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The Hindu Analysis

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UPSC / HPAS · GENERAL STUDIES

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WHY IN NEWS

On Friday, the Supreme Court held that the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls is **linked only to elections**, and issued notice to the Election Commission (EC), the West Bengal government and the State's Chief Electoral Officer on a plea that the State was using SIR data to strike people off welfare schemes.

SC opposes use of SIR data for non-poll tasks

The top court issues notice to the Election Commission and Bengal government after Congress leader's petition says the State is denying welfare benefits to people excluded from electoral rolls

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court stated on Friday that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is only linked to elections as a petition said the West Bengal government is using SIR data to delete names from schemes ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward Caste certifications.

Justice Joydalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Supreme Court, in its May 27 judgment in the Bihar SIR case, had made it very clear that the SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.

"The Election Commis-

Key concerns

Petition raises issues on Bengal government's use of SIR data

❶ Deletion from electoral rolls has led to serious civil consequences

❷ SIR data is being linked with PDS and other government schemes

❸ Only 38,000 of 34 lakh appeals have been heard so far; at present rate, the appellate process is likely to take nearly 21 years to complete

❹ Absence of publicly available guidelines on filing of documents, conduct of hearings and entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals



Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi, drew the court's attention to three orders passed by the West Bengal government. The petition said the State issued a notification on May 19 that purged voters must not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme for cash transfer to women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal.

On June 4, the State directed the deletion of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the basis of the outcome of the SIR. On May 14, it issued an order calling for authorities to re-verify and cancel caste certificates of names deleted from the SIR list.

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sion has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on. The EC is not a constitutional authority regarding Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 (dealing with citizenship rights) of the Constitution," Justice Bagchi

observed. The court issued notice to the EC, West Bengal government, and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State on a petition filed by Congress leader Prasenjit Bose that deletion from electoral roll has resulted in serious civil consequences extending beyond the right to vote.

Mr. Bose, represented by senior advocate Gopal

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BACKGROUND — WHAT IS THE DISPUTE

- A petition by **Congress leader Prasenjit Bose** (represented by senior advocate **Gopal Sankaranarayanan** and advocate **Neha Rathi**) alleged that West Bengal is using SIR data to **delete names from welfare schemes** ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward-Caste certifications.
- It drew the court's attention to **three State orders**: (i) **May 14** — directing authorities to re-verify and **cancel caste certificates** of names deleted from the SIR list; (ii) **May 19** — a notification that purged voters must **not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna** cash-transfer scheme for women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal; (iii) **June 4** — deletion of **Public Distribution System (PDS)** beneficiaries on the basis of the SIR outcome.
- "They have even linked the PDS to voting," Mr. Sankaranarayanan submitted, arguing deletion had consequences **far beyond the right to vote**.

THE COURT'S REASONING

- Justice **Joydalya Bagchi** — one of three judges on the Bench headed by **CJI Surya Kant** — noted that the Court's **27 May judgment in the Bihar SIR case** had made it very clear that the **SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose**, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.
- "*The Election Commission has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on*," Justice Bagchi observed.
- Crucially, the Court held the **EC is not a constitutional authority** regarding **Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12** (citizenship rights) — it cannot itself decide citizenship, and deletion from a roll cannot cascade into loss of welfare or citizenship status.

PROCEDURAL CONCERNS FLAGGED (KEY CONCERNS BOX)

- Deletion from electoral rolls has led to **serious civil consequences**; SIR data is being **linked with PDS and other government schemes**.
- Only **38,000 of 34 lakh appeals** have been heard so far; at the present rate the appellate process is likely to take **nearly 21 years** to complete.
- Absence of publicly available guidelines** on the filing of documents, issuance of notices, conduct of hearings, entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals, supply of reasoned orders and timelines for disposal.
- The petition sought **streamlining of the appellate process** before SIR tribunals, disclosure of data, publication of a standard operating procedure (SOP), and a time-bound disposal mechanism.

ANALYSIS — WHY IT MATTERS

- Establishes a firewall between **electoral administration** and **welfare entitlement / citizenship**: a name struck off a roll must not automatically strip a person of rations, pensions or caste certificates.
- Reinforces that **determining citizenship is a quasi-judicial function** under the Citizenship Act, 1955 — not a by-product of roll revision by the EC.
- Raises **due-process and federalism** questions: mass deletions without published SOPs, hearings or timelines risk arbitrary exclusion of the poor and vulnerable.

PRELIMS POINTERS

SIR of electoral rolls; Articles 9–12 (citizenship); EC's constitutional status & powers; Citizenship Act, 1955; RP Act, 1950.

MAINS ANGLE

"Delinking electoral rolls from welfare and citizenship protects the vulnerable."
Discuss the due-process safeguards needed in electoral-roll revision.

WHY IN NEWS

Manasbal Lake — the country's **deepest freshwater lake**, in central Kashmir's **Ganderbal** district — is on a path of ecological recovery, marked by the return of migratory birds between **December 2025 and January 2026**.

J&K's Mansbal lake starts hosting migratory birds again

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Manasbal Lake, the country's deepest freshwater lake in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district, is on the path of ecological recovery with the return of migratory birds.

The lake is 43-feet deep with a length and breadth of 3.5 km and 1.5 km, respectively. Locals are upbeat about the uptick in the migratory birds between December 2025 and January 2026.

"The return of migratory birds prompted the Wullar-Manasbal Development Authority (WMDA) to hold a bird watching festival in the winter. Many rare species were sighted by the birdwatchers," said Chief Executive Officer of the WMDA Ahsanul Haq Chishti.

According to official da-



Locals are upbeat about the uptick in the migratory birds in Mansbal Lake between December 2025 and January 2026. FILE PHOTO

ta, the Mansbal lake was home to more than 46 species of birds belonging to 23 families, including Mallard, White Headed Duck, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Collared Dove, Lesser Pied Kingfisher, Golden Eagle, Grey Backed Shrike, Tickell's Thrush etc.

Efforts paid off

Reviving the lake played a major role in arrival of migratory birds. "Accumulated weeds on about 7202.50

cubic meters were removed from the lake surface. "The lake with clear waters and long strips of water channels is rejuvenating," said Mr. Chisti. What has added to the health of the lake is the dredging process over an area of around 70,000 square feet, "restoring freshness, clearing channels and maintaining the lake's depth".

"Weeding operations managed to control the ex-

cessive growth of aquatic vegetation that had severely impacted water circulation and biodiversity of the lake," said Mr. Chisti.

Bilal Nasir Zargar, a wildlife photographer from Mansbal, said about five years ago, there was a dip in the lake's water level, resulting in lesser migratory birds stopping by.

"However, I have again started spotting migratory birds like Horned Grib and Long-Eared Owl and others too, especially the last winter. In the last two years, water quality has improved. I expect more migratory birds to flock. The lake, however, needs attention on multiple aspects," said Mr. Zargar, who has documented the migratory birds from the last 12 years at the lake.

Meanwhile, the WMDA has pushed for water budgeting "to know the quan-

tum of the lake's carrying capacity, volume of water currently being lifted by way of water supply schemes, natural outflows or other drawls and the surplus quantum available with the waterbody".

Water budgeting

The water budgeting will be carried out by the J&K Water Resources Regulatory Authority. "The idea is that the water ecosystem of the lake is preserved and kept at a scientifically derived level to maintain its ecology," said Mr. Chishti.

A three-pronged approach has been adopted to further improve the water quality in the lake. According to officials, a sewerage treatment plant and an integrated solid waste management plant spread over one acre of land, will treat the waste before entering into the lake.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE LAKE

- It is **43 feet deep**, with a length of **3.5 km** and breadth of **1.5 km**; locals are upbeat about the uptick in migratory birds.
- The **Wullar–Manasbal Development Authority (WMDA)** held a **bird-watching festival** in winter; many rare species were sighted, said WMDA CEO **Ahsanul Haq Chishti**.
- Official data record **46+ species across 23 families** — including Mallard, White-Headed Duck, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Collared Dove, Lesser Pied Kingfisher, Golden Eagle, Grey-Backed Shrike and Tickell's Thrush.

HOW THE REVIVAL HAPPENED

- Dredging & de-weeding:** accumulated weeds of about **7,202.5 cubic metres** were removed from the lake surface over an area of **~70,000 sq ft** — "restoring freshness, clearing channels and maintaining the lake's depth."
- Weeding controlled the **excessive growth of aquatic vegetation** that had severely impacted water circulation and biodiversity; clear waters and long strips of water channels are now rejuvenating.
- Wildlife photographer **Bilal Nasir Zargar** (documenting the lake for 12 years) noted that ~5 years ago a **dip in water level** reduced migratory-bird visits; he has now again spotted **Horned Grebe, Long-Eared Owl** and others, with water quality improving over the last two years.

WATER BUDGETING & WAY FORWARD

- The WMDA has pushed for **water budgeting** to know the lake's **carrying capacity**, the volume lifted by water-supply schemes, natural outflows/other drawls, and the surplus available with the waterbody.
- It will be carried out by the **J&K Water Resources Regulatory Authority** so the ecosystem is preserved and kept at a **scientifically derived level** to maintain its ecology.
- A **three-pronged approach:** a **sewerage treatment plant** and an **integrated solid-waste management plant** (over one acre) will **treat waste before it enters the lake**.

ANALYSIS — WHY IT MATTERS

- A model of **wetland restoration** where dredging, de-weeding and pollution interception reverse eutrophication and revive bird habitat — relevant to Wullar, Dal and other Himalayan wetlands.
- Migratory birds are a **bio-indicator** of wetland health; their return signals improved water quality and restored circulation.
- Shows the value of a **dedicated authority + regulator** combination (WMDA + Water Resources Regulatory Authority) for science-based lake management.

PRELIMS POINTERS

Manasbal = deepest freshwater lake in India; Wullar = largest freshwater lake (Ramsar site); eutrophication; bio-indicators; Central Asian Flyway.

MAINS ANGLE

Discuss community-led and science-based approaches to reviving degraded Himalayan wetlands and the role of dedicated development authorities.

WHY IN NEWS

The **Lok Sabha Speaker** has announced that the report of the inquiry committee under the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** into allegations against Justice **Yashwant Varma** (submitted on **18 May 2026**) will be tabled when Parliament reconvenes on **20 July** — even though Varma **resigned on 9 April** with immediate effect.

India's Parliament must not stage its Cadaver Synod

In January 897 CE, Rome witnessed the strangest trial in the history of the Church. Pope Stephen VI ordered the corpse of his predecessor, Pope Formosus, dug up from its grave. Formosus had been dead for about nine months. His body was dressed in papal vestments and propped upon a throne in the Lateran basilica. A trembling deacon stood beside the corpse and answered questions on its behalf. The dead pope was charged with perjury and with violating canon law. He was, unsurprisingly, found guilty. His election was declared void. His acts were annulled. The three fingers of his right hand, the fingers of consecration, were hacked off. The body was then flung into the Tiber.

History remembers this spectacle as the Cadaver Synod. It settled nothing. It disgusted Rome, provoked an insurrection, and Stephen VI himself was imprisoned and strangled within months. Successor popes reburied Formosus with honour and burned the record of the trial. The lesson has endured for centuries. A tribunal that sits in judgment over someone who no longer holds the office it can take away does not do justice. It performs theatre, and the theatre degrades the tribunal more than the accused.

An impossible impeachment
India's Parliament now stands at the edge of its own Cadaver Synod. The Lok Sabha Speaker has announced that the report of the inquiry committee constituted under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, into allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma will be tabled when Parliament reconvenes on July 20. The report was submitted on May 18, 2026. The difficulty is stark. Justice Varma resigned on April 9, with immediate effect, giving up his official residence, vehicles and amenities. His judicial salary has ceased. He has revived his enrolment with the Bar Council and may resume practice as an advocate. Whatever the Allahabad High Court website may say, the man is no longer a judge in any sense that the Constitution recognises. The question before Parliament is whether it should proceed against a judicial corpse.

Begin with first principles. The Constitution treats the conduct of judges as a subject beyond ordinary parliamentary debate. Article 121 forbids any discussion in Parliament of the conduct of a Supreme Court or High Court judge in the discharge of his duties, except upon a motion for an address praying for his removal. The bar is deliberate. The framers knew that a legislature free to debate judicial conduct at will would soon



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of India

hold judges hostage to majorities. So they permitted one exception — and one alone. Parliament may discuss a judge's conduct only when it is actually engaged in the solemn business of removing him. The discussion is incidental to removal. It has no independent existence.

Removal, in turn, presupposes an office to be vacated. Article 124(4), applied to High Court judges through Article 27(1)(b), speaks of a judge being "removed from his office." The Judges (Inquiry) Act creates elaborate machinery, a motion, an inquiry committee, a report, an address to the President, all directed to a single constitutional consequence. The Act knows no lesser penalty. It cannot censure, fine or disqualify. It can only remove. Once the judge has already left, the machinery grinds on with nothing to grip.

A judge is a constitutional functionary
Has Justice Varma left? The Supreme Court answered that question nearly half a century ago. In *Union Of India vs Shri Gopal Chandra Misra And Ors*, (1978), a Constitution Bench held that a High Court judge's resignation under the proviso to Article 217 is a unilateral constitutional act. It requires no acceptance by the President or anyone else. A judge who resigns with immediate effect severs the constitutional link at the moment of his own choosing. A judge is not a government servant whose resignation lies on some desk awaiting orders. He is a constitutional functionary who holds office by the Constitution and may relinquish it by the Constitution. Justice Varma's letter said "with immediate effect." The link snapped on April 9. That his name lingers on a website is an administrative carryover, not a statement of law.

Precedent points the same way. Justice P.D. Dinakaran resigned in 2011 while impeachment proceedings were pending; the inquiry committee was dissolved, and no report reached Parliament. When Justice Soumitra Sen resigned (2010) after the Rajya Sabha had actually adopted the removal motion, the proceedings simply ended. Parliament thereafter never took the matter up. In both cases, the institution understood that resignation extinguishes the removal jurisdiction. The Varma committee, unusually, continued its work after his resignation and submitted a sealed report after his resignation. Tabling that report as a formal record may perhaps be defended as closure of the file, but even that is strictly not necessary. The

Speaker can just inform Parliament that such a report has been received, but no further action is deemed necessary. Before Parliament proceeds further, members must demand that it be advised by the Attorney General, who must be summoned to the House. Anything beyond tabling would take Parliament into realms that no legislature has gone before.

Consider what that territory looks like. If Parliament can proceed to debate and vote upon the removal of a man who is no longer a judge, then the resignation of the judge is no barrier. Neither, logically, is retirement. Nor, indeed, is death. Every safeguard in Article 121 rests on the premise that the discussion serves a live removal. Remove that premise, and a future Parliament could constitute committees against judges who retired a decade earlier, or whose judgments displeased a later majority. It could posthumously arraign a Chief Justice for a verdict delivered in another political era. The special majority requirement would remain, but special majorities have been mustered before and will be again. Judicial independence does not depend on judges being brave on the day of judgment alone. It depends on their knowing that no legislature will hold a synod over their record after they have gone.

Close the file
None of this means that Justice Varma escapes accountability. Impeachment is not punishment. It is the removal of an unfit occupant from a constitutional office, and that purpose stands fully achieved. The office is vacant. If the burnt currency notes found at his residence disclose an offence, the criminal law applies to former judges exactly as it applies to the rest of us. Investigation, prosecution and trial remain open, and are indeed the proper forum for questions of guilt. His pension and terminal benefits raise separate statutory questions that the government may lawfully examine. What Parliament cannot do is dress the corpse in robes and conduct a trial that can end only in removing a man from an office he does not hold.

Rome eventually understood this. Pope Theodore II reinstated the ordinations of Formosus and reburied him with honour in St. Peter's Basilica. Pope John IX condemned the synod and burned its acts. The Church survived Formosus. It nearly did not survive the trial of his corpse. Parliament should table the report, note it, and close the file. Let us not dig up old corpses just for the stink.

Parliament must avoid a purposeless exercise over the Justice Yashwant Varma report

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THE HISTORICAL ANALOGY

- In **January 897 CE**, Rome held the “**Cadaver Synod**”: Pope Stephen VI had the corpse of his predecessor **Pope Formosus** exhumed, dressed in vestments and “tried” — the verdict was annulled, three fingers hacked off, the body flung into the Tiber. It settled nothing; Stephen VI was soon imprisoned and strangled, and successors reburied Formosus with honour. The point: **a trial of the departed degrades the tribunal more than the accused**.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION

- Post-resignation, Varma has given up his official residence, vehicles and amenities; his **judicial salary has ceased**; he has revived his **Bar Council enrolment** and may practise as an advocate. Whatever a court website shows, he is **no longer a judge** in any sense the Constitution recognises.
- Article 121** forbids any discussion in Parliament of a judge's conduct **except upon a motion for an address praying for removal**. Such discussion is **incidental to removal** and has no independent existence.
- Article 124(4)**, applied to High Court judges via **Article 217(1)(b)**, speaks of a judge being “removed from his office.” The Judges (Inquiry) Act's machinery — motion, committee, report, address to the President — aims at a **single consequence: removal**. It knows **no lesser penalty** (no censure, fine or disqualification). Once the judge has left, “the machinery grinds on with nothing to grip.”

PRECEDENTS & PRINCIPLE

- In **Union of India v. Shri Gopal Chandra Misra (1978)**, a Constitution Bench held that a High Court judge's resignation under the proviso to **Article 217** is a **unilateral constitutional act** requiring **no acceptance** by the President; the link is severed at the judge's own choosing.
- Justice P.D. Dinakaran (2011)** resigned while impeachment was pending — the inquiry committee was dissolved and no report reached Parliament.
- Justice Soumitra Sen (2011)** resigned after the Rajya Sabha had adopted the removal motion — the proceedings simply ended.
- Danger of proceeding: if Parliament can “remove” one who has already left, then resignation, retirement or even death would be no bar — a future majority could arraign judges who left a decade earlier or whose judgments displeased it. **Judicial independence rests on judges knowing no legislature will hold a synod over their record after they are gone**.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS NOT LOST

- Impeachment is **removal, not punishment**; the office is already vacant, so the purpose is fully achieved.
- If the **burnt currency notes** found at his residence disclose an offence, the **criminal law applies to former judges as to anyone else** — investigation, prosecution and trial are the proper forum for guilt.
- Pension and terminal benefits** raise separate statutory questions the government may lawfully examine. The author's prescription: Parliament should **table the report, note it, and close the file**.

PRELIMS POINTERS

Articles 121, 124(4), 217 & proviso; Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968; impeachment/removal procedure; Gopal Chandra Misra (1978).

MAINS ANGLE

“Resignation extinguishes removal jurisdiction, not accountability.” Examine the constitutional limits on Parliament's power over judges who have left office.

WHY IN NEWS

The **second phase of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** commits a **₹1.27 lakh crore** corpus — far outpacing Phase 1 — directed across a wide range of the electronics-manufacturing ecosystem.

Promise of chips

Chipmaking is more than a seasonal obsession in India now

The second phase of the India Semiconductor Mission's outlay far outpaces the first, with a ₹1.27 lakh crore corpus directing the government's purse on a wide range of the electronics manufacturing ecosystem. As with the first phase, the outlay is likely to be spent lavishly on select individual projects in the form of a capital subsidy (with the government shelling out a smaller share than last time's 50%), and manufacturing-linked incentives disbursed at a per-unit level once sales are done. Incremental incentive boosters have been promised for products that leverage domestic capabilities and components. The second phase promises to take forward the government's goals to make India a strategic destination for the electronics value chain, and to grow such capabilities at home in human capital and intellectual property where select countries dominate different parts. The government has long held that this will be a decades-long project, and its follow-through with a larger corpus is welcome. This industry may not become a massive employer, but in a geopolitically fraught environment, the wisdom of spending public money in these capabilities is clearer. Much of the returns on the initial chipmaking bet remains unknowable as most facilities and projects approved in the first phase are yet to begin commercial production.

Some technologies remain out of the grasp of even the most advanced economies: Dutch extreme ultraviolet lithography machines are complex, and only Japan is close to cracking the code. The prospect of India deploying investments towards such frontier technology is hard to imagine, but tantalising. Capabilities such as these create hard strategic leverage — which will in turn lead to resistance to India quickly attracting talent and developing these capabilities. The corpus is not insignificant, but advanced economies are prepared to beg, borrow and steal, with deeper pockets, to retain their spot in the pecking order. The same applies for AI, which sits on a foundation of memory and processing infrastructure whose manufacture India hopes to undertake some day. There are bright spots in India's talent ecosystem, with semiconductor engineers and designers sought worldwide amid a looming global talent shortage. Leveraging these talents and giving them worthwhile work and academic pursuits in highly technical fields is key in ecosystem-building. Else, India risks repeating its decades-old mistake of developing the West's premier technical human capital. The coming decades demand that India find its rightful spot in global chipmaking value chains. The bad news is that the capacity to inflict pain is the best deterrent against supply chain shocks. The good news is that the hard work of avoiding supply chain shocks through global competition in key areas could deliver the kind of economic boom that made the Asian Tigers who they are today.

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WHAT PHASE 2 OFFERS

- As in Phase 1, spending will be on select projects via a **capital subsidy** (with the government's share **smaller than last time's 50%**), plus **manufacturing-linked incentives** disbursed at a **per-unit level once sales are done**.
- Incremental incentive boosters** are promised for products that **leverage domestic capabilities and components**.
- Stated goals: make India a **strategic destination for the electronics value chain**, and grow capabilities at home in **human capital and intellectual property**, where select countries currently dominate different parts.

THE CASE FOR IT

- The government has long held this is a **decades-long project**; following through with a larger corpus is welcome.
- The industry **may not become a massive employer**, but in a **geopolitically fraught environment** the wisdom of spending public money on these capabilities is clearer.
- Much of the **returns remain unknowable** as most facilities/projects approved in Phase 1 are **yet to begin commercial production**.

THE HARD FRONTIER

- Some technologies stay out of reach of even advanced economies: Dutch **EUV (extreme ultraviolet) lithography** machines are highly complex, and **only Japan is close to cracking the code**. Such capability creates **hard strategic leverage**.
- Advanced economies, with **deeper pockets**, are prepared to “beg, borrow and steal” to retain their place in the pecking order — the same logic applies to **AI**, which rests on memory and processing infrastructure India hopes to build.
- India's bright spot is **talent**: its semiconductor engineers and designers are sought worldwide amid a looming global talent shortage.

ANALYSIS — WAY FORWARD

- The key to **ecosystem-building** is **retaining talent** — giving engineers worthwhile work and academic pursuits at home; else India risks repeating its **decades-old mistake of developing the West's premier technical human capital**.
- The coming decades demand India find its rightful spot in **global chipmaking value chains**.
- The **capacity to inflict pain is the best deterrent against supply-chain shocks**; the hard work of avoiding such shocks through global competition could deliver the kind of **economic boom that made the Asian Tigers**.

PRELIMS POINTERS

India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) Phase 1 & 2; EUV lithography; DLI (Design-Linked Incentive); fab / OSAT / chip design; SEMICON India.

MAINS ANGLE

Evaluate India's semiconductor strategy: subsidies vs. comparative advantage, talent retention, and strategic autonomy in critical technologies.

WHY IN NEWS

A growing section of **Kerala's youth** has been consumed by addiction to narcotic and psychotropic substances, prompting the launch of **Operation Toofan** in June to streamline the anti-drug enforcement drive.

Battling drug abuse

Kerala has shown initiative in coordinated action against cartels

For a few years now, a growing section of Kerala's youth has been consumed by a festering addiction to narcotic drugs and contraband/psychotropic substances. The signs of the State teetering towards substance abuse were apparent in the wake of the liquor ban a decade ago. But it grew to gargantuan proportions with synthetic drug cartels using digital technologies and social media to outpace law enforcement. While the COVID-19-stricken years of 2020-21 saw a drop in NDPS cases registered in the State, cases surged to 26,619 in 2022 from 5,695 in 2021. The number rose to 36,314 in 2025, alongside large-scale seizures of commercial quantities of contraband. Commercial capital Ernakulam city accounted for a substantial number. Despite efforts by multiple agencies, success has been limited. The UDF government sought to streamline the anti-drug enforcement drive by launching Operation Toofan in June, with the State police joining hands with the police forces in the southern States, central agencies, and State education, health and excise departments.

Focusing on integrated enforcement, public engagement, rehabilitation of victims and a speedy and effective prosecution, the operation has,

Focusing on integrated enforcement, public engagement, rehabilitation of victims and a speedy and effective prosecution, the operation has, until July 15, netted over 7,600 drug peddlers in some 7,100 cases, with synthetic drugs accounting for a significant share of the haul. Given that narcotics cases are often weakened by questionable forensic reliability, the issue has gained sharp focus during the ongoing campaign. The network of drug cartels is often too intricately webbed, with investigations often netting only the small fish. Besides bringing the community on board as Toofan warriors, the campaign aims to strengthen national intelligence-sharing and coordination systems under the NCORD framework, including the NIDAAN database of arrested narco-offenders. Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala is meeting Chief Ministers to solicit jointness in the operations. The States are in the process of assigning nodal officers for close coordination, with a platform in the pipeline. Since the rackets employ innovative means to recruit carriers, coordinate among themselves and carry out delivery, Kerala needs to upskill the District Anti-Narcotics Special Action Force (DANSAF) personnel at the cutting edge to bust these networks. Equally important is to strengthen cyber forensic capabilities so that neither investigation nor prosecution is found wanting in taking these cases to their logical conclusion. The crippling effects of narcotics on society are manifold, and it is never too late to build a defence against them.

The Hindu, Page 8 (Editorial) — 18 July 2026

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- Signs of the State teetering towards substance abuse appeared in the wake of the **liquor ban a decade ago**, and grew to gargantuan proportions as **synthetic-drug cartels used digital technologies and social media** to outpace law enforcement.
- NDPS cases:** after a COVID-era dip, cases surged to **26,619 in 2022** from **5,695 in 2021**, and rose to **36,314 in 2025**, alongside large-scale seizures of commercial quantities of contraband; commercial capital **Ernakulam** accounted for a substantial share.

OPERATION TOOFAN

- The State police joined hands with **police forces of southern States, central agencies**, and State **education, health and excise** departments — focusing on **integrated enforcement, public engagement, rehabilitation of victims** and speedy, effective prosecution.
- Until **15 July**, it netted over **7,600 drug peddlers** in some **7,100 cases**, with synthetic drugs a significant share of the haul.
- Because narcotics cases are often **weakened by questionable forensic reliability**, forensic strength has become a sharp focus of the campaign.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Cartel networks are **intricately webbed**, with investigations often netting only the “**small fish**.” The campaign engages the community as “**Toofan warriors**.”
- It aims to strengthen national intelligence-sharing and coordination under the **NCORD** framework, including the **NIDAAN** database of arrested narco-offenders.
- Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala** is meeting Chief Ministers to build jointness; States are assigning **nodal officers** for close coordination, with a shared platform in the pipeline.

ANALYSIS — WAY FORWARD

- Since rackets use **innovative means to recruit carriers** and coordinate delivery, Kerala must **upskill the DANSAF** (District Anti-Narcotics Special Action Force) at the cutting edge.
- Equally vital is strengthening **cyber-forensic capabilities** so neither investigation nor prosecution falls short in taking cases to their logical conclusion.
- The crippling effects of narcotics on society are manifold — and “**it is never too late to build a defence**” through enforcement, demand reduction and rehabilitation.

PRELIMS POINTERS

NDPS Act, 1985; NCORD; NIDAAN database; DANSAF; psychotropic vs. narcotic substances; Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan.

MAINS ANGLE

Discuss the multi-pronged, federal response required to combat synthetic-drug trafficking; enforcement, forensics, community and rehabilitation.

WHY IN NEWS

The **India–UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)**, which came into force earlier this month, is a good deal on exports — but its deeper worth lies in what it **obliges India to import** and the competitive confidence it demands.

A trade deal that tests India's competitive confidence

A trade agreement is usually sold on its potential for export facilitation. Its deeper worth often lies in what it obliges the country to import. The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between India and the United Kingdom, which came into force earlier this month, is a good agreement on the first count. It may prove an even better one on the second.

The first fruits lie here

Start with exports, because that is where the immediate gains lie and where they matter most. Effective July 15, nearly all of India's exports — about 99% by value — will enter the U.K. free of duty. The tariffs that fall to zero are not on the goods that fill headlines but on the goods that matter to India's workers: textiles and garments, leather and footwear, marine products, processed food, engineering items, and auto components. These are labour-intensive sectors. They employ precisely the workers India most needs to draw into productive, formal jobs. A garment unit in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, or a footwear cluster in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, competes on thin margins; a duty of 12% or 16% at the British border is often the difference between winning an order and losing it.

Hitherto, India has carried a handicap in this aspect. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Cambodia already shipped their garments into Britain duty-free while India's exports paid the tax. That gap is now closed. This is the part of the agreement that deserves to be recognised, because it bears directly on employment. Trade policy is, in the end, about jobs.

A gain of a different character deserves mention. India is the world's largest supplier of generic medicines, and Britain buys close to \$30 billion of pharmaceuticals a year. Removing the duty lets Indian generics compete on price. This



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is not a labour story but a scale one — a mature Indian industry meeting one of its largest markets on equal terms.

Another aspect of the agreement too deserves special mention. It settles an old unfairness. An Indian professional posted to Britain for a few years has had to pay into the British social security system money he would almost never see again, while still contributing at home. The Double Contribution Convention that takes effect alongside the trade pact now exempts such workers, and their employers, from that double payment for up to five years. More than 75,000 workers and some 900 companies stand to save on the order of \$600 million a year. It is money returned to Indians who go abroad to work, and the removal of a real grievance that had long irritated an otherwise warm relationship.

Opening markets, raising standards

Now to the imports — and to the part of the agreement that will make some people uncomfortable. India has agreed to bring its duty on cars built in Britain down from about 110% towards 10%, and to lower the tax on Scotch whisky from 150% towards 40% over a decade. The cuts are phased across years, capped by quotas, and drafted so that India's own passenger vehicle industry has the time to enhance its competitiveness. They are, in short, cautious. But they point in the right direction, and the direction is the point.

This is a good place to record what protection does when it is never-ending. It does not build strong industries; it preserves weak ones. An industry that is never made to face a better product never has to make one. India's own record proves this in both directions. Where its carmakers have had to compete — in small and mid-sized vehicles, at home and abroad — they have become genuinely good. Where they have

sheltered behind very high walls, they have had little reason to improve. Letting a limited number of British cars in at a lower duty will not overwhelm anyone. It will do something more useful. It will remind India's producers that the customer, not the tariff schedule, is the person they must satisfy. Exposure to competition is not a concession to a trading partner. It is a favour we Indians do ourselves. A domestic industry pushed to raise its game confers significant economic benefits over time.

Use the open door

In the end, trade agreements are living arrangements, not monuments. Signing an agreement and making it work are two different tasks, and the second is the harder and longer one. The gains promised today will become real only if India's exporters are ready, its procedures are clean, and its enterprises are informed and educated of the opportunities that trade agreements create. There is considerable scope for improvement in the utilisation rate of free trade agreements in India. The government and premier industry bodies must actively and continuously engage with small industry and enterprise associations.

India and Britain now intend to double their trade, from about \$56 billion, by the end of the decade. Whether they get there will depend less on the text signed last year than on the confidence with which India uses it. That, in the end, is what an agreement like this asks of a nation: to compete. Thiruvalluvar said it more economically than any government could. Those who strive without slackening, he wrote, will see even destiny retreat before them. An open door puts that conviction to the test. India should be glad of the test.

The views expressed are personal

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THE FIRST FRUITS — EXPORTS

- Effective **15 July**, nearly all of India's exports — about **99% by value** — enter the UK **free of duty**.
- The gains are in **labour-intensive sectors**: textiles & garments, leather & footwear, marine products, processed food, engineering items and auto components — exactly the sectors that draw workers into formal jobs. A duty of **12% or 16%** at the British border was often the difference between winning and losing an order for a Tiruppur garment unit or an Agra footwear cluster.
- This **closes the handicap** India carried while **Bangladesh, Pakistan and Cambodia** already shipped garments into Britain duty-free.

PHARMA & PROFESSIONALS

- India is the **world's largest supplier of generic medicines**, and Britain buys close to **\$30 billion** of pharmaceuticals a year; removing the duty lets Indian generics **compete on price** — a mature industry meeting a large market on equal terms.
- The **Double Contribution Convention**, effective alongside the pact, exempts Indian professionals (and their employers) from **double social-security payments for up to five years**. More than **75,000 workers and some 900 companies** stand to save on the order of **\$600 million a year** — removing a long-standing grievance.

OPENING MARKETS, RAISING STANDARDS — IMPORTS

- India agreed to cut duty on **cars built in Britain from ~110% towards 10%**, and on **Scotch whisky from 150% towards 40%**, over a **decade** — phased across years and **capped by quotas**, so India's passenger-vehicle industry has time to build competitiveness.
- The author's argument: **never-ending protection preserves weak industries**; where Indian carmakers had to compete (small/mid-sized vehicles), they became genuinely good, but where sheltered behind high walls they had little reason to improve. Exposure to competition is **a favour Indians do themselves**, not a concession to a partner.

USE THE OPEN DOOR — ANALYSIS

- Trade agreements are **living arrangements, not monuments**: signing is easy, making them work is harder. Gains are realised only if exporters are ready, procedures are clean, and small enterprises are informed — India's **FTA utilisation rate** has considerable scope for improvement.
- India and Britain intend to **double trade from about \$56 billion** by the end of the decade; whether they get there depends less on the text than on the **confidence with which India uses it**.
- Citing **Thiruvalluvar** — those who strive without slackening will see even destiny retreat before them — the CEA argues an open door puts that conviction to the test, and India should be glad of the test.

PRELIMS POINTERS

India–UK CETA; FTA vs CEPA/CECA; Double Contribution Convention; rules of origin; FTA utilisation rate; tariff quotas.

MAINS ANGLE

“FTAs are tools to force domestic competitiveness.” Critically examine the balance between protecting nascent industries and exposing them to competition.

WHY IN NEWS

The **Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)** are a **self-governing British Overseas Territory** in the South Atlantic Ocean, **claimed by both the United Kingdom and Argentina**.



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY

- Located about **480 km east of the Strait of Magellan**, north-east of the southern tip of South America.
- **Stanley**, on **East Falkland**, is the capital and largest settlement.
- Covers about **12,200 sq km**, comprising **East Falkland, West Falkland and 700+ smaller islands**.
- Terrain features **rolling hills, peatlands and indented coastlines**, with a **cool, windy maritime climate**.

HISTORY & SOVEREIGNTY

- First settled by the **French (1764)**, followed by British and Spanish control.
- **Britain re-established control in 1833**, while **Argentina continues to claim sovereignty**.
- The **1982 Falklands War**, fought for **74 days**, ended with the **restoration of British control**.
- Argentina also claims a portion of **Antarctica**; all Antarctic claims are held in abeyance under the **Antarctic Treaty (effective 1961)**.

MAP ANCHORS (FOR PRELIMS)

- **To the west:** Chile and Argentina; the **Strait of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego, Río Gallegos and Ushuaia**.
- Surrounding waters: the **Atlantic Ocean** to the east and the **Pacific Ocean** to the west of the continent.

ADDITIONAL POINTERS (IR & ECONOMY)

- In a **2013 referendum**, islanders voted overwhelmingly to **remain a British Overseas Territory** — the UK cites this as an exercise of **self-determination**, which Argentina rejects as relevant to sovereignty.
- The dispute is periodically raised at the **UN Special Committee on Decolonization**, which urges UK–Argentina negotiations.
- The economy rests on **fisheries (squid), sheep farming and wool, tourism** and prospective **offshore hydrocarbons**.
- Strategically, the islands command the **South Atlantic** near the **Drake Passage** and act as a gateway toward **Antarctica**.

PRELIMS POINTERS

British Overseas Territory; Strait of Magellan; Tierra del Fuego; Antarctic Treaty (1961); 1982 Falklands War; Islas Malvinas.

MAINS ANGLE

Sovereignty disputes and the principle of self-determination; strategic significance of the South Atlantic and Antarctic gateway.

- Q1** With reference to the Supreme Court's recent observations on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, consider the following statements:
1. The SIR outcome can be used to conclusively determine a person's citizenship.
 2. The Election Commission is a constitutional authority for adjudicating matters under Articles 9 to 12.
 3. Determination of citizenship is to be referred to the government under the Citizenship Act.

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b) The Court held SIR is linked **only to elections** and its outcome cannot determine citizenship (1 wrong). The EC is **not** a constitutional authority on Arts. 9–12 (2 wrong). It must refer citizenship matters to the government under the Citizenship Act (3 correct).

- Q2** Consider the following Articles of the Constitution of India relating to citizenship:

1. Article 9 — Persons voluntarily acquiring citizenship of a foreign State not to be citizens.
2. Article 10 — Continuance of the rights of citizenship.
3. Article 11 — Parliament to regulate the right of citizenship by law.

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d) Citizenship is dealt with in **Part II (Articles 5–11)**. All three pairings are correct: Art. 9 (voluntary foreign citizenship), Art. 10 (continuance of rights), Art. 11 (Parliament to regulate citizenship by law).

- Q3** With reference to Manasbal Lake, recently in the news, consider the following statements:

1. It is the deepest freshwater lake in India.
2. It is located in the Ganderbal district of Jammu & Kashmir.
3. It is a designated Ramsar site.

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a) Manasbal is India's **deepest freshwater lake**, in **Ganderbal** (1 & 2 correct). It is **not** a Ramsar site — Wular Lake is the Ramsar wetland in the Kashmir valley (3 wrong).

- Q4** The 'Central Asian Flyway (CAF)', occasionally seen in the news, is best described as:

- (a) A network of highways linking Central Asian republics to India (b) **A major migratory route of birds spanning areas between the Arctic and the Indian Ocean**
(c) An air corridor designated for humanitarian aid (d) A submarine optical-fibre cable network

Ans: (b) The CAF is one of the world's major **bird migratory flyways**, covering routes between the Arctic and Indian Ocean regions; India is a key range country under the CMS.

- Q5** With reference to the removal/resignation of a High Court judge, consider the following statements:

1. Article 124(4) is applied to High Court judges through Article 217(1)(b).
2. A judge's resignation under the proviso to Article 217 requires acceptance by the President.
3. In Union of India v. Gopal Chandra Misra (1978), the Supreme Court held such a resignation to be a unilateral act.

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b) Statements 1 and 3 are correct. Statement 2 is wrong — resignation under the proviso to Art. 217 is a **unilateral constitutional act** needing no acceptance by the President.

- Q6** Article 121 of the Constitution of India relates to:

- (a) **Restriction on discussion in Parliament on the conduct of judges** (b) The President's special address to Parliament
(c) Powers and duties of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (d) The procedure for passing a Money Bill

Ans: (a) Article 121 bars discussion in Parliament on the conduct of a Supreme Court/High Court judge **except** upon a motion for an address praying for the judge's removal.

1. The Phase-2 corpus is smaller than that of Phase-1.

2. It provides support through capital subsidy and manufacturing-linked incentives.

3. Extreme Ultraviolet (EUV) lithography is a mature technology widely available to developing economies.

(a) 2 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1 and 3 only

Ans: (a) Only statement 2 is correct. Phase-2's corpus (₹1.27 lakh crore) is **larger** than Phase-1 (1 wrong); EUV lithography is **highly complex and restricted** — only a few nations command it (3 wrong).

Q8 Consider the following pairs relating to India's anti-narcotics framework:

1. NCORD — Narco-Coordination Centre for intelligence-sharing

2. NIDAAN — Database of arrested narco-offenders

3. DANSAT — District Anti-Narcotics Special Action Force

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d) All three pairs are correctly matched. These mechanisms operate under the broader NDPS Act, 1985 framework for coordinated drug-law enforcement.

Q9 With reference to the India–UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), consider the following statements:

1. About 99% of India's exports by value will enter the UK duty-free.

2. The Double Contribution Convention exempts Indian professionals from double social-security payments for up to five years.

3. India will immediately reduce the import duty on British cars to zero.

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a) Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is wrong — the duty on British cars is cut from ~110% **towards 10%** (not zero), phased over a decade and **capped by quotas**.

Q10 With reference to the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), consider the following statements:

1. They lie in the South Atlantic Ocean, east of the Strait of Magellan.

2. They are administered by Argentina but claimed by the United Kingdom.

3. Antarctic claims in the region are held in abeyance under the Antarctic Treaty.

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a) Statements 1 and 3 are correct. Statement 2 is **reversed** — the islands are **administered by the UK** and **claimed by Argentina**.

ANSWER KEY AT A GLANCE

Q1 (b)

Q2 (d)

Q3 (a)

Q4 (b)

Q5 (b)

Q6 (a)

Q7 (a)

Q8 (d)

Q9 (a)

Q10 (a)

ONE-MINUTE REVISION

- ▶ **Deepest freshwater lake in India** — Manasbal (J&K); **largest** — Wular (Ramsar site).
- ▶ **Article 121** — bars discussion on a judge's conduct except on a removal motion; **Gopal Chandra Misra (1978)** — resignation under Art. 217 is unilateral.
- ▶ **ISM Phase 2 corpus** — ₹1.27 lakh crore; toughest frontier tech — **EUV lithography**.
- ▶ **Anti-drug tools** — NCORD, NIDAAN, DANSAT (under the NDPS Act, 1985).
- ▶ **India–UK CETA** — ~99% of exports duty-free; **Double Contribution Convention** exempts social-security for 5 yrs.
- ▶ **Falklands (Islas Malvinas)** — UK Overseas Territory, capital Stanley; Antarctic Treaty effective 1961.