

# EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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## GS 2: POLITY THE HINDU PAGE: 01

### Centre tightens norms for foreign donations

NGOs must stick to the activities specified by Centre in their category and geographical area | NGOs must declare everything they published: books, magazines, and articles in newspapers | Existing registrations must comply within the next year; a minimum fine of ₹1 lakh will apply

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) wanting to access foreign funds must now stick to a list of activities specified by the Centre, according to the latest amendment to the Rules of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, notified on Monday.

While NGOs seeking foreign funds are required to register under one of the five permitted categories, namely social, economic, educational, cultural, and religious, this is the first time separate activity lists have been laid out for those in each category.

NGOs must now disclose their activities, the geographical scope of their programmes, their websites, social media accounts, and publications. They must pay separate fees for each category and State or Union Territory they operate in, as opposed to the previous sin-

gle fee for FCRA registrants.

Any new registration must follow the new norms and existing registrations must comply with the changes within the next year. Any violations will be penalised with a minimum fine of ₹1 lakh, according to another order from the Union Home Ministry. The Ministry regulates all foreign donations through the FCRA.

Earlier amendments of the Rules only required NGOs to give an undertaking that their acceptance of foreign funds is not likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or impact friendly relations with foreign states or disrupt communal harmony.

**Key functionalities**  
The amended Rules also broaden the definition of an NGO's "key functionalary" beyond office-bearers and directors to include trustees, partners, the Karta or head of a Hindu Undivided Family, governing body members, and

#### Funding check

Under the fresh changes to Rules of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, all NGOs are required to disclose specific activities and geographical scope of their programmes to receive contributions under 5 permitted categories:



#### EDUCATIONAL

- Schools, colleges, and libraries
- Scholarships
- Research institutions and think tanks
- Civic-awareness and constitutional-rights programmes



#### ECONOMIC

- Livelihood generation
- Skill development
- Agricultural sectors
- Entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises
- Financial and digital inclusion



#### RELIGIOUS

- Places of worship
- Religious education
- Pilgrim services
- Meditation programmes
- Preservation of religious traditions



#### SOCIAL

- Public health
- Rehabilitation
- Sanitation and nutrition
- Disaster relief



#### CULTURAL

- Preservation of Indian arts and languages
- Museums, archives, and cultural festivals
- Heritage conservation

anyone else controlling or managing the organisation.

Associations having foreign nationals (other than persons of Indian origin) as key functionaries will ordinarily not be considered eligible for registration or prior permission, unless specifically permitted by the Centre, according to the new Rules. NGOs must

also declare whether their association or any of their key functionaries brought out any publication during the year, including books, magazines, and newspaper articles.

A senior government official said that the amendments were effected to bring uniformity in Foreign Contribution forms (FC-F) and to avoid

duplication.

The amended Rules state that the certificate of registration or the application form (for fresh registrations) shall specify the purpose or purposes for which registration is granted, chosen only from such list of purposes as specified in the Schedule appended to the Rules; and the States or Union territories in

which the NGO proposes to undertake the activities.

The Rules also imposes a fee on NGOs to operate for each specified purpose, and within each State or Union Territory.

Some categories specifically exclude political activities. For instance, the "educational" purpose lists 22 activities but adds the caveat that "awareness programmes on constitutional rights, fundamental duties, and civic responsibilities" must be "strictly non-political in nature."

The "cultural" purpose lists "promotion of contemporary arts inspired by Indian traditions" among 18 categories, adding the caveat to "exclude political/ ideological content."

There are 16 permitted categories of religious activities, including "conduct of religious education, moral instruction, satsangs, discourses, and meditation retreats (excluding proselytisation)", and "burial/cremation ground development and maintenance." There are 19 activities listed

under "economic" purpose, and 30 items under the "social" category.

#### Fines for violations

MHA notified another order which specifies fines for FCRA violations such as excess administrative spending, speculative investments, misuse of funds, unauthorised receipt/use of foreign contributions, and using funds for unapproved purposes or in unapproved States/UTs.

Any use of funds for purposes other than those for which they were received can attract a penalty of up to 30% of the amount misused or ₹1 lakh, whichever is higher. Similarly, using foreign funds for purposes or in areas not covered under the NGO's approval also invites a fine of 30% of the amount or ₹1 lakh, whichever is higher. In addition, spending beyond the permitted expense limit is penalised with fines calculated as a percentage of the amount involved, subject to a minimum of ₹1 lakh.

## GS 2: GOVERNANCE THE HINDU PAGE: 11

# Civil Services Preliminary Examination 2026: tough by design or default?

An exam meant to filter talent is increasingly seen as rejecting it, raising questions about fairness, design, and whether the system is identifying merit – a warning that calls for deeper reflection and timely course correction, rather than remaining a mere instance of acknowledgement

Gopala Krishna V.

The story so far:

The Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, introduced in 1979 following the Kothari Committee's recommendations, was designed as a screening mechanism – a 'filter and funnel' – to shortlist candidates for the descriptive Main examination. In its original format, it consisted of two components: an optional subject paper at the graduate level and a General Studies paper, with the optional paper carrying greater weight. For many years, this system functioned smoothly with minor changes.

The Alagh Committee set up in 2000 observed that the preliminary exam should have an optional paper to assess the intellectual competence of the aspirant and maintain its connection with the university system. It also proposed a Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) which would evaluate skills such as general awareness, problem-solving, data analysis and decision-making. The committee also recommended that the questions at the preliminary exam should be made challenging and a case-study approach should be adopted.

In 2009, the S.K. Khanna Committee recommended that the Preliminary Examination should be renamed as the Civil Services Aptitude Test with two common papers at the Preliminary. The preliminary exam was reconstituted to comprise two papers – General Studies Paper-I and General Studies Paper-II. The Paper I covers all conventional areas in 'Humanities', while Paper-II has questions on quantitative aptitude, reasoning, comprehension, interpersonal skills and communication, decision-making and problem-solving. The components of Paper-II were designed to test whether the aspirant had the ability to imbibe new technologies.

Both the papers had equal weightage and the combined marks in both the papers were taken to determine merit. This change practically delinked the Preliminary Examination with the university system. After a few years, due to protests, Paper-II known as CSAT was made qualifying in nature. In practice, this meant that nearly five lakh aspirants were narrowed down to about 10,000 candidates solely based on their performance in the 100 questions attempted over two hours.

Bringing down the vast pool of aspirants to a manageable number through a paper comprising just 100 questions is an inherently difficult task. As a result, examiners were forced to constantly reinvent and compile the most unpredictable questions. Over time, it became quite evident that the objective of selecting candidates was being overshadowed by the need to eliminate them. Even the qualifying paper became a tool for rejection, with overall difficulty level of questions rising.

**What changed this year?**

Against this evolving backdrop, the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination held in May has come under widespread criticism for the perceived inequity in the distribution and format of questions. Many aspirants found the paper unusually difficult and unpredictable – concerns that were publicly acknowledged by the UPSC Chairman, who expressed empathy with candidates.

This has sparked a broader debate on whether the nature of the paper was an unintended outcome of systemic constraints or a deliberate shift in examination design, and more importantly, what course corrections are needed to ensure fairness, balance and credibility in the screening process.

This year, UPSC committed itself to greater transparency, and agreed to release the answer key of the preliminary

exam immediately after it. Openness also meant that the questions had to be set from verifiable authoritative sources. The questions were framed using carefully curated information drawn from government websites.

Attempting the question paper entailed sifting through 55 pages and comprehending 40,000 words in two hours. In addition to this, the subject-wise distribution of questions was distorted and the style of questioning underwent a noticeable shift. Consequently, the aspirants found no link between their preparation and the questions. They had to make guesses, "some informed" and "some wild". Solving previous years' questions, which was considered as the gold standard was also of no help.

This gap between the preparation and examination, coupled with the element of surprise, prompted the aspirants to voice their concerns. The democratisation of expression through social media platforms further amplified the protests, creating a snowballing effect.

The nature of the question paper, thus, appears to be less a matter of a deliberate design and more a consequence of systemic constraints – a by-product of a short-sighted examination pattern established 15 years ago. In retrospect, the committee which introduced the pattern overlooked a dictum that is crucial in policy formulation; that anticipation is the highest form of competence. It failed to adequately foresee the challenge of balancing the increasing number of aspirants with a relatively static number of vacancies.

**What is the way out?**

The perceived unfairness of the Preliminary Examination has been widely voiced by aspirants and has also been recently flagged by a Parliamentary Committee. However, the Chairman's acknowledgement of the paper's difficulty should not remain a mere instance of

proverbial "ventilation therapy." Many crises in governance are not sudden surprises; they are warning signals that were noticed but not acted upon in time. This appears to be one such signal – one that calls for deeper reflection and timely course correction.

It is time for the government to appoint a committee to revisit the examination pattern and make suitable long-term changes after public consultation. The UPSC has been collecting information regarding the socio-economic profile of the aspirants. They have information about the distribution of applicants based on place of birth, schools and colleges attended, status of parents etc. as they are collecting this information at the preliminary stage itself. This information should be used as an input to align the scheme of examination to the background of the aspirants.

Questions may be unpredictable by design, but aspirants should not feel that they are incapable of rising up to the required level of the questions or the highest positions in the country are beyond their reach. The government must undertake reforms both in the examination system and the university framework by introducing 'bridge courses' along the lines of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission. Such measures would help restore visible alignment between education and assessment.

The education system and public employment emanate from the same source – the government. Any disconnect between the two risks eroding their trust in the system. Respecting the aspirations of this generation and sustaining their faith is the order of the day. It is better to prevent a crisis rather than 'firefight' one.

The writer is the Director of Brain Tree, Hyderabad, an institute training candidates for the civil services examination.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INDIAN  
EXPRESS PAGE: 13

# Why industry can't afford to wait for the state to drive the robotics revolution



**RAJA MANDALA**  
BY C RAJA MOHAN

**E**LON MUSK'S vision of "amazing abundance" imagines a world in which goods and services become plentiful and inexpensive, thanks to the unfolding technological revolution. The idea sounds fanciful, but it has a long lineage. Civilisations have long dreamt of magical sources of plenty — the *akshayapatra* of Indian mythology, the cornucopia of the ancient Greeks. Karl Marx, too, believed that advancing productive forces could eventually liberate humanity from drudgery, but the obstacle was in the exploitative structure of social relations.

Musk's bet is narrower than Marx's. He is convinced that the tech revolution at hand could produce societies of "universal high income". Whether this seductive vision is real or not, the tech transformation is here and is called "embodied intelligence" or "physical AI".

Digital AI generates answers to questions and is moving towards the simulation of reality, but it remains locked inside your computer. "Embodied intelligence" — robots, often built in vaguely human form and known as humanoids, that can sense their surroundings, make decisions and use mechanical limbs to act on them — promises to step into the factory, the hospital ward and the battlefield. Musk's bet is that such humanoid robots could become the most consequential product ever made, doing for production what the computer did for information.

This is not fantastical futurism. Industrial robots have populated factories for decades. The new ambition is to make them adaptable enough, by empowering them with AI, to work in spaces designed for humans rather than machines. That ambition is fast becoming one of the defining strategic contests of this century, and it increasingly runs



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

through Washington and Beijing.

America still leads in frontier artificial intelligence, advanced chip design and the software architecture that will eventually serve as the brain of any humanoid robot. China has built something different: An industrial ecosystem to mass-produce the body. According to the International Federation of Robotics, China accounted for 54 per cent of all industrial robot installations worldwide in 2024 — some 295,000 units, the highest annual total ever recorded by any single country — and its operational stock crossed 2 million, by far the largest in the world. China is fast becoming for robotics what it already is for solar panels, batteries and rare-earth processing: The world's dominant manufacturing platform.

In robotics, then, as in several other frontier technologies, America increasingly supplies the brains while China supplies the bodies. Neither side is content to stay in its lane. Beijing is pouring resources into closing the gap in AI models; meanwhile, Washington is rediscovering industrial policy to rebuild ad-

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vanced manufacturing at home.

For now, China dominates the global humanoid robot market, producing roughly 85 per cent of all humanoids worldwide. According to *The New York Times*, Chinese firms like Unitree and AgiBot have begun mass production, and US companies are determined to catch up. Musk plans to begin pilot production of the Optimus 3 humanoid robot soon. He hopes to scale to high-volume manufacturing in the coming years, eventually expanding to a 10-million-unit-per-year production line at a Texas gigafactory.

India's place in this race remains modest. The country installed 9,100 industrial robots in 2024, a 7 per cent rise on the previous year,

but that places it only sixth in the world by annual installations — well behind not just the United States, Japan and China but also South Korea and Germany. India's overall robot density of around 10 continues to trail the global average of 132 robots per 10,000 manufacturing workers. It is a fraction of South Korea's extraordinary 1,200. If America and China are contesting leadership in embodied intelligence, India is a mere spectator.

But the stakes for India could hardly be higher. For three decades, the country's comparative advantage has rested on an abundance of cheap labour. (It is a different matter if we have actually leveraged it for collective benefit.) The age of embodied intelligence puts a big question mark over that asset. The very resource that once seemed to favour India risks becoming a constraint in a world where manufacturing competitiveness depends increasingly on robotics rather than on wage differentials.

Self-reliance rhetoric is no substitute for strategy here. Unlike China, India cannot isolate its robotics ambitions from the world; its near-term task is to combine international collaboration with the patient building of domestic research, design and manufacturing capability. There are grounds for some optimism. SSI Mantra, India's first indigenous surgical robotic system, has already conducted telesurgeries across thousands of kilometres, demonstrating that Indian engineers can compete at the technological frontier when talent, demand and regulation align. Several other companies, like GreyOrange, are pressing ahead with robotics development. The challenge lies in building industrial-scale robotics.

The Indian government can and should set incentives, fund research and shape regulation. But policy cannot substitute for actions at the firm level. The GoI's Draft National Robotics Strategy has been around since 2023 and could eventually turn into a robotics mission. But if Indian industry waits for a state-led mission to drive the robotics revolution, it may find, as it has with other technologies before, that the revolution has already happened elsewhere.

Musk's "amazing abundance" may remain a distant horizon or be realised only in part. The race to build the machines that might get the world there, however, has already begun. India's place in it will be decided mainly by the appetite of Indian capital to invest, innovate and take risks at the scale the moment demands.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for *The Indian Express*. He is also associated with the Motwani-Jadeja Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University and the Council on Strategic and Defence Research, Delhi

## GS 2: Vulnerable Section INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 14

• LEGAL

# Intellectual disabilities & the question of choice in giving birth

Vineet Bhalla  
New Delhi, June 23

THE KARNATAKA High Court permitted the parents of a 23-year-old woman with severe intellectual and developmental disabilities a total abdominal hysterectomy, or the surgical removal of the uterus, last week. The ruling was the latest instance of courts' intervention in the reproductive autonomy of women with intellectual disabilities — decisions that often involve the complex intersection of law, medicine and human rights.

### Why approach courts?

Historically, women with intellectual disabilities have been vulnerable to forced sterilisations and non-consensual medical procedures, often justified by caregivers as a matter of convenience or under the guise of protecting them from the consequences of sexual abuse.

To prevent this, Indian law places strict safeguards on procedures that permanently alter a person's reproductive capacity. Section 10 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, prevents persons with disability from being subjected to any medical procedure leading to infertility without their free and informed consent.

A legal dilemma arises when a woman's intellectual disability is so severe that she lacks the cognitive capacity to understand the nature and consequences of a procedure, rendering her unable to give "informed consent". In such scenarios, caregivers and doctors cannot unilaterally make the decision and must approach a court. The court does not simply substitute its own judgment for the individual's; it conducts an inquiry to determine what course of action lies in the "best interests" of the person.

### BEST INTERESTS

- For individuals unable to care for themselves, the courts invoke 'parens patriae': a doctrine wherein the court steps into the shoes of a guardian.
- The court conducts an inquiry to determine what lies in the person's "best interests", prioritising their health, dignity, and bodily integrity.

particularly from marginalised communities, under government health insurance schemes. These procedures were often allegedly performed in private hospitals without consent or informing the women about side-effects.

Recognising this as a serious violation of the fundamental right to health under Article 21, the SC directed all states and Union Territories to strictly implement the Union Health Ministry's 2022 Guidelines to Prevent Unnecessary Hysterectomies. The court mandated the formation of hysterectomy monitoring committees at the national, state and district levels to audit such surgeries and directed the blacklisting of hospitals found performing the procedure without necessity or consent.

### The abortion dilemma

While the Karnataka case dealt with a hysterectomy, most of the jurisprudence regarding the reproductive rights of intellectually disabled women in India revolves around pregnancies, often resulting from sexual assault.

Here, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, comes into play. Under the Act, if a pregnant woman has a mental illness, a pregnancy can be terminated with the written consent of her guardian. The law, however, does not extend this guardian-consent provision to women with intellectual disabilities. For them, their own consent remains an absolute legal requirement for an abortion.

This distinction came to the fore in *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration*, a landmark 2009 SC judgment. The SC held that a woman's right to make reproductive choices is a fundamental dimension of "personal liberty" guaranteed under Article 21. The court noted that because she suffered from mental retardation and not a mental illness, the state could not force an abortion without her consent.

Courts are also frequently forced to balance reproductive autonomy with the physical survival of the mother and the medical complexities of late-stage pregnancies.

### Guidelines on hysterectomies

The issue of consent and medical necessity in hysterectomies was addressed by the Supreme Court in *Dr Narendra Gupta v. Union of India (2023)*, which highlighted that "unnecessary hysterectomies" were being carried out on women.

# GS 3: DEFENCE

## INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 14

DEFENCE

### From Ukraine to Lebanon, 'invisible' drones are redefining asymmetric warfare

Abhinav Chakraborty  
New Delhi, June 23

A FRAGILE ceasefire prevails between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This came after months of fighting that saw the Iran-backed militia deploying a low-cost weapon to lethal effect against Israel's advanced electronic warfare systems: fibre-optic drones.

#### 'Invisible' drones

Fibre-optic drones, as the name suggests, are connected to their operators through fibre-optic cables — these are high-speed, high-strength, and lightweight network cables that transmit data as pulses of light through tiny strands of glass or plastic. This thin cable is first wound onto a spool and covered with a protective shell before being attached to a drone.

"So it's a big spool of very thin wire, almost hair-like, connected to both the drone and the operator. The entire communication is through this cable, and this thin wire pro-

vides security to the drone because no radio emissions can be picked up," Group Captain Rajiv Kumar Narang (retired), a drone systems expert and senior fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, told *The Indian Express*.

When the drone takes off, the cable begins to unwind and can reach reasonable speeds without encountering too much drag. According to Narang, the drone's information and control is managed through this thin wire, which initially allowed operation over shorter distances of about 5 km and later went up to — as per some claims — distances of even 20 to 30 km. Since these cables can transmit operational data during flight, they enable a drone operator to see their target and the surrounding environment in real time.

The Russia-Ukraine war has been the testing ground for innovation in drone warfare. Narang said that given traditional drones emit radio frequency (RF) signals and create their signatures owing to their use of GPS or radio control, they are susceptible to



A Ukrainian first-person view drone with a fibre-optic wire for communication.

jamming, detection, and fixing of position. Fibre-optic drones emerged as the solution.

#### Tackling the threat

These drones have found a new battlefield in southern Lebanon, where Hezbollah has been fighting the IDF. Reports indicate that Israel, despite its sophisticated

jamming systems, has found it tough to neutralise this threat and suffered setbacks since April, be it in the form of wounded soldiers or destroyed armoured vehicles.

Effective neutralisation is preceded by detection and tracking. According to Narang, detection requires proactive systems.

"We need to develop better radars and, of course, electro-optic systems and infrared systems. They should be able to provide real-time detection, identification, and tracking of small, slow and low flying drones," he said.

Narang said the only source for detection of a fibre-optic drone is its radar cross-section — a metric that determines how visible it is to radar. This requires highly capable radar systems and is extremely difficult with current technological levels.

In terms of neutralisation, the drone's small size and lack of RF signals pose an additional challenge besides the lack of time for detection. Drone neutralisation systems, being multi-sensor and multi-shooter systems, are becoming expensive to achieve assured neutralisation of hostile drones.

A report in *The Jerusalem Post* pointed to efforts by top Israeli defence companies to present a range of solutions to the IDF. Among them were energy-based systems, including one that utilises electromagnetic force to capture and immobilise the drone. Another proposed solution are kinetic interception systems — also called "hit-to-kill" — which destroy targets such as ballistic missiles and hostile drones using kinetic energy, that is, extreme physical force of a direct, high-velocity collision.

For now, Israeli soldiers have taken a cue out of Ukraine's playbook by using rather rudimentary techniques such as protective nets and even metal enclosures on military equipment to block these drones.

Besides, these drones also have their shortcomings. For instance, they are susceptible to bad weather owing to their light body frame. They can also stop functioning if the thin cable snaps.

#### The Indian context

India's four-day conflict with Pakistan

last May in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack also saw extensive use of drone swarms and loitering munitions. Since then, India has sought to learn from its own experience as well as other battlegrounds.

Narang believes swarms would be a "major challenge". He said: "From an Indian point of view, I think we need to think of developing better 'hard-kill' counter-drone systems." "Hard kill" refers to physically destroying the drone, whether by firing a gun, using a suicide drone, or launching a small missile.

Since jamming may not be an option against fibre-optic drones, Narang said that India could also develop Light Combat Helicopters and Light Combat Aircraft among others, as airborne counter-drone platforms. Narang also suggested greater use of AI and upgradation of munitions in detection and neutralisation alongside hybrid and mobile air defence systems to enhance accuracy and effectiveness.

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