard to contest without case facts. India's leverage lies in trade talks, where mobility can be traded against market access. 3. **Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: protest the method, keep the partnership —** Retaliation would hurt Indian firms that depend on the US market. A sensible line seeks the specific allegations and due process for each firm, while firms hire locally and diversify markets, so one policy does not define the relationship.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Restrictions on skilled migration in developed countries can hurt India as much as tariffs. Examine with reference to recent US action against Indian IT firms. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Examine —** Weigh evidence on both sides, then judge. 2. **Introduction — the PERM suspension of six IT firms —** Explain PERM as the first green-card step. 3. **Body — mobility is India's comparative advantage, so curbs act like tariffs —** Value addition: Sonderling's figure of over 2.3 lakh H-1B approvals since 2009; draw the H-1B → PERM → priority date → green card path, marking the block. 4. **Body — but offshoring softens it, and Mode 4 excludes permanent migration, so diplomacy is the only route —** Delivery from India keeps earnings; link to trade talks. 5. **Conclusion — negotiate mobility, diversify markets —** Write mobility into trade deals and widen beyond the US.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. An interview board asks: should India retaliate against the US suspension of Indian IT firms?** ***Approach:*** No. Retaliation would hurt Indian firms and workers more than the US. India should seek the allegations, insist on due process and press for mobility in trade talks, while firms localise hiring.

4.2 Pakistan confirms troops in Saudi Arabia as Houthis strike Riyadh and Abha airports; India issues advisory

ISSUE THREAD **West Asia war: Iran, Saudi, Houthis** (update 9) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · National interest and global commons

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *The war that began with US–Israeli strikes on Iran in February has spread to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. On October 5 Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye agreed to deploy forces in Saudi Arabia under their August defence pact.*

THE NEWS Riyadh. Pakistan has confirmed its forces are in Saudi Arabia. "We, the forces of Pakistan, are already there," military spokesman Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry told CNN, calling the role "defensive in nature" and the numbers classified, PTI reports; The New York Times reported Pakistan Air Force strikes on the Houthis in Yemen. Türkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the Makkah pact, under which an attack on one is an attack on all, does not authorise attacks on other countries. Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority said Houthi strikes killed two and wounded 28 at Abha airport and killed one at Riyadh's King Khalid airport. India's Ministry of External Affairs called targeting civilian infrastructure "completely unacceptable", and the embassy advised the about 2.74 million Indians there to stay alert. Air India cancelled Riyadh flights until October 10, The Hindu reports.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

US–Israeli strikes on Iran in February → the 2022 Yemen truce collapses in July and the Houthis hit Saudi targets → Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye activate the Makkah pact → Pakistani forces confirmed in Saudi Arabia as Houthis strike airports → India condemns and issues its third advisory since March

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The Strategic Partnership Council anchors India–Saudi ties —** India and Saudi Arabia signed the agreement creating a Strategic Partnership Council in October 2019, during the Prime Minister's visit to Riyadh. Since April 2025 it has four ministerial committees: political-security, defence, economy-energy-investment, and tourism-culture. Saudi Arabia is a top crude supplier and home to one of the largest Indian communities abroad. 2. **India has standing tools to protect citizens in war zones —** The Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra runs helplines for Indians abroad, and the Indian Community Welfare Fund finances emergency help and repatriation. In 2015 Operation Raahat evacuated Indians from war-torn Yemen.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Diaspora safety is a recurring GS2 theme —** The syllabus links "Indian diaspora" with the "effect of policies and politics of other countries on India's interests". Gulf wars test both.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Bab el-Mandeb Strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. • Operation Raahat (2015) evacuated Indian nationals from Yemen. • The India–Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council was established in 2019. • The Indian Community Welfare Fund, set up in 2009, lets Indian missions fund emergency help and repatriation for distressed nationals.
ANALYSIS	1. **Pakistan's careful words show a pact limited by Iran —** Calling the role defensive and keeping numbers secret lets Islamabad honour Riyadh without openly fighting Tehran's ally. The Express editorial notes offensive support would cross Tehran's red lines. The pact gives Saudi Arabia political backing, not deterrence, and Türkiye's caveat narrows it further. 2. **India's statement is deliberately narrow —** It condemns attacks on civilian infrastructure and backs Saudi Arabia, but names neither Iran nor Pakistan. This keeps India's ties with Riyadh and Tehran intact while keeping attention on its citizens. It is the third such statement since March, a sign that India now treats Gulf advisories as routine crisis management. 3. **Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: India's stake is people, not alliances —** Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia may deepen Islamabad's ties with Riyadh, but India cannot match that militarily and need not. With Hormuz restricted, the Red Sea route through Bab el-Mandeb, carrying 12% of global maritime trade per the Express, matters more for India's energy. A thoughtful officer would deepen economic ties, protect sea lanes and keep evacuation plans ready.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Pakistan's military presence in Saudi Arabia matters less to India than the safety of its diaspora there. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Comment —** Give a reasoned view with evidence. 2. **Introduction — Pakistan's confirmation and the airport strikes —** One line each. 3. **Body — the pact is defensive and Iran-constrained, so the strategic risk is limited —** Cite Fidan and Chaudhry. 4. **Body — 2.74 million Indians and air links are the real exposure —** Value addition: Operation Raahat; draw a map of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and Riyadh.

	5. **Conclusion — economic depth plus evacuation readiness —** Use the Strategic Partnership Council.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are India's Ambassador in Riyadh as airport attacks continue. What are your first steps?** ***Approach:*** I would update the registration database of Indians, especially in Riyadh and the south near Abha. I would keep the helpline staffed, coordinate with Saudi authorities and airlines on safe routes, and pre-position evacuation plans with the Ministry of External Affairs.

5. Environment & Ecology

A warm patch of the Pacific is now writing India's winter. The El Niño that dried the monsoon will, the WMO says, last into 2027, and its next bill arrives as stagnant air over Delhi and thin moisture for rabi. Climate here is not a distant trend but this season's planning variable.

5.1 WMO says a strong El Niño will last into 2027, worsening Delhi's winter air outlook

ISSUE THREAD **El Niño, heat and water** (update 4) **LENS** Development and environment · Short-term relief and long-term reform

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *A strengthening El Niño left the monsoon deficient and pushed peak power demand to a record 269 GW in September. Reservoirs ended the season at 70% of capacity, below the ten-year average.*

THE NEWS Bengaluru, October 8. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said El Niño will peak in October-December, extending into spring 2027. Secretary-General Celeste Saulo put the likelihood of it persisting through February 2027 at "near-100 per cent", calling it "potentially one of the strongest since at least 1950". Sea temperature in the Niño 3.4 region of the central Pacific was 2.5°C above normal in August, IE reports. El Niño, the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation, usually weakens Indian rainfall. India's monsoon ended with a 12.6% deficit, 759.4 mm against a long period average of 868.6 mm, per IMD data as reported, the driest in 11 years. In an IE op-ed, SAFAR's founder Gufran Beig warns that a "Super El Niño" will weaken winds and suppress western disturbances over north India, trapping pollution just as stubble fires and Diwali crackers peak in early November.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Central Pacific warms over 0.5°C above normal → monsoon falls 12.6% short → El Niño persists into 2027 → calm, dry north Indian winter → pollution trapped over Delhi as farm fires and crackers peak

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **El Niño is the warm phase of ENSO, tracked in the Niño 3.4 region —** ENSO is an equatorial Pacific ocean-atmosphere cycle with three phases: warm (El Niño), neutral and cool (La Niña), recurring every two to seven years. An El Niño is declared when sea-surface temperature in the Niño 3.4 region stays at least 0.5°C above normal over several consecutive months. A positive Indian Ocean Dipole can partly offset its effect on Indian rainfall. 2. **IMD grades the monsoon against the long period average —** The long period average (LPA) for the June–September season is about 87 cm, based on 1971–2020. Rainfall below 90% of LPA is "deficient", 90–95% "below normal", 96–104% "normal", 105–110% "above normal" and above 110% "excess".
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS1 "important geophysical phenomena" meets GS3 "environmental pollution" —** ENSO is a perennial Prelims topic; its link to winter air is a cross-paper Mains connection.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Niño 3.4 region in the central equatorial Pacific is the standard index area for declaring El Niño and La Niña. • IMD terms seasonal monsoon rainfall below 90% of the long period average "deficient". • The monsoon long period average is about 87 cm, computed over 1971–2020. • SAFAR is the air-quality forecasting system of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
ANALYSIS	1. **Weather can make the same emissions far more dangerous —** El Niño adds no smoke, but calm winds and a low inversion layer, the lid of warm air that stops pollutants rising, keep it near the ground, and without western disturbances no rain washes it out. Identical emissions thus produce worse air. Targets that ignore meteorology will be missed and wrongly blamed on enforcement. 2. **Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: emergency curbs are not a plan —**

	Emergency bans on construction and vehicles buy days of relief and are politically easy. Beig argues for airshed management, treating the whole Indo-Gangetic region as one unit, and notes that NCAP still rewards cities for cutting PM10, which over-weights dust. The sound judgement is to keep emergency curbs but fund regional, PM2.5-based action that outlasts one El Niño. 3. **The drought's cost runs into rabi and power —** Low soil moisture and reservoirs weaken rabi sowing, and a warm winter can stress wheat at grain filling; heat and weak hydro output already pushed power demand to records. One shock, three bills: food, energy and air.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Explain how a strong El Niño can worsen winter air quality in north India. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Explain —** Set out the mechanism step by step. 2. **Introduction — WMO expects El Niño to last into 2027 —** Note the 12.6% monsoon deficit. 3. **Body — weaker winds and a lower inversion layer trap pollutants —** Draw a box diagram: warm Pacific → calm, dry north India → shallow mixing layer → PM2.5 builds. 4. **Body — absent western disturbances remove the natural rain wash —** Value-addition: November 5-10 has historically been Delhi's worst window, Beig notes. 5. **Conclusion — move to airshed-based, PM2.5-focused management —** Cite NARFI under the Principal Scientific Adviser.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Chief Secretary of Delhi, how would you prepare for a winter the forecasters say will be unusually stagnant?** ***Approach:*** I would trigger graded curbs on forecasts of stagnant days, not wait for the index to cross thresholds. I would ask CAQM to coordinate with Punjab and Haryana on evening fire detection using geostationary data. Hospitals would be told to plan for respiratory surges in early November. Public messaging would explain why this winter is worse, so curbs are not seen as arbitrary.

6. Health & Life Sciences

Both stories show the health system failing at a link the patient never sees. In cancer drugs it is the distribution chain, where mark-ups of about 170% sit between factory and MRP. In Balaghat it is district surveillance, where vacant posts and an absent ASHA let treatable illnesses kill tribal children. The remedy in both is ordinary administration done properly.

6.1 Centre to cap trade margins at 30% on non-scheduled cancer drugs after NPPA finds 170% mark-ups

ISSUE THREAD **Cancer drug affordability** (update 4) **LENS** Market and State · Growth and equity

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *The Supreme Court called a tenfold cancer-drug mark-up "broad daylight dacoity", and the Kerala High Court allowed government use of patents for costly cancer drugs.*

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Union government will cap trade margins at 30% of the maximum retail price (MRP) on non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs, The Hindu and The Indian Express report. A trade margin is the gap between the price a distributor pays the manufacturer and the MRP the patient pays. The Express counts 110 drugs, 35 patented; The Hindu says "all" such drugs, the list to be finalised by a committee under the Directorate General of Health Services. Branded and generic, domestic and imported, patented and non-patented medicines are covered. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) found average trade mark-ups of about 170%, up to 700% in some cases. The Express adds that it may take effect within about 10 days, cutting some prices by up to 70%.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Costly cancer drugs escape ceiling prices → the chain adds mark-ups averaging 170% → the Supreme Court calls a ₹27,000 MRP on a ₹2,700 drug "carnage" → NPPA data quantifies the gap → the Centre caps margins at 30%

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The DPCO, 2013 fixes prices only for scheduled drugs —** The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Medicines in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are scheduled, and the NPPA fixes a ceiling price for them. For all other, non-scheduled drugs the company sets the price and may raise the MRP by no more than 10% a year. 2. **The NPPA can also cap trade margins —** The NPPA, set up in 1997, enforces the DPCO under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers. A margin cap leaves the factory price free and limits what the chain adds. Its 2019 cap of 30% on 42 cancer drugs used the DPCO's power to act in extraordinary circumstances (Down To Earth); MRPs fell by up to 91% (Express).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Medicine prices are the core of the GS2 health line —** The syllabus asks about "Social Sector/Services relating to Health". Out-of-pocket spending on drugs is its sharpest example.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and enforced by the NPPA. • Scheduled formulations under the DPCO are the medicines in the National List of Essential Medicines. • A manufacturer may raise the MRP of a non-scheduled formulation by at most 10% a year.
ANALYSIS	1. **The cap hits the chain, not the inventor — its strength and its gap —** Because the manufacturer's price to the distributor is untouched, patented launches are not discouraged. Officials chose only expensive drugs, since 30% on a cheap drug would not cover marketing costs. The gap: a firm can raise its price to the distributor and keep the old MRP, so the NPPA must watch factory prices too.

	2. **Price caps treat the symptom; marketing creates the mark-up —** Margins are large because the doctor, not the patient, picks the brand. On October 8 a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, on a PIL by medical representatives' unions, directed the Centre to form a committee within two weeks on a statutory regime against unethical marketing, as the voluntary 2015 code is ineffective. Without that law, squeezed margins may return as incentives. 3. **Lens — Market and State: a cancer patient cannot shop, so the State sets the boundary —** The NPPA found sharp price gaps between retail outlets, hospitals and online pharmacies — the mark of a captive buyer. Intervention is justified, but heavy controls can delay launches. A sensible officer caps the chain and watches stock-outs first.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Trade margin rationalisation is a lighter touch than price control. Examine its potential to make cancer medicines affordable in India. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Examine —** Probe how the cap works and can be evaded, then judge. 2. **Introduction — the 170% finding and the 30% cap —** Define trade margin in one line. 3. **Body — it targets the captive buyer without touching the inventor —** Value addition: the 2019 cap cut MRPs by up to 91%. Draw factory → distributor → hospital or retailer → patient, marking the 30% cap. 4. **Body — higher factory prices and stock-outs are the evasion risk —** Monitoring must accompany the cap. 5. **Body — marketing reform must follow —** Cite the Supreme Court's October 8 committee order. 6. **Conclusion — a cap is a first step —** Pair it with enforceable marketing law and generic supply.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a State Drugs Controller. Hospital pharmacies now call the capped drugs "out of stock". What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would verify through test purchases and stock registers, since false stock-outs push patients to costlier substitutes. Withheld stock or overcharging goes to the NPPA for recovery. I would display the capped MRPs and a helpline at every hospital pharmacy.

6.2 Balaghat child deaths: Centre's outbreak team finds no district lab, vacant epidemiologist post, absent ASHA

ISSUE THREAD **Tribal child health and disease surveillance** (new thread) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Growth and equity

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *Since June, tribal children in Baiga-dominated villages of Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district have died after fever, rashes and ulcers; in August the State put deaths at eight.*

THE NEWS Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh. An investigation by the Centre's National Joint Outbreak Response Team (NJORT) into the deaths of about 32 tribal children since June found a health system weakened "at almost every stage", The Indian Express reports. The district surveillance unit was run by a data manager; the District Epidemiologist and microbiologist posts were vacant; there was no District Public Health Laboratory; and Kundekasa, the worst-hit village, had no ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist, the village health worker) for over a year. The children, aged one to 13, had fever, rashes and ulcers. The team found a "mixed febrile illness cluster" — measles in 25 of 64 samples, malaria in 27 of 32, a few dengue, chikungunya and enterovirus cases — with no single cause established. The district health officer says about 12 died, with 32 cases earmarked for compensation.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Remote Baiga villages with poor nutrition and incomplete vaccination → no ASHA, epidemiologist or laboratory → measles and malaria spread unrecognised from June → children die at home or after visiting traditional healers → a central team reports in September; the deaths become a political crisis

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **IDSP is India's outbreak early-warning system —** The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, launched in 2004, is run by the National Centre for Disease Control. Each district surveillance unit, led by an epidemiologist and linked to laboratories, should spot unusual clusters and investigate them. Reports flow through the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP). 2. **The ASHA is the village's first link to the system —** ASHAs were created under the National Rural Health Mission in 2005, at one per about 1,000 people, relaxed in tribal and hilly areas to one per habitation. Paid by incentives, she tracks immunisation and sick children and escorts them to facilities.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Tribal health tests the GS2 line on vulnerable sections —** The syllabus asks about "welfare schemes for vulnerable sections". Balaghat joins a PVTG, malnutrition and surveillance gaps.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (2004) is implemented by the National Centre for Disease Control. • ASHAs were introduced under the National Rural Health Mission in 2005. • The Baiga of Madhya Pradesh are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group. • Severe acute malnutrition means weight-for-height below minus three standard deviations of the WHO median, or mid-upper arm circumference below 115 mm.
ANALYSIS	1. **A broken chain, not a mystery disease —** Surveillance is a relay: the ASHA notices, the district unit sees a cluster, the laboratory names the cause, the response follows. In Balaghat nearly every runner was missing. A measles-malaria mix is exactly where a laboratory matters, because each needs a different response. 2. **Malnutrition turned fevers into deaths, and the dashboard hid it —** The team counted 604 severely and 1,985 moderately acutely malnourished children in 357 anganwadis of Birsa block, yet only 30-35% were on the Poshan Tracker, whose figures differed from field measurements. A district can look healthy on screen while its children waste. 3. **Lens — Independence and accountability: blame vacancies, not families —** Two families ignored an ASHA's advice, and one blamed "Maata", so blaming belief is tempting. But trust cannot be expected from a system absent for a year. A thoughtful officer publishes a deadline for filling every vacant post.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The Balaghat child deaths reflect a failure of disease surveillance more than a failure of medicine. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Comment —** Give a reasoned opinion with evidence, in a narrow frame. 2. **Introduction — 32 deaths and the NJORT findings —** Two lines on the mixed febrile cluster. 3. **Body — every IDSP link was missing —** Value addition: no district lab, vacant epidemiologist, no ASHA for a year. Draw ASHA → district unit → lab → response, crossing out broken links. 4. **Body — malnutrition and bad records multiplied the toll —** Cite 604 SAM children and 30-35% tracker coverage.

	5. Conclusion — staff the district first — Filled posts come before dashboards.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the new Collector of Balaghat. What do you do in the first 30 days?** ***Approach:*** I would order a house-to-house fever and nutrition survey, borrowing ASHAs from nearby villages, and arrange sample transport to a working laboratory. I would run a measles catch-up drive and treat every severely malnourished child. I would enlist Baiga elders and traditional healers to refer sick children early.

7. Science & Technology

India has regulated AI through platform-rule amendments and advisories while saying it needed no AI law. On October 8 that changed. The real test is whether the new framework is written as law, with clear definitions and appeals, or keeps living in advisories a ministry can widen overnight.

7.1 MeitY Asks Platforms to Curb Manipulated Content as Vaishnaw Promises an AI Regulation Paper

ISSUE THREAD **Deepfakes and AI regulation** (new thread) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Liberty and order

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *Deepfakes were handled by amending the IT Rules, 2021, and the government long said existing laws were enough for AI.*

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on Thursday, October 8, issued an advisory urging social media platforms to curb "manipulated or out-of-context content", beyond the AI deepfakes already liable to takedown under earlier amendments to the IT Rules, 2021, The Hindu reports. Such content, it said, can "cause public confusion… disturb public order". It precedes the Cockroach Janta Party's October 10 protest in Delhi. The same day, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said a consultation paper on AI regulation would come within a month, centred on safety, deepfakes (a "nuisance"), a human-first approach and skilling. AI cannot be regulated "by law alone", he said; India needs a "techno-legal solution", legal duties backed by tools such as labels and detection.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Generative AI makes realistic fakes cheap → IT Rules amended to require labels and fast takedown → MeitY widens the net by advisory before a protest → an AI regulation paper is promised

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Section 79 safe harbour depends on due diligence —** Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 shields an intermediary from liability for users' content if it follows due diligence, and Section 79(3)(b) removes the shield if it ignores "actual knowledge" of unlawful content. The IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 define that due diligence; Rule 3(1)(b) requires reasonable efforts to stop users sharing listed unlawful or false content. 2. **Shreya Singhal (2015) limits takedown —** The Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act as vague and read down Section 79(3)(b): "actual knowledge" means a court order or government notification, not a private complaint. It upheld Section 69A, the Centre's blocking power, which needs recorded reasons.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 links IT with security threats through social media —** The syllabus names "awareness in the fields of IT" and the "role of media and social networking sites" in internal security.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 gives intermediaries "safe harbour" from liability for third-party content, subject to due diligence. • In Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015), the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act and upheld Section 69A. • Amendments to the IT Rules, 2021 notified in February 2026 define "synthetically generated information" and require it to be labelled. • Article 19(2) includes public order among grounds for restricting speech; misinformation is not a listed ground.
ANALYSIS	1. **"Out-of-context" content is harder to police than a deepfake —** A deepfake is a fabricated file, so it can be defined, labelled and detected. A real video with a false caption is not; its harm lies in the claim attached. Judging context makes platforms arbiters of truth, so this advisory will be applied unevenly.

	2. **Lens — Innovation and safeguards: fight fakes through law, not advisories —** The harm is real: a fake released before a tense protest can spark violence. But an advisory issued on the eve of an opposition-linked protest invites the charge that "public order" is cover for limiting political speech; the Bombay High Court struck down the government fact-check unit in 2024 on such worries. A thoughtful officer would write narrow definitions, reasoned orders and an appeal into the new framework. 3. **Placing the burden on industry has a price —** The Minister said "the bulk of the responsibility" lies with industry. Big platforms can afford detection and provenance tools; Indian start-ups may not, so heavy compliance favours incumbents. Duties should scale with risk and size, as in the EU AI Act.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine whether India's intermediary-rules approach can deal with deepfakes, or whether a dedicated AI law is needed. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Examine —** Test both routes, then conclude. 2. **Introduction — the October 8 advisory and promised AI paper mark a shift towards law —** Define a deepfake. 3. **Body — the IT Rules give speed through labels and takedown, but are delegated legislation —** Value addition: Shreya Singhal (2015) on "actual knowledge". 4. **Body — advisories on vague categories like "out-of-context" risk chilling political speech —** Bombay High Court, 2024. 5. **Body — a risk-based law can share duties across the chain —** Diagram: developer → platform → user, marking the duty at each stage (watermark, label, report). 6. **Conclusion — legislate narrowly, with reasoned orders and appeal —** Parliament, not advisories.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a District Magistrate, a deepfake of a communal incident spreads on the eve of a protest. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Verify fast through the cyber cell and post an official clarification on the same platforms. Send a reasoned takedown request through the nodal officer, recording the public-order threat. Avoid a blanket internet shutdown, and preserve evidence to prosecute the source.

8. Society

A dam is built once; resettlement is lived for a generation. In Panna, tribal families stand in water to say the 2013 land law's promise is being lost to delays, wrong valuations and middlemen. The State has raised the package; the failure now is delivery, and delivery is the district's job.

8.1 Panna Tribals Hold Month-Long Jal Satyagraha Over Majhgaon Dam Compensation and Resettlement

ISSUE THREAD **River-linking and displacement** (new thread) **LENS** Growth and equity · Development and environment

> *STORY SO FAR* *The Ken–Betwa link, meant to water drought-prone Bundelkhand, and allied State dams in Chhatarpur and Panna displace mostly tribal villages.*

THE NEWS Panna, Madhya Pradesh. Since September 11, villagers of Ajaygarh sub-division have held a jal satyagraha (standing in water) at Banhari Kalan against the State's Majhgaon Medium Irrigation Project, The Hindu reports. The ₹693-crore dam needs 1,552 hectares in eight villages and displaces 1,450 families from four; it will irrigate 8,370 hectares in 43 villages. Official records show ₹194.86 crore paid to 97.43% of 1,006 landowners and a ₹5 lakh resettlement grant to 1,219 families; 231 are pending over inheritance cases or missing papers. On July 10 the State raised the package to ₹12.5 lakh, matching the Ken–Betwa link. Protesters allege undervalued houses, wrongful exclusions, a February 16, 2024 cut-off date and bribe demands; a revenue officer was caught taking ₹47,000. Collector Usha Parmar admits problems but calls the protest political.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Bundelkhand's chronic drought → Ken–Betwa link and State dams in Chhatarpur and Panna → acquisition from 2018, paid in instalments → package raised to ₹12.5 lakh after July protests → exclusions, low valuations and bribes push villagers back into the water

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The 2013 land law requires impact study, consent and resettlement —** The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 replaced the 1894 Act. It requires a Social Impact Assessment and consent of 80% of affected families for private projects and 70% for public–private partnerships; purely government projects such as Majhgaon need none. Rural compensation can reach four times market value; resettlement entitlements come on top. 2. **In tribal areas, the gram sabha must be heard —** PESA, 1996 requires the gram sabha or panchayat to be consulted before land acquisition and resettlement in Scheduled Areas. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 bars evicting forest dwellers before their rights are settled. In the Niyamgiri case (2013) the Supreme Court let gram sabhas decide on bauxite mining.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Development-induced displacement spans GS1 and GS3 —** GS1 covers "effects of globalization on Indian society"; GS3 covers "land reforms" and "infrastructure".
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The RFCTLARR Act, 2013 requires consent of 80% of affected families for private projects and 70% for PPP projects. • PESA, 1996 requires consultation with the gram sabha or panchayat before land acquisition in Fifth Schedule Areas. • The National Perspective Plan for inter-basin water transfer dates to 1980; link studies are done by the National Water Development Agency (NWDA). • The Ken–Betwa Link Project covers Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh; the Union Cabinet approved it on December 8, 2021, at about ₹44,605 crore, per NWDA.

ANALYSIS	1. **The law is generous on paper; it is failing in delivery —** The State has paid almost all landowners and raised the package two and a half times, yet people protest. Money paid in pieces since 2018 cannot rebuild a house, and one wrong survey entry, such as a brick house recorded as mud, decides a family's future. 2. **Lens — Growth and equity: those who give up land must share the gains —** Forty-three villages get water; four drown to pay for it. Cash does not replace land for small farmers with no other trade, hence the demand for land for land. A thoughtful officer would pay cash where land is scarce but add project jobs and priority water rights. 3. **Resettlement can carry hidden gender bias —** The first ₹5 lakh went to the male head; widows such as Sampat Pal are missing from lists. The Collector now asks for joint accounts, which should be the rule from the first survey, with widows counted as separate families as the 2013 Act's definition of "family" requires.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Development-induced displacement in India is less a failure of law than of implementation." Critically examine with reference to river-linking projects. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Critically examine —** Weigh law against delivery; judge. 2. **Introduction — Panna's jal satyagraha —** Ken–Betwa: first of 30 National Perspective Plan links. 3. **Body — the 2013 Act and PESA give strong rights on paper —** Value addition: 70–80% consent; Niyamgiri (2013). 4. **Body — delivery fails at survey, valuation, piecemeal payment and middlemen —** Diagram: survey → valuation → eligibility list → payment → resettlement, marking each leak. 5. **Body — the law has gaps too: no consent for government projects, rigid cut-off dates —** Widows fall out. 6. **Conclusion — public lists, single-window grievance, rehabilitation before submergence —** Land for land where possible.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Collector of Panna, you face 231 unpaid families and bribery complaints. What do you do this month?** ***Approach:*** Publish the eligibility list, with amounts paid and pending, in every village and online, and hold document camps at the protest site. Send inheritance disputes to a revenue court with fixed timelines and bribery complaints to the Lokayukta. Dialogue, not arrests, ends such protests fastest.

9. Internal Security

The forces that fight Maoists, guard borders and secure elections are now governed by a law whose validity the Supreme Court has not yet decided. By bringing the Act into force a week before the hearing, the Centre has turned a pending question into a working arrangement, and officers who lead troops await the answer.

9.1 Centre brings CAPF Act into force a week before Supreme Court tests its validity

ISSUE THREAD **CAPF cadre and IPS deputation** (update 2) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Centre and States

> ***STORY SO FAR*** *The Supreme Court's May 2025 judgment asked the Centre to reduce IPS deputation in the CAPFs progressively. The 2026 Act reserves 50% of IG, at least 67% of ADG and all DG posts for deputation, notwithstanding any judgment.*

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 8. The Home Ministry has brought the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Act, 2026 into force from October 8, nearly five months after Parliament passed it, The Hindu reports. Commencement, the date a passed law begins to bind, was fixed by notification. Serving officers have challenged the Act, among them CRPF Assistant Commandant Bibhor Kumar Singh, a Shaurya Chakra awardee who lost his legs in a 2022 anti-Maoist operation in Bihar. On September 30, a Bench of Justices Manoj Misra and Ujjal Bhuyan decided to hear, on October 15, contempt petitions alleging the Centre has not fully implemented the May 23, 2025 judgment, along with three writ petitions against the Act. Per PRS, the Act covers Group A officers of the CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP and SSB, and lets the Centre frame cadre rules notwithstanding any court judgment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cadre officers stay blocked at the top → May 2025 judgment orders deputation cut progressively → Parliament passes an overriding Act (April 2026) → challenge and contempt cases tagged → Act in force a week before the hearing

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The May 2025 judgment treated CAPF cadre officers as an organised service —** The Supreme Court's judgment of May 23, 2025 held CAPF Group A officers to be an Organised Group A Service for all purposes. It asked the Centre to review the cadre and progressively reduce IPS deputation to senior posts. 2. **Parliament may remove the basis of a judgment but may not simply overrule it —** A legislature can cure the defect a court found, even retrospectively. It cannot declare a judgment ineffective, which would usurp judicial power. The Court restated this in Madras Bar Association v Union of India (2021), on tribunal provisions re-enacting what it had struck down.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Command of the CAPFs is a GS3 question, not only a service dispute —** GS3 asks about "various security forces and agencies and their mandate"; who leads the CAPFs is a live test.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Entry 2A of the Union List, inserted by the 42nd Amendment, 1976, covers deployment of Union armed forces in a State in aid of the civil power. • The BSF guards the borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, the ITBP the border with China, and the SSB the borders with Nepal and Bhutan. • Under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, civil contempt is wilful disobedience of a court's judgment, order or direction.
ANALYSIS	1. **Commencement splits the contempt case into a before and an after —** Until October 8 only the judgment governed deputation, so earlier failures stay open to contempt. From now the Centre will say it acts under a statute, so the Bench must decide validity before it can judge the later period. 2. **Lens — Independence and accountability: acting first narrows what the Court can undo —** Courts rarely stay a statute, so postings under the Act will stand unless it falls. Early commencement is lawful but creates facts on the ground. A thoughtful officer

	would make senior postings subject to the case's outcome. 3. **The operational case for IPS officers is real, but it does not reach every top post —** The Centre argues IPS officers link the CAPFs with State police, whom every deployment needs. Cadre officers reply that they lead troops in Maoist areas and on borders, and a force whose officers cannot reach the top loses morale. A smaller deputation share would serve liaison without closing the ladder.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Evaluate the case for reserving senior posts in the Central Armed Police Forces for IPS officers, keeping in view the effectiveness of internal security operations. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Directive — Evaluate —** Weigh each argument and give a verdict. 2. **Introduction — the Act is in force amid a Supreme Court challenge —** The 2025 judgment and the October 15 hearing. 3. **Body — IPS officers bring the liaison with State police that deployments need —** Police is a State subject. 4. **Body — a closed ladder costs field experience and morale —** Value addition: the May 2025 judgment on Organised Group A Service. Flowchart: judgment, Act, notification, hearing. 5. **Conclusion — a minority deputation share set after a published cadre review —** Liaison plus a fair ladder.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Director General of a CAPF, how would you keep cadre officers committed while the Act is under challenge?** ***Approach:*** I would tell officers plainly that the Act is in force, the Supreme Court will decide its validity, and litigating will not affect their postings. Field commands would go strictly on merit, and I would press for a published cadre review so grievances move into a process.

9. Ethics & Administrator's Corner — Integrative Case Studies

These three case studies stitch together stories from today's papers into GS4-style scenarios. Work through the prompts on paper before reading the Model Approach, which is written as named points so you can compare your own structure against it, not just your conclusions.

Case 1 — "Fix the Staffing, Not the Story": The Collector and the Baiga Children of Balaghat

SCENARIO The Indian Express (8 October) reports that the Centre's National Joint Outbreak Response Team found about 32 tribal children dead in Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, since June, from a mixed fever cluster of measles, malaria and other infections. The district surveillance unit was run by a data manager, the post of District Epidemiologist was vacant, there was no District Public Health Laboratory, and the worst-hit village had no ASHA for over a year. The State first counted eight deaths, the health officer now says about 12, yet 32 cases were earmarked for compensation. Imagine you are the Collector. The State capital wants a quick, individual culprit, perhaps a suspended ANM. Your own data show that families often chose a traditional healer over hospital, and that your department left the posts empty.

Q1. Whose failure is this: the family that delayed care, the frontline worker, or the system that left the post vacant? What values collide?

Q2. What will you do in the next 72 hours, and what in the next six months?

Q3. How will you report the death count and your own department's lapses honestly under political pressure?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Accountability sits where the power to prevent sat —** A family acting on belief in "Maata" is a cause to be understood, not a culprit. An ASHA who advised hospital care did her duty, while a village left without one for a year is a managerial failure. Suspending a junior to satisfy headlines punishes the weakest link. Fix responsibility on the vacancy, the missing laboratory and the unreconciled data.

2. **Triage first, then rebuild the system —** In 72 hours: mobile health teams, measles vaccination catch-up, malaria testing and referral transport, and treatment of acute malnutrition. In six months: fill the epidemiologist, microbiologist and ASHA posts through the State, link surveillance, immunisation and Poshan Tracker records, and train anganwadi staff to weigh children weekly. Article 21 and the directive in Article 47 on public health and nutrition are the duty behind these steps.

3. **Respect belief, but make the clinic nearer than the healer —** Work with Baiga elders and traditional healers as referral partners, not rivals. Use ASHAs from the community, escort sick children to the hospital, and cover the cost of travel. Trust, not an order, changes health-seeking behaviour.

4. **Conclusion — candour is the first public-health measure —** Publish a reconciled death list with sources, accept the finding that staffing gaps contributed, and report the vacancies upward in writing. Honest numbers protect the next child; a managed narrative protects only the officer.

Case 2 — "Thirty Per Cent Will Kill Supply": The Pricing Officer and the Cancer-Drug Margin

SCENARIO The Hindu and The Indian Express (9 October) report that the Centre will cap trade margins at 30% of MRP on non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs, a list the Indian Express puts at 110 drugs including 35 patented. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority found an average mark-up of about 170%, reaching 700% in some cases. The Supreme Court last month noted a drug with an MRP of ₹27,000 supplied to retailers at ₹2,700. Imagine you are a senior officer finalising the list. A manufacturers' delegation warns that 30% will make some drugs unviable and cause shortages. One executive, a former classmate, offers a private briefing and hints that a smaller list would be "reasonable". A patient group says every week of delay costs families their savings.

Q1. Which interests compete here, and is the classmate's offer a conflict of interest or a legitimate source of information?

Q2. How will you decide the list and the margin, and what will you do about the shortage argument?

Q3. How will you handle the private briefing and the pressure to delay?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Separate legitimate evidence from private influence —** Industry has a right to be heard, so invite its data through a formal, recorded consultation open to patient groups and distributors alike. A private briefing from a friend creates a perception of bias even if nothing improper is said. Decline it, disclose the contact to the head of department, and recuse if a real interest exists.

2. **Decide by public-interest evidence, within the law —** Price control under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013, issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, must be proportionate and reasoned. Base the list on market data, the criteria of cost, approval in India and frequent use, and test the claim that a margin of 30% on a cheap drug cannot cover costs. Where a drug is genuinely unviable, adjust that entry with a written reason instead of weakening the whole list.

3. **Meet the shortage risk with monitoring, not retreat —** Track supply through a reporting window, act against hoarding or withdrawal, and keep a review clause. Article 21 and Article 47 make affordable health care a State duty, and the cost of delay falls on the sickest.

4. **Conclusion — transparency is the officer's shield —** Record reasons, publish the methodology, and hold the line on process rather than outcome. A decision that can be explained to a patient, a manufacturer and a court is a defensible one.

10. Prelims Quick-Revision Facts

These are written to the pattern UPSC Prelims actually uses — the provision, the parent Act, the appointing or administering authority, the composition, the definition, the treaty year and the threshold written into law. The news gives the hook; the permanent fact behind it is what gets asked. Transient numbers that no objective question can be built on have been left out on purpose.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Starlink — GMPCS licence is not a licence to launch	The Communications Ministry said no applicant has yet been cleared to launch satcom services: all three GMPCS licensees (Starlink, Eutelsat OneWeb backed by Bharti, and Jio Satellite Communications) are undergoing a security assessment, after which a licensee can seek spectrum assignment (The Indian Express p. 1-2; The Hindu p. 15). GMPCS stands for global mobile personal communication by satellite. Starlink also holds the final authorisation of IN-SPACe, the Department of Space's authorising body for private space activity.
Nilekani task force — NEET to move to computer-based testing	A six-member High Powered Task Force headed by Nandan Nilekani, set up on 26 July after the NEET protests, told the Supreme Court through a DoPT affidavit that it held about 18 meetings and over 40 consultations, ran a public portal "Listen at Scale", and that NEET will shift from pen-and-paper to a computer-based test (CBT) from next year (The Indian Express p. 8). The National Testing Agency conducts NEET; the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is the Central law against paper leaks.
Untouchability — Article 17, the PCR Act and the Atrocities Act	Article 17 abolishes untouchability and makes its enforcement in any form a punishable offence. The offence is defined and punished by the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (earlier called the Untouchability (Offences) Act); the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 deals with atrocities by non-members of these communities. A Hindu parley on 9 October asked whether legal guarantees alone can end the practice (The Hindu p. 9).
Delhi evacuee properties — possession without ownership	Delhi's government will survey 683 Partition-era built-up properties that were allotted to families arriving from Pakistan, who were given possession but not ownership rights; the findings go to the Centre (The Indian Express p. 4). The legal framework is the Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950, under which property left by those who migrated to Pakistan vested in a Custodian of Evacuee Property.
Monuments and events — ASI guidelines, AMASR Act and Adopt a Heritage	ASI guidelines of 2005, as reported, bar functions at centrally protected monuments, allow exceptions for classical music, dance and drama, require events to end by 10 pm and bar ticket sales (The Hindu p. 7). The parent law is the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, which regulates construction near protected monuments (a 100-metre prohibited and a further 200-metre regulated area after the 2010 amendment). Adopt a Heritage 2.0 (2023) lets private "Smarak Sarthi" partners adopt monuments.
TIME-HF — nurse-led heart-failure care at SCTIMST	The Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, an Institute of National Importance under the Department of Science and Technology, ran the TIME-HF randomised trial with 1,507 adults in 22 hospitals. Patients with reduced ejection fraction who got nurse-led collaborative care had a 22% lower risk of death over two years (The Hindu p. 20, citing the journal Circulation). It is an example of task-shifting, in which trained nurses take on tasks usually done by doctors.
World Sight Day and RBSK	World Sight Day falls on the second Thursday of October, which was 8 October this year. A Hindu op-ed used it to argue that screening is not the same as treatment: a Karnataka report cited there found 62 lakh children screened but only 1.9% given spectacles (The Hindu p. 20). The Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), under the National Health Mission, screens children from birth to 18 years for the "4 Ds": defects at birth, deficiencies, diseases and developmental delays.
PRASHAST — school-based disability screening	PRASHAST is a digital, two-part school-based screening checklist of the Education Ministry that helps teachers spot probable disability among children; special educators validate the findings

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	and refer children for medical assessment. It covers the 21 conditions recognised under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (The Hindu p. 14; PIB release of 8 October).
Delhi PG regulation after the Satya Niketan collapse	After a building collapse at Satya Niketan on 6 September killed seven, five of them Delhi University students, the Delhi government is drafting a Paying Guest Accommodation Regulation and Safety Bill, 2026, and studying relaxations in the Master Plan for Delhi (MPD)-2047 and the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 so that authorised PGs can operate near education hubs (The Indian Express p. 3). The Master Plan is prepared by the Delhi Development Authority under the Delhi Development Act, 1957.
Tata Sons — Trusts hold about 66%	Tata Trusts hold about 66% of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata group, according to The Indian Express (p. 13). Noel Tata, the Trusts' chairman, has sought a meeting with the Prime Minister's Office over the proposal to list Tata Sons. Listing would make Tata Sons subject to disclosure and governance rules of the securities regulator, SEBI.
SIR draft deletions — the figure is the authors' own	Two authors in a Hindu editorial of 9 October (p. 8) put draft-stage deletions in the Special Intensive Revision at 13.37 crore across 30 States and Union Territories; this is their count and not an official one. Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 permits a special revision of the roll for "any constituency or part of a constituency". In Lal Babu Hussein (1995) the Supreme Court held that a name on the roll is presumed valid and may be removed only after notice and hearing.
NBA — Access and Benefit Sharing under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002	The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), under the Environment Ministry, reported receiving ₹9.68 crore for April–September 2026 under the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) framework, paid by users of India's biological resources (PIB, 8 October). ABS is the idea, in the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity, that those who commercially use biological resources or associated knowledge must share the benefits with the communities that hold them.
Section 163 BNSS — prohibitory orders and the Jantar Mantar rule	Delhi Police refused permission for a protest at Jantar Mantar, citing prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, and its 2022 standing order, which does not permit a dharna beyond one continuous day (The Indian Express p. 2, p. 4). Section 163 is the successor of Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973; it empowers a District Magistrate or other authorised officer to prohibit assembly in urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance.
POCSO — victim must be heard before anticipatory bail	The Allahabad High Court (order of 29 September) directed all POCSO special courts in Uttar Pradesh to decide anticipatory bail pleas on merits only after giving the victim or guardian a hearing, with legal-aid counsel at State cost if a lawyer cannot be engaged (The Indian Express p. 8). The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 provides for special courts and child-friendly procedures.
Calcutta High Court — a detention order must state its basis	The Calcutta High Court observed that an order of the Foreigners Registration Office detaining a person as a Bangladeshi national must specify the basis for the finding, since merely saying so does not suffice (The Indian Express p. 6). The question of whether a person is a foreigner is decided under the Foreigners Act, 1946; detention without stated grounds also raises concerns under Article 21 and the safeguards of Article 22.
Air Force Day, 8 October	Air Force Day is observed on 8 October to commemorate the establishment of the Indian Air Force and the sacrifices of air warriors; the force was raised in 1932 (The Indian Express p. 8; The Hindu p. 12). This year's 94th edition was held at Hindon, and the Chief of the Air Staff is the head of the service.
Nobel Prize in Literature 2026	The Nobel Prize in Literature 2026 went to the Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson, aged 76, "for her bold and inventive oeuvre that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature" (The Indian Express p. 9; The Hindu p. 16). Her works include Eros the Bittersweet and Autobiography of Red.

Source note: All items are drawn from The Hindu & The Indian Express (Delhi Editions) — 9 October 2026, supplemented where indicated by official releases and PRS Legislative Research. Facts, figures and quotes are reproduced as reported on that date; verify currency (ongoing legal proceedings, evolving numbers) before using in an answer.

11. Answer Writing, GS1, Map, Ethics & CSAT

The daily part the newspapers do not give you: one fully written model answer, one GS1 static topic, map practice, one GS4 theory term and CSAT practice.

11.1 Model answer of the day — Card 2.1 (15 marks, 250 words)

> ***"The 57th GST Council marks a shift from coercion to trust in tax administration." Critically examine, with reference to the role of States. (15 marks, 250 words)***

Introduction — On October 8 the 57th GST Council recommended removing officers' power to arrest before prosecution, raising the prosecution threshold from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore and cutting the general penalty from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000. Most changes apply from April 2027.

1. **Trust replaces suspicion as the starting point —** An officer must now build a prima facie case and go to court first. Disputes below ₹10,000 get no show-cause notice, and goods in transit can be stopped only by the supplier's or destination State's officers, on specific intelligence.

2. **Faster refunds make trust real for small firms —** Ninety per cent of refunds will be sanctioned automatically within three working days instead of seven, and accumulated input credit becomes refundable for input services and capital goods. Money locked by the inverted duty structure returns as working capital.

3. **But deterrence against fraud may weaken —** At least four States objected: fake-invoice rings vanish fast, and slower prosecution may recover nothing. Trust without data analytics can become a gift to fraudsters.

4. **States gave up power, but cooperatively —** Under Article 279A decisions need three-fourths of weighted votes, States holding two-thirds. Transit States surrendered a weapon for a single market, yet kept revenue and prosecution and agreed by consensus. Since Mohit Minerals (2022) made recommendations persuasive, Parliament and every legislature must still amend their GST Acts.

Conclusion — The shift is real but incomplete: trust lowers compliance costs only if detection improves. Way forward: shared Centre–State invoice-matching data, amendment of the CGST and State GST Acts before April 2027, and a review of fraud recoveries after a year.

> **Draw this:** *Beside the first point, two flowcharts: old "suspicion → arrest → case" crossed out; new "suspicion → data match → evidence → prosecution".*

(257 words)

11.2 GS1 corner — Geography: Western disturbances and winter temperature inversion over north India

Today's peg: *5.1*

1. **Western disturbances bring north India its winter rain —** They are low-pressure systems from the Mediterranean region, carried east by the subtropical westerly jet. They bring winter rain to the north-western plains, valuable for rabi wheat, and snow to the western Himalaya.

2. **Calm, clear winter nights create an inversion —** The ground loses heat fast, so air near it becomes colder than the air above: temperature rises with height. This stable layer stops rising air, trapping smoke and moisture as smog and fog.

Prelims facts

- In a temperature inversion, temperature increases with height instead of decreasing.
- Western disturbances are extra-tropical systems carried eastwards by the subtropical westerly jet stream.
- Winter rain from western disturbances benefits rabi crops in Punjab and Haryana.

11.3 Places in news — mark them on your atlas

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Balaghat	South-eastern Madhya Pradesh, bordering Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh in the Satpura–Maikal hills.	Centre's outbreak team links about 32 Baiga child deaths to missing surveillance staff (6.2).	Kanha Tiger Reserve lies partly in Balaghat and Mandla districts.
Panna	Bundelkhand, northern Madhya Pradesh; the Ken river, a Yamuna tributary, flows through it towards Uttar Pradesh.	Jal satyagraha at Banhari Kalan against the Majhgaon dam's resettlement (8.1).	The Ken–Betwa link's Daudhan dam lies within Panna Tiger Reserve.
Abha	South-western Saudi Arabia, in the Asir highlands near the Yemen border.	Houthi strike on its airport killed two and wounded 28 (4.2).	Asir's highlands catch more rain than most of the Arabian Peninsula.
Bab el-Mandeb	Strait between Yemen and Djibouti–Eritrea, joining the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.	Carries 12% of maritime trade; vital for India as Hormuz is restricted (4.2).	With the Suez Canal, it is the Red Sea route between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

11.4 Ethics term of the day (GS4 Section A): Accountability

Meaning — Answering for one's decisions to those affected and to higher authority, and accepting consequences. Real accountability fixes responsibility where the power to prevent harm lay, rather than on the weakest person in sight.

In today's news — Case 1 (6.2): Balaghat families are blamed for trusting healers, but the vacant ASHA and epidemiologist posts were the State's duty. In 1.2, the Punjab commission pins burden on the State as custodian of CCTV records.

Use in an answer — Administrative-failure case studies: use it to separate blame from responsibility before proposing reforms.

11.5 CSAT practice (Paper II)

The passage below is original, written on the theme of one of today's editorials. Choose your answers first; the key is at the end.

When something terrible happens inside an institution, the first public question is usually who is to blame. A name is found, a person is suspended, and the story ends. The habit is understandable: grief and anger want a face, and punishing one person feels like justice.

Yet a search for a villain often stops the search for causes. Most serious failures in schools, hospitals or offices come from many small conditions acting together: rules no one checks, posts left empty, pressures everyone accepts as normal, warnings that reached no one with the power to act. Remove one individual and every one of these conditions remains, waiting for the next person to fail in the same way.

Blame also changes how people behave afterwards. If those closest to a mistake expect to be punished, they hide it. Errors go unreported, records are tidied, and the institution loses the very information it needs to improve. Sectors that have become much safer, such as aviation, did so partly by encouraging people to report errors without fear and by studying each incident for the chain of events behind it.

None of this means that no one is responsible. Deliberate wrongdoing and gross negligence must be punished, and families who have suffered deserve honest answers. The point is that punishment and understanding are different tasks. An inquiry that asks only who failed will rarely learn why the failure was possible.

A mature public culture, then, would treat every tragedy as two questions: who must answer for it, and what must change so it does not recur. The second question is harder and slower, but it is the one that protects the next person.

Q1. Which one of the following best expresses the central idea of the passage?

(a) Individuals should never be punished for institutional failures.

(b) Searching only for someone to blame can prevent institutions from understanding and correcting the causes of failure.

(c) Aviation is the safest of all sectors.

(d) Public anger after a tragedy is always misplaced.

Q2. The claim that punishment-centred responses make institutions lose information assumes that

(a) people who expect punishment are less likely to report their mistakes.

(b) institutions keep no records of errors.

(c) most errors are deliberate.

(d) information is never useful to institutions.

Q3. Which one of the following can be inferred from the passage?

(a) Suspending an official is the best response to any tragedy.

(b) The author would favour inquiries that examine conditions and processes as well as individual conduct.

(c) Families of victims do not need answers.

(d) Empty posts are the only cause of institutional failure.

Reasoning and quantitative aptitude

Q4. A firm claims a GST refund of ₹6,00,000. 90% is sanctioned automatically; on verification, 80% of the remainder is also allowed. What is the total refund?

(a) ₹5,40,000

(b) ₹5,76,000

(c) ₹5,88,000

(d) ₹6,00,000

Q5. Among five officers, A is senior to B but junior to C; D is junior to B; E is senior to C. Who is the most junior?

(a) A

(b) B

(c) D

(d) E

Answer key and explanations

Q1: (b) The passage contrasts blame with understanding causes; option 0 fails because the fourth paragraph says wrongdoing must be punished.

Q2: (a) Information is lost only if fear of punishment leads people to hide errors; option 2 contradicts the passage's view of failures.

Q3: (b) The author wants both questions asked; option 3 overstates, since empty posts are one condition among many.

Q4: (c) Automatic: 90% of 6,00,000 = 5,40,000. Remainder 60,000; 80% of it = 48,000. Total = 5,88,000.

Q5: (c) From senior to junior: E, C, A, B, D. D is the most junior.

12. Essays of the Day

Two essays, on prompts phrased the way the Essay paper actually sets them, written the way a top-ranked candidate writes under time. Read them for structure and for the sweep of examples — not to memorise.

ESSAY 1 · Essay · Section A · 7 min read

Trust is a better tax collector than fear.

Themes: Tax morale: why most citizens pay when they could evade · Fear produces hiding, not honesty — from window tax to evening stubble fires · Trust must be earned by the State and backed by evidence, not handed out blindly

Picture a small cloth merchant in a district town, in whose house the word “inspector” is spoken in a lowered voice. He pays his taxes, but he lives with two fears: that he had made some honest mistake in a form, and that an honest mistake would be treated as a crime. Fear does not make him more honest; it makes him more anxious, and it makes him keep his business small so that nobody will notice it. On 8 October the 57th GST Council took a decision that could change the mood in houses like his. This essay argues that a State collects more, and collects it more fairly, when citizens trust it than when they fear it. It also accepts that trust is not a gift the State can simply announce; it has to be earned, and it has to be backed by the ability to catch the few who betray it.

The idea is old in India. Kalidasa, describing the ideal king Dilipa in the first canto of the Raghuvamsha, wrote: “प्रजानामेव भूत्यर्थं स ताभ्यो बलिमग्रहीत् । सहस्रगुणमुत्स्रष्टुमादत्ते हि रसं रविः ॥” He took tax from his subjects only for their own welfare, as the sun draws up water from the earth only to return it a thousandfold as rain. The verse does not say that the king was feared. It says the people could see where their money went. A citizen who sees the rain does not resent the sun. That is the first meaning of trust in taxation: a visible return, in roads, schools, clinics and courts that work.

History also shows what fear produces instead. England introduced a window tax in 1696, assuming that the number of windows was a fair sign of wealth. Householders responded by bricking up their windows, and for more than a century and a half people lived in darker, less healthy rooms until the tax was finally repealed in 1851. The State did not get honesty; it got hiding. Today’s news has a modern version. The government told the Lok Sabha that stubble-burning incidents fell 90 per cent in 2025 against 2022, but the count rests on polar satellites that pass only between 10:30 am and 1:30 pm. A multi-satellite estimate puts the fall near 30 per cent, and an ISRO-led study found farmers shifting to evening burning. When rules are enforced only by watching and punishing, people learn the hours when no one is watching.

Economics reached a similar conclusion by an unexpected route. In 1972 Michael Allingham and Agnar Sandmo built a famous model in which a taxpayer pays only after weighing the chance of being caught and the size of the fine. It was elegant, but later researchers noticed that, with real audit rates and penalties as low as they are, the model predicts far more evasion than we actually see. Most people pay more than fear alone can explain. They pay because they think others are paying too, because the rules seem fair, and because they believe the State will treat them decently. Economists call this “tax morale”. It is the cheapest tax collector a government can have, and the easiest to destroy.

India has learnt both lessons at a cost. The retrospective amendment of 2012, passed after the Supreme Court ruled for Vodafone, told every investor that a settled matter could be reopened by the State at will. It brought years of arbitration and damaged India’s reputation, and in 2021 Parliament itself withdrew it through the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act. The repair has been slow and deliberate: faceless assessment and a Taxpayers’ Charter in 2020, and the Jan Vishwas Act of 2023, which removed or softened criminal penalties in 183 provisions across 42 Central laws. The GST Council’s decision belongs to this line. Officers will no longer arrest before prosecution; the prosecution threshold rises from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore; the general penalty falls from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000; disputes below ₹10,000 will not even get a show-cause notice; and 90 per cent of refunds will be sanctioned within three working days. The message is simple: the honest small trader should not pay for the State’s suspicion of the dishonest few.

The counter-argument must be heard in full, because it is not foolish. At least four States objected to dropping the power of arrest, and their fear is grounded in experience. Fake-invoice rings create shell firms, claim credit for tax never paid and vanish within weeks. A slower path through the courts may find only empty offices. Trust that is not checked becomes an invitation. There is also a deeper objection: trust in the State cannot be declared by the State. In Panna, where tribal families have stood in water for a month demanding fair compensation for the Majhgaon dam, a revenue officer was caught taking a bribe of ₹47,000. A citizen who has met that officer will not believe a Taxpayers' Charter merely because it is printed. And some fear is necessary: no society has run on goodwill alone.

These objections do not overturn the argument; they refine it. The eighteenth-century Italian thinker Cesare Beccaria argued in On Crimes and Punishments that the certainty of punishment deters more than its severity. That is the bridge between trust and deterrence. A State that arrests on suspicion is severe but uncertain: it frightens the honest and often misses the clever. A State that matches every supplier's return with every buyer's claim, flags a new firm that issues huge invoices in its first month, and prosecutes quickly with evidence is certain without being cruel. The honest taxpayer then sees fewer visits, and the fraudster sees a higher chance of being caught. Trust for the many and certainty for the few are not rivals. They are the two halves of one design, and data, not the threat of handcuffs, is what joins them. The Centre must also share that data with States, so that the States that gave up a weapon are given a better one.

Trust also has to travel in both directions. A State that wants citizens to trust it must keep its own promises: refunds on time, rules that do not change backwards, officers who do not take bribes, and compensation paid before a village is drowned. Every delayed refund and every arbitrary notice is a withdrawal from a bank account of goodwill that took decades to fill. Kalidasa's sun is trusted because the rain actually comes.

Think again of the cloth merchant. He will not become a saint because the inspector stops arriving unannounced, but he may expand his business, issue proper bills to every customer and sleep better at night, and the State will collect more from a larger shop than it ever did from a frightened small one. Fear can make a citizen pay once. Trust makes him pay every year, and makes him proud to. The task of a good administrator is not to choose between them but to place them correctly: trust as the rule, certain punishment as the exception, and the State's own honesty as the foundation of both.

Built from today's cards: