

THE HINDU · DAILY ANALYSIS



Current Affairs Analysis

UPSC & State PSC · Editorial-based Coverage

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Onion Price Stabilisation

Delimitation & the 543 Debate

Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

India, SCO & Central Asia

Fire Safety in ICUs

Language Policy & English

Compiled by **Sapna Chauhan**

In Today's Edition

Six editorial and news themes from The Hindu, decoded for Prelims and Mains with value-addition, prelims pointers and practice.

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01 Centre Blames Middlemen as Onion Prices Hit ₹62/kg

GS III · ECONOMY

WHY IN NEWS

The Union government blamed “black marketing, hoarding and profiteering” for the surge in onion prices — ₹62/kg in the Delhi market — and announced retail sale of onions at a discounted ₹35/kg through designated mobile vans and cooperative outlets under its **price stabilisation measures**.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The essential vegetable will be sold at a subsidised **₹35 per kg** through mobile vans in cities such as Delhi, cushioning consumers against the retail spike.
- The Consumer Affairs Ministry has tasked **NAFED** and **NCCF** to sell onions via their retail stores and **Kendriya Bhandars** under the price stabilisation programme.
- Union Agriculture Minister **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** attributed the increase to **middlemen**, stressing that farmers should get a remunerative income even as consumers get produce at a reasonable rate.
- The intervention aims to break the **producer-consumer price wedge** that hoarding and long supply chains create in perishables.

Centre blames middlemen as onion prices hit ₹62 per kg

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Thursday blamed “black marketing, hoarding and profiteering” for the increasing price of onions across the country and said the essential vegetable will be made available for retail sale at a discounted price of ₹35 per kilogram through designated mobile vans in cities such as Delhi. On Thursday, the price for a kilogram of onion in the Delhi market was ₹62.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry said the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (Nafed), and the National Cooperative Consumers’ Federation of India Limited (NCCF) will sell the onions through its retail stores and the Kendriya Bhandars under the price stabilisation measures.

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said middlemen are the reason for the increase in onion prices and the farmers should get a reasonable income while the consumers should get the product at a reasonable rate.

The Hindu, Page 12 · “Centre blames middlemen as onion prices hit ₹62 per kg”

VALUE ADDITION · THE TWO COOPERATIVE ARMS

- **NAFED (1958)**: National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd — apex body for procurement & marketing of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce; one of India’s largest procurement agencies.
- **NCCF (1965)**: National Cooperative Consumers’ Federation — apex body of consumer cooperatives; functions under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**; promotes the consumer cooperative movement.

- Both are registered under the **Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002**; NCCF is managed by a Board of Directors (sanctioned strength 21) with the General Body as ultimate authority.

Aspect	Details
	The National Cooperative Consumers Federation of India (NCCF) was established on October 16, 1965, (HQ: New Delhi) as the apex body of consumer cooperatives.
Purpose	To function as the apex body of consumer cooperatives , promoting the consumer cooperative movement
Legal Status	Registered under the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002
Ministry	Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India
Function	Facilitates the voluntary formation and democratic functioning of consumer cooperatives
Structure	Management: Board of Directors
	Ultimate Authority: General Body
Board of Directors	Exercises most powers of NCCF (excluding those reserved for the General Body)
	Current Sanctioned Strength: 21

Snapshot · National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF)

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF)**: set up in 2014–15, now under the Department of Consumer Affairs; used to regulate price volatility of onion, potato and pulses through buffer stocking.
- Essential Commodities Act, 1955**: empowers the Centre to impose stock limits to curb hoarding; onion is regulated as an essential commodity when prices spike.
- Operation Greens**: targets Tomato-Onion-Potato (TOP) value chains; extended to 22 perishables (TOP to TOTAL) for transport and storage subsidies.
- Kendriya Bhandar**: a central government consumer cooperative (1963) used as a retail channel for stabilised commodities.

Syllabus Link > GS III — Issues of buffer stocks and food security; storage, transport & marketing of agricultural produce; e-technology and price stabilisation for farmers.



02 Why 543 Should Remain 543 — The Delimitation Debate

GS II · POLITY

WHY IN NEWS

With the monsoon session adjourned *sine die* on August 13, 2026 but not yet prorogued, speculation has grown that Parliament may reconvene to take up the constitutional amendment linked to **delimitation** and **women's reservation** — reopening the question of whether the Lok Sabha must expand beyond 543 seats.

THE CORE ARGUMENTS

- **Article 81** requires representation to broadly correspond to population “so far as practicable”; **Article 82** provides for readjustment of seats after every Census.
- The **42nd Amendment (1976)** froze the inter-State allocation of seats on the **1971 Census**, so that States succeeding in family planning would not be penalised; the **84th Amendment** extended the freeze until the first Census after **2026**.
- A proposed **50% pro-rata increase** preserves each State’s proportion but widens the **absolute gap**: e.g., UP rising 80→120 and Tamil Nadu 39→59 keeps the ratio yet lifts the voting-strength gap from 41 to ~61 MPs.
- Parliament votes in **absolute numbers**, not proportions – confidence motions, legislation and amendments all turn on absolute strength, so a proportional freeze does not protect political voice.
- The 1976 freeze embodied a **federal compact**; delimitation (redrawing boundaries within States) and **enlargement** (increasing total seats) are separable objectives.

Why 543 should remain 543

Days after both Houses of Parliament were adjourned sine die on August 13, 2026, the monsoon session has yet to be formally prorogued. The delay has prompted speculation that Parliament could be reconvened for another attempt at the constitutional amendment linked to delimitation and women’s reservation. Whether or not that happens, it gives urgency to a question Parliament must confront: must delimitation necessarily mean an enlargement of the Lok Sabha?

Numbers alone cannot decide

At first glance, the issue looks like arithmetic. India’s population has grown enormously since Lok Sabha seats were frozen half a century ago, so it seems natural to argue that representation must now expand correspondingly. But, constitutional design is not arithmetic alone. Article 81 requires representation broadly to correspond to population, “so far as practicable”, while Article 82 provides for readjustment after every Census. Yet, Parliament has twice modified the mechanical application of this principle when another compelling national objective was at stake. In 1976, through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, the inter-State allocation of seats was frozen on the basis of the 1971 Census so that States successful in family planning were not politically penalised for reducing population growth. The freeze was later extended by the 84th Amendment until the publication of figures from the first Census conducted after 2026. Parliament thus recognised that population matters, but it is not the only constitutional value at stake.

The government has reportedly suggested increasing every State’s representation by roughly 50%, arguing that this would leave each with the same “proportion” of Lok Sabha seats that it has today. On the face of it, that appears to answer the fear of the southern States of losing their relative position. But “proportion” tells only half the story.

Suppose Uttar Pradesh rises from 80 seats to 120, while Tamil Nadu rises from 39 to about 59. Their proportional relationship remains unchanged. Yet, the absolute gap in voting strength rises from 41 Members of Parliament (MP) to around 61. Parliament does not vote in proportions; it votes in absolute numbers. Governments are formed by numbers, and confidence motions, legislation, and constitutional amendments are decided by numbers. A 50% pro-rata increase may preserve the ratio while widening the numerical gap.

The 1976 freeze therefore embodied a federal compact: States that succeeded in population stabilisation would not see their political voice diminished for doing what national policy encouraged. That understanding should not now be thoughtlessly discarded.

There is also a misconception that delimitation and enlargement are inseparable. They are not. India has already shown that constituency boundaries can be redrawn without changing the



S.K. Quereshi
Former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of ‘An Undocumented Wonder – The Making of the Great Indian Election’

number of seats allocated to each State. The delimitation after the 2001 Census reorganised constituencies within States while maintaining the existing inter-State allocation.

That principle can be adopted again. The 2027 Census can provide the basis for redrawing constituencies within each State so that populations are more evenly distributed. boundaries can reflect demographic movement and urbanisation. None of this requires increasing the Lok Sabha beyond 543 or disturbing the present federal balance.

A continuously expanding legislature is also not an inevitable consequence of population growth. The United States House of Representatives has remained at 435 voting members (there were some temporary exceptions) for more than a century despite enormous population growth. Switzerland’s National Council has remained at 200 members since 1963. Going a step further, Hungary reduced its Parliament from 386 members to 199, while Italy reduced its Chamber of Deputies from 630 to 400. There is no democratic law requiring legislatures to grow whenever population grows.

Bigger House, weaker deliberation

There is another serious concern: what a larger House does to Parliament’s own functioning. Parliamentary time does not expand with the number of MPs. Even with 543 members, many MPs hardly get opportunities to speak, ask

questions or raise matters of public importance. A Lok Sabha enlarged by 50%, to more than 800 members, would reduce those opportunities further. It may increase representation numerically while weakening the quality of deliberation, one of Parliament’s most important functions. Indian MPs already represent the largest average constituencies among the world’s major democracies – several times the size of a U.S. congressional district or a U.K. constituency. Freeing the House at 543 while the population keeps growing means that burden only increases after delimitation, and the case for more representatives to improve accessibility is a real one. But it does not follow that the additional representatives must sit in Parliament. Most citizens approach elected representatives over roads, schools, hospitals, local services and State administration – matters substantially within the State sphere. If population growth has made constituencies unwieldy, strengthening representation at the State level is, therefore, a more sensible solution. More MLAs and smaller Assembly constituencies can bring representatives closer to citizens without continuously enlarging the national legislature.

That expansion faces none of the federal-arithmetic constraint that makes Lok Sabha expansion fraught. A larger Assembly shifts no balance between States – each answers only to its own population. Vidhan Sabhas can therefore grow to meet accessibility needs without disturbing the inter-State balance in Parliament that the 1976 freeze was designed to protect. Then comes women’s reservation.

One-third reservation for women is now being connected with delimitation, and enlargement of the Lok Sabha is presented partly as a way of accommodating women without disturbing existing political interests.

But women’s representation should not become a constitutional justification for enlarging the House. One-third of the present Lok Sabha is approximately 181 seats. Women can receive their constitutionally promised representation within the existing House of 543. The purpose of reservation is to alter who occupies

parliamentary seats, not necessarily to create hundreds of additional ones. A 50% expansion could produce a curious result: the number of women MPs would rise, which is desirable, but so would the numerical dominance of the already larger States. A reform intended to correct one representational imbalance could deepen another. Women’s representation and federal fairness are both legitimate constitutional objectives. India need not choose between them.

Preserve 543, undertake reforms

The solution is simple: retain the Lok Sabha at 543, preserve the present inter-State distribution of seats, undertake delimitation within States on updated population figures; implement women’s reservation within that structure; and expand the Vidhan Sabhas to absorb the accessibility pressure that population growth has created.

For half a century, States have pursued demographic policies knowing that successful population stabilisation would not reduce their parliamentary influence. Southern States in particular invested heavily in education, health care and family welfare and achieved fertility levels that national policy itself encouraged. To reward that success with a larger political advantage for States where population grew faster would invert the incentives the Union deliberately created.

The question, therefore, is not whether population should matter. Of course it should. The question is whether it should now mechanically rearrange the federal political balance that India consciously preserved for five decades. Twice before, Parliament amended the constitutional framework to meet the existing inter-State allocation despite population changes. There is no reason it cannot do so a third time. The uncertainty over whether Parliament may be recalled makes this more than an academic debate. Decisions taken now could shape the federal balance of the Republic for decades.

Delimitation is necessary. Women’s representation is overdue. Updated constituency boundaries are desirable. But none of these objectives requires an 800-plus-member Lok Sabha.

Sometimes constitutional wisdom lies not in making institutions larger, but in preserving the balance that has allowed them to endure; 543 has served India for more than half a century. There is a strong constitutional, federal and democratic case for letting this number remain 543.

The Hindu, Page 8 (Op-Ed) · “Why 543 should remain 543”

VALUE ADDITION · DELIMITATION IN INDIA

- **Delimitation** = redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies to reflect population changes, done by an independent **Delimitation Commission** under Article 82.
- Commissions have been constituted in **1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002**; their orders have the force of law and **cannot be questioned in any court**.
- Total Lok Sabha seats have stayed at **543** since the freeze; the 2002 exercise only redrew boundaries within States without altering inter-State allocation.

- **Women's reservation** (106th Amendment, 2023 — Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) is to take effect after delimitation following the next Census.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Seat freeze amendments: **42nd (1976)** → froze on 1971 Census; **84th (2001)** → extended freeze & allowed intra-State readjustment on 1991 figures; **87th (2003)** → shifted the readjustment base to the 2001 Census.
- The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the President and works with the **Election Commission**; its members include a retired SC judge, the CEC and State Election Commissioners.
- Southern States argue that successful population control should not **reduce** their parliamentary weight — the crux of the North–South delimitation concern.

Syllabus Link > GS II — Structure & functioning of Parliament; issues and challenges of the federal structure; representation and constitutional amendments.



03 Danger From Above — Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

GS III · DISASTER MGMT

WHY IN NEWS

A flash flood ravaged the Himalayas and foothills in Nepal, killing at least **359** people with hundreds missing. Satellite imagery analysed by global agencies including **ISRO** points to a **glacier collapse or ice-rock avalanche in Tibet**, possibly followed by a temporary river blockage and its sudden failure — a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF).

ANATOMY OF THE DISASTER

- An earthquake was initially suspected but not borne out; secondary flooding from **debris blockages upstream** remains a warning.
- Extensive damage along the **Bhote Koshi** and **Trishuli** corridors: settlements washed away, 35 motorable and 45 suspension bridges and ~40 km of roads damaged, and hydropower & monitoring infrastructure lost.
- The event recalls the **October 2023 South Lhonak Lake GLOF in Sikkim**, which released millions of tonnes of water and rock and pulverised the State's largest hydropower project (Teesta-III).
- The Indian Himalayas have nearly **7,500 glacial lakes** and about **15,000 glaciers**; assessing them needs site visits, feasible only July–September, making forecasting extremely difficult.
- Dams and hydropower projects in such terrain are often the **first casualties**; governments must enforce construction codes and invest in glacier-health tracking.

VALUE ADDITION · UNDERSTANDING GLOFS

- **What is a GLOF?** A sudden release of water from a glacial lake, usually when a natural **moraine or ice dam** fails — triggered by avalanche, rock/ice fall, earthquake, or moraine erosion.

- **Drivers:** Accelerated glacier melt from global warming enlarges lakes; unstable moraine dams and downstream human settlements/dams raise exposure.
- **Consequences:** Flash floods, loss of life, destruction of hydropower and bridges, long-term channel changes and sedimentation.
- **Response:** NDMA's **National GLOF Guidelines (2020)**, remote-sensing inventories, early-warning systems, lake-lowering (siphoning) and hazard zonation of construction.

Danger from above

Natural outbursts in hilly terrain are rising amid climate change

Disaster struck Nepal on Wednesday after a flash flood ravaged the Himalayas and foothills. As of Thursday, at least 359 people including several foreign tourists, had died, while at least 300 Indians remained missing. Satellite imagery analysed by global agencies, including the Indian Space Research Organisation, points to a glacier collapse or ice-rock avalanche in Tibet, possibly followed by a temporary river blockage and its sudden failure. An earthquake was initially suspected, but evidence has not borne it out. While the immediate flood wave has passed, there are warnings of possible secondary flooding from debris blockages upstream. There has been extensive damage along the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli corridors, with settlements washed away and hydropower and monitoring infrastructure damaged. Nepalese authorities said 35 motorable and 45 suspension bridges and about 40 kilometres of roads had been damaged.

Given that it is the monsoon, north India and the larger Himalayan regions are under the influence of a powerful Western Disturbance. It would thus not have been unreasonable to attribute the floods to these extratropical storms that can cause clouds to collide with mountains and release enormous quantities of rain at short notice. But the ubiquity of satellites is helping establish a more complex picture, pointing to col-

lapsing glaciers and recalling the October 2023 South Lhonak Lake disaster in Sikkim. There, an eponymous Himalayan glacier suddenly gave way, releasing millions of tonnes of water, debris and rock that pulverised Sikkim's largest hydropower project. Subsequent analysis showed that the resulting Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) had been years in the making. The Indian Himalayas have nearly 7,500 glacial lakes and about 15,000 glaciers, some monitored through remote sensing. Yet, fully assessing their condition requires site visits, difficult because these lakes lie in inhospitable terrain while expeditions are generally feasible only from July to September. Even with satellite monitoring, accurately forecasting a glacier collapse remains exceedingly difficult – and can be counterproductive if warnings trigger panic among residents who, often because of habit or lack of alternatives, are unlikely to move out of harm's way. Dams and hydropower projects in such terrain are often among the first casualties of these natural outbursts, which are increasing amid global warming. Beyond relief and rescue, governments must enforce construction codes, discourage settlements and large projects in known vulnerable zones, and invest in better tracking of glacier health. Such monitoring can feed long-term disaster planning into development programmes. A tragedy is frequently not the result of a conspiracy but the product of passive neglect; the latter can be addressed.

The Hindu, Page 8 (Editorial) · “Danger from above”

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **South Lhonak Lake** lies in North Sikkim; its 2023 outburst devastated the **Chungthang dam (Teesta-III)** on the Teesta river.
- **Western Disturbance:** extratropical storms originating over the Mediterranean that bring winter/monsoon-period rain to north India & the Himalaya.
- The **NDMA** is the apex disaster body chaired by the Prime Minister under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
- Bhote Koshi and Trishuli are trans-boundary rivers of the **Gandaki/Kosi** Himalayan system.

Syllabus Link > GS III — Disaster and disaster management; climate change impacts on the cryosphere; infrastructure and vulnerable zones. (A ready Mains question on this theme appears in the Practice Arena.)



04 India's Return to its Central Asian Neighbourhood

GS II · IR

WHY IN NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to travel to Central Asia – a state visit to **Uzbekistan** followed by the meeting of Heads of State of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** in the Kyrgyz capital **Bishkek** (formerly Frunze) – reaffirming India's engagement with a strategically vital region.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- Central Asia lies landlocked between two giants, **Russia and China**; India shares deep **civilisational links** in culture, religion, language and architecture despite the absence of overland connectivity.
- India and **Tajikistan** are separated only by the narrow **Wakhan Corridor** in Afghanistan – India is part of the Eurasian landmass continuum.
- Mr. Modi's **2015 visit** to all five Central Asian republics was historic; in **2017** India joined the SCO as a full member (alongside Pakistan).
- From the “**Shanghai Five**” (1996), the SCO in its 25th year has grown to **10 members, 15 dialogue partners and two observers**; India's engagement is driven by geography, not ideology.
- Within SCO chambers, negotiating against a **China–Pakistan dyad** is demanding but essential to protect India's interests on connectivity and counter-terrorism.

VALUE ADDITION · THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION

- **Nature:** A Eurasian intergovernmental organisation for economic cooperation and regional security; addresses the “three evils” – terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **Origin:** “Shanghai Five” (1996: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan); Uzbekistan joined in **2001**, forming the SCO.
- **10 Members:** China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Iran, Belarus. **India & Pakistan joined in 2017.**
- **Observers:** Afghanistan, Mongolia. **Dialogue partners** include Turkey, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Azerbaijan. **Official languages:** Russian and Chinese.

India's return to its Central Asian neighbourhood

P rime Minister Narendra Modi is set to travel to Central Asia in the next few days, the first part of call being a state visit to Uzbekistan, followed by participation in the meeting of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, called Frunze in Soviet times. The change of names is not just symbolic. It represents the birth of a new region.

Central Asia is an evocative moniker. The region lies landlocked, situated between two giants, Russia and China. In most of its countries, the post 1991 generation has largely taken over, engaged in finding a new internal equilibrium. Islam is the main religion, but does not define identity and is therefore not a political project. The fight against radicalisation and terrorism is uncompromising. Occasional catastrophes such as the devastating Grosus City Hall terror attack in Moscow in 2024, China's constant fear of spread of radicalisation in the border regions and export of instability and extremist ideology from Afghanistan are everyday reminders of the challenges.

In Central Asia, there are a multitude of ethnicities, languages, geographies and resource endowments. These influence domestic and foreign policy choices, with Turkmenistan practising rigorous neutrality. Relations among countries are complicated by legacy disputes over borders, water resources and overlapping ethnicities. Turkey and Iran are dominant influences, while the United States and the European Union are working their way in as Russia's hold weakens and China's grows.

Mr. Modi's 2015 visit to all five Central Asian countries was historic. It marked the end of an unstated Indian policy of deferring to Russia in its periphery – politely keeping away. In 2017, India was welcomed into the SCO as a full member by Russia, as Pakistan was, by China. To mark the 30 years of their independence/diplomatic ties, India



Pankaj Saran
Former Deputy
National Security
Adviser, Ambassador
and Convenor,
NatStrat

The Prime Minister's visit is an opportunity for India to deepen its strategic presence, expand economic ties and strengthen its diplomatic influence

made an unprecedented gesture of inviting all Central Asian leaders as chief guests for the Republic Day in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the event to be held only virtually, but without it leading to the creation of high-level mechanisms for cooperation, including the India-Central Asia Dialogue.

Beyond geography

If South Asia and West Asia, not to speak of East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are India's neighbourhoods, Central Asia is no less. A lack of overland connectivity does not take away from the civilisational links India has with the region – in culture, religion, language and architecture. Geographically, India and Tajikistan are separated only by the narrow Wakhan corridor that lies in Afghanistan. India is part of the continuum that is the Eurasian landmass.

Pakistan, a historically new piece in the equation, seeks to usurp the historical lineage based on religious affinity. Its tactic to cut India off, physically and otherwise, from these historical connections, like its other India-centric gambits, is, as anecdotal evidence shows, doomed to failure. Yet, India must not allow this to succeed. Countries of the region are today looking beyond Russia and China for partners in their socio-economic development. India's lived experience as a plural, moderate and democratic society is admired not feared in the region.

It is against this background that Mr. Modi's decision to go back to the region must be welcomed. India should build upon the foundations to consolidate its rightful place in the region, whether in the economic, trade, defence, natural resources, technology spheres or in softer areas such as cultural, educational, health and tourism exchanges. The choice of a state visit to Uzbekistan is consistent with the steady improvement of relations under President Mirziyoyev since 2016. It is among the most

dynamic countries of the region, and most forward in the diversification of its foreign policy. Any Indian visitor to Tashkent, Samarkand or Bukhara will vouch for the empathy and resonance between the two peoples.

There are also hardosed reasons – Uzbekistan has been uncompromising in its fight against terrorism and extremism. Its intimate knowledge of Afghanistan, and pragmatic approach towards the Taliban, are of key importance to India. India has had detailed discussions with it on alternative rail and road connectivity routes through Iran and Afghanistan which need to be revisited in the light of recent developments in these countries.

India and the SCO

Starting from the small beginnings of the “Shanghai Five” in 1996, the SCO, in its 25th anniversary, has grown to 10 members, 15 dialogue partners and two observers. With the exception of 2024, Mr. Modi has been a regular participant in SCO Heads of States meetings. India's SCO engagement is driven by geography, not ideology. Within the SCO chambers, negotiating against a China-Pakistan dyad is demanding but essential. India has kept its head above the swamp by suggesting several ideas to enhance cooperation in the economic, technological and civilisational fields. In Tianjin last year, Mr. Modi put forward the vision of security, connectivity, and opportunity for the SCO. In the instant case, for a country as overwhelmingly dependent on China as Kyrgyzstan, the SCO, and India in particular, offers a valuable geopolitical lifeline.

Taken together with his visits to the Indian Ocean Region last month, Mr. Modi would have traversed far-flung corners of India's maritime and continental neighbourhood in quick succession reflecting India's geostrategic imperatives and opportunities.



Central Asia — the five republics between Russia, China, Iran and Afghanistan

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **RATS** (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure) is the SCO's security arm, headquartered in Tashkent.
- **Connectivity for India:** INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) and **Chabahar port** in Iran offer overland access to Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
- **Ashgabat Agreement** (India joined 2018) links Central Asia with the Persian Gulf; India's "**Connect Central Asia**" policy dates to 2012.
- The **Wakhan Corridor** is a narrow strip of Afghanistan separating Tajikistan from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Syllabus Link > GS II — India and its neighbourhood; bilateral, regional and global groupings involving India; effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.



05 New-Age Fires — Fire Safety in ICUs

GS III · DISASTER MGMT

WHY IN NEWS

Back-to-back fire accidents at neonatal ICUs in **Amravati (Maharashtra)** and **Chhindwara (Madhya Pradesh)** claimed the most vulnerable — newborns. India's fire risk has shifted from industry to **hospitals, hotels and homes**, with **electrical fires** now predominant.

KEY CONCERNS

- ICUs are **oxygen-rich, sealed compartments** where smoke fills up rapidly; in an NICU, patients cannot self-evacuate, making evacuation drills essential.
- A best-case setup needs **three independent exits** (two allowing horizontal evacuation), automatic sprinklers, independent power lines, oxygen-cylinder bed supports and fire drills every two years.

- Post-Delhi-NICU fire, the **National Neonatology Forum** sought mandatory fire-safety certification, power audits, addressable alarms and an evacuation protocol — now **RACE** (Rescue, Alarm, Confine, Extinguish/Evacuate).
- The **2026 National Guidelines on Fire and Life Safety in Healthcare Facilities** offer a starting point for ICU-NICU safety.
- A hidden risk is **electrical harmonics**: NICU electronics draw distorted current that silently overheats neutral wiring and transformers without tripping a breaker — a largely unaudited factor behind “short-circuit” blazes.

VALUE ADDITION · FIRE & LIFE SAFETY FRAMEWORK

- **National Building Code (NBC) 2016** (by BIS) — Part 4 lays down fire & life-safety norms: exits, compartmentation, sprinklers and detection for institutional buildings.
- **RACE protocol**: Rescue → Alarm → Confine → Extinguish/Evacuate — the standard sequence for a hospital fire response.
- **Electrical harmonics**: distorted currents from electronic loads that degrade wiring — addressed by power-quality audits, not ordinary breakers.
- Hospitals are “institutional occupancies” requiring the strictest fire clearance, yet enforcement gaps persist across States.

New-age fires

Fire accidents in ICUs need better and more evacuation facilities

Not too long ago, India's fire accidents typically occurred in industrial facilities, large offices, mass gatherings, firecracker units and railway compartments, caused by faulty machinery, weak safety procedures and careless use of flammable materials. While these risks persist, what has got added to the country's poor record in fire safety in the last 15 years or so is residential buildings, hotels and hospitals, especially Intensive Care Units (ICU). Electrical fires now seem predominant, often caused by increased appliance use, overloaded electrical systems and poor maintenance. ICUs are especially vulnerable with their oxygen-rich environments. This month, back-to-back accidents at neonatal ICUs in Amravati, Maharashtra, and Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, claimed the most vulnerable: newborn babies. The Amravati fire was put out in 30 minutes, but the smoke was too much for the three babies admitted because of complications. A faulty ventilator is suspected to be the cause. In the NICU at Chhindwara District Hospital, a short circuit in a warmer triggered a fire and three babies, just days old, suffered burns. Over the past 15 years, ICU fires, including the one in Jhansi in 2024, in which 18 newborns died, have not served as a wake-up call. The Amravati fire shared many features with previous incidents.

Perhaps the best way to respond to these new-age fires would be to treat ICU accidents as a distinct category. ICUs are sealed compartments where smoke fills up very quickly. In an NICU, where patients cannot self-evacuate, evacuation drills are essential. A best-case setup would have three independent exits, with at least two allowing horizontal evacuation, automatic sprinklers, independent power lines for large equipment, oxygen cylinder bed supports, and fire drills every two years. A well-designed ICU also locates oxygen outlets away from sockets. Following a Delhi NICU fire, the National Neonatology Forum called for mandatory fire safety certification for NICU-equipped hospitals, regular power audits, analogue addressable alarms, and an evacuation protocol — now RACE or Rescue, Alarm, Confine, Extinguish/Evacuate. The 2026 National Guidelines on Fire and Life Safety in Healthcare Facilities can be a useful starting point for ICU-NICU safety. Beyond all this lies an issue in power quality: electrical harmonics. NICU equipment is packed with electronic components that draw distorted current, which can silently overheat neutral wiring, transformers, and loose connections without tripping a breaker. Post-fire reports citing generic “short circuits” or “technical faults” may well be missing this harmonic-driven degradation, a largely unaudited risk factor.

The Hindu, Page 8 (Editorial) · “New-age fires”

PRELIMS POINTERS

- The **NBC 2016** is a recommendatory code by the **Bureau of Indian Standards**; States adopt it through local building bye-laws.

- Fire services are a **State subject** (State List, Entry 6 — public health & sanitation); the **NDMA** issues advisory hospital-safety guidelines.
- Oxygen enrichment lowers the ignition threshold — the reason ICU/NICU wards demand special segregation of oxygen outlets from electrical sockets.

Syllabus Link › GS III — Disaster and disaster management; GS II — issues relating to health governance and regulatory enforcement.



06 Is English a Foreign Language in India?

GS II · POLITY

WHY IN NEWS

While hearing challenges to the CBSE's **three-language formula** — which mandates that two of the three languages be native Indian languages, a category that excludes English — the **Supreme Court** wondered whether it is correct to treat English as a “non-indigenous” language given its long history and role as a link language in governance and higher education.

THE DEBATE

- Macaulay's Minute is relatively recent (**1835**); the East India Company had begun using English in India almost **230 years earlier**, with interaction intensifying through the 18th century.
- In the 19th century, English governors in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras insisted on teaching children in **native/regional languages**.
- Per the **2011 Census**, about **10%** of Indians speak English, and the share is rising with social and geographical mobility.
- Hindi has been “gulping” other languages — some **56 languages** are shown as subsets of Hindi in the Census, reflecting the state's desire for linguistic unity.
- Example: **Pawri**, spoken by the Pawra Adivasi community on the Maharashtra–MP border, is counted under Hindi though its speakers do not understand Hindi — as with Tamil, Kannada and Marathi grouped anomalously.
- Historically India produced books in Sanskrit (6th–8th c.), Persian (15th–16th c.) and, today, **more books in English than England does**.

VALUE ADDITION · LANGUAGE POLICY ARCHITECTURE

- **Three-language formula**: originated with the **Kothari Commission (1964–66)** and the National Policy on Education 1968; reiterated in **NEP 2020** with flexibility and no language imposed on any State.
- **Eighth Schedule** lists **22 scheduled languages**; English is **not** in the Eighth Schedule but is an **associate official language** of the Union.
- **Articles 343–351** govern the Union's official language (Hindi in Devanagari) and the promotion of languages; the **Official Languages Act, 1963** allows continued use of English for official purposes.

- India recognises **classical languages** (Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia and others) with special funding.

Is English a foreign language in India?

PARLEY

The Supreme Court has been discussing language in the month of the hearing challenges to the CBI's three language formula, which mandates that two of the three languages must be native Indian languages, a category that does not include English. The top court had wondered whether it was correct to treat English as a "non-indigenous" language, given its long history in the country, and its role as a link language in governance and higher education. So should English be considered a foreign language in India? Apoorv and Ganesh discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Prachi Jethani**.

Is English a foreign language in India?

Apoorv: No. It came from outside the geography that we define as India now. But it has been Indianised. We cannot now say that English is foreign to the soil because it's being used in different forms and for different purposes by people across India.

Ganesh: Deeply Hindi and English are born of the same Indo-European language family. One part of that family came to us 3,000 years ago that was Sanskrit and one of the descendants of Sanskrit is Hindi. Another part came through Europe 400 years ago, in the 17th century. So, they both belong to the same root language, and both of them have come to us at different times. In fact, the only major indigenous language in India is Tamil as it does not come from outside. But for that reason, we cannot impose Tamil on all students. Similarly, we cannot impose English or Hindi. So in India, the language question cannot simply be seen in terms of which is foreign, which is indigenous.

The history of English in India includes both imperialism and the freedom movement. Marathi and Gandhi. How has this complicated the issue?

GB: Marathi's minute is relatively recent, dated 1851. The East India Company had started using English in India almost 250 years before that. The interaction between English and other languages started in the 17th century and intensified during the 18th century. In the 19th century, the English government in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras insisted on teaching children in native languages, that is, the regional languages. Elphinstone very clearly gave written instructions to teach children in Gujarati and Marathi in the Bombay presidency. But by 1855, the East India Company was thinking of how to bring in legislation to replace Persian, which had been kind of a national language connecting India for several centuries, and that is when Marathi came in.

AP: English came as a language of traders and

Apoorv: We cannot treat English as a simple imposition on Indians. Indians adopted it, domesticated it, and then used it against those who had colonised India. It became a language of liberation for many communities.

Apoorv: And

GB: The rise of English in India is not at all a clear mirror as far as language is concerned. For example, if a language is spoken by less than 10,000 persons, the Census says it is not a language. Then, if you look at how many individuals are studying in universities in India, the total figure at any given time in the last 10 years would be about four crore. Each one of them knows English as a second language because English is the language of higher education, and yet the Census does not reflect those figures.

Hindi has been going over languages. In the Census itself, some 50 other languages are included as subsets of Hindi. There is a language called **Parsi** which is spoken by the Parsi community on the border of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, who do not understand Hindi at all. Yet that is shown as a subset of Hindi. It is the same with Tamil, Kannada and Marathi. All smaller languages are being shown as subsets of larger languages and that comes from the state's desire to have some kind of linguistic unity.

India is made of many languages and that is the fundamental truth. Just last week, in Maharashtra, rickshaw drivers and taxi drivers were on strike because there is a compulsion that they have to pass an examination in Marathi, based on grammar. Why would a taxi driver need Marathi grammar? He has functional Marathi. Indians speak a lot of functional languages. They speak English, not as the British do, but as a functional language. They speak Hindi all over India as a functional language. And I think we should never forget the beauty of having multiple functional languages in our pockets, in our hearts, and in our brains.

But there is also a vested interest in English in India from English language publishers and English medium schools. They but for the continuance of English partly out of commercial

interest. I don't agree with that.

AP: On the CBI and their stress on a three language formula, and the insistence of policymakers that they want children to learn the mother tongue – all this is farcical because people know that all these policymakers are sending their own children to English medium schools and that English is social capital, cultural capital, and capital in real terms.

Apoorv: And

GB: There's also a significant amount of Indian literature written in English today, including works in translation. And of course, films and the internet freely mix languages. How does that change the debate?

GB: In the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, many Indians produced books in Sanskrit. Then, in the 15th and 16th centuries, India was producing more books in Persian. Today, India is producing more books in English than they produce in English. But not dead languages have still survived.

So the production of books, movies, and songs in a certain language is not necessarily an indication of a profound fundamental cultural shift. There are just two small questions to be asked to anybody who is writing English fiction or non-fiction. The first is, when that person gives into any spiritual space, is their prayer also in English? The second question is, is the audience only Indian or is it a global audience? The answers to these two questions will reveal the exact significance of the shift.

By the way, the English came here and had an impact on many things. But Indian music remains Indian music. We have internalised but not replaced. So, our cultural reception of English culture has been cultural, granular, and is not wholesale as in Australia, U.S. or in Canada where native cultures were wiped out.

AP: I would disagree with that. For example, in my daughter's generation or the generation after, their first love is music through English and not "Indian music". I don't see any problem in that and I don't see them as culturally uprooted. Would we say that this young generation or those bands which sing only in English are not culturally Indian? It's a very complex concept and the whole anxiety about maintaining nativity and creating a difference between what is indigenous and what is foreign is also problematic. Therefore, I would like to argue that English has made India its home. Those who want to declare that it's a foreign language, in fact, want to hide the fact that Hindi colonises other languages and so do Tamil and other languages, when they create these as meta languages and others as sub languages.

The Hindu, Page 9 (Parley) - "Is English a foreign language in India?"

PRELIMS POINTERS

- The **Eighth Schedule** began with 14 languages; now **22** (Sindhi, Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santhali added over time).
- Under **Article 344**, an Official Language Commission and a Parliamentary Committee review the use of Hindi.
- Article 29-30** protect the linguistic rights of minorities and their right to conserve their language and script.

Syllabus Link > GS II — Indian Constitution, provisions and government policies; GS I — diversity of India and salient features of Indian society.

Practice Arena

MAINS · PRELIMS · QUICK REVISION

MAINS — MODEL ANSWER PRACTICE

MAINS QUESTION 1 · GS III · DISASTER MANAGEMENT

“Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) are emerging as a significant disaster risk in the Himalayan region due to climate change and increasing human interventions.” Discuss the causes, consequences and measures required to strengthen India’s preparedness against GLOFs. (250 words | 15 Marks)

“जलवायु परिवर्तन और बढ़ते मानवीय हस्तक्षेप के कारण हिमालयी क्षेत्र में हिमनद झील विस्फोट बाढ़ (GLOFs) एक गम्भीर आपदा जोखिम के रूप में उभर रही है।” इसके कारणों, प्रभावों तथा GLOF से निपटने हेतु भारत की आपदा-पूर्व तैयारी को सुदृढ़ करने के उपायों की चर्चा कीजिए। (250 शब्द | 15 अंक)

Approach > Define a GLOF; give causes (glacier melt from warming, moraine-dam failure, avalanche/earthquake triggers, dam & settlement pressure); consequences (loss of life, hydropower & bridge destruction, channel change — cite South Lhonak 2023 & the recent Nepal flood); measures (NDMA GLOF Guidelines 2020, remote-sensing inventories, early-warning, lake-lowering, hazard zonation, transboundary data-sharing). Conclude on climate-resilient Himalayan development.

MAINS QUESTION 2 · GS II · POLITY & FEDERALISM

The debate over whether the Lok Sabha should be enlarged after the freeze ends reflects a tension between representational equality and the federal compact of 1971. In this context, critically examine the constitutional and federal implications of delimitation in India. (250 words | 15 Marks)

लोकसभा के आकार में वृद्धि संबंधी बहस प्रतिनिधित्व की समानता और 1971 के संघीय समझौते के बीच तनाव को दर्शाती है। इस संदर्भ में, भारत में परिसीमन के सांविधानिक और संघीय निहितार्थों का आलोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए। (250 शब्द | 15 अंक)

Approach > Explain Articles 81 & 82 and the 42nd/84th/87th Amendment freeze on the 1971 Census; present the case for enlargement (population growth, representational equality) and against (absolute-number gap, penalising States that curbed population, North–South balance); distinguish delimitation from enlargement; note women’s reservation linkage; conclude with a balanced, consensus-based path.

PRELIMS — 10 MCQS

Q1. With reference to NAFED and NCCF, consider the following statements:

1. Both are registered under the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002.
2. NCCF functions under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
3. NAFED is the apex body of consumer cooperatives in India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Q2. The Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF), often in the news, is administered by the:

- (a) Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare
- (b) Department of Consumer Affairs
- (c) Reserve Bank of India
- (d) NITI Aayog

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding delimitation of Lok Sabha seats:

1. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment froze inter-State seat allocation on the basis of the 1971 Census.
2. Orders of a Delimitation Commission can be challenged before the Supreme Court.
3. Article 82 provides for readjustment of seats after every Census.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

- Q4.** The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which provides reservation for women in legislatures, was enacted through which Constitutional Amendment?
- (a) 103rd Amendment (b) 105th Amendment (c) 106th Amendment (d) 101st Amendment
- Q5.** The South Lhonak Lake, associated with a major 2023 Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, is located in:
- (a) Uttarakhand (b) Himachal Pradesh (c) Sikkim (d) Arunachal Pradesh
- Q6.** Consider the following about the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):
1. It was constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
 2. It is chaired by the Prime Minister of India.
 3. It issued the National Guidelines on Glacial Lake Outburst Floods.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Q7.** With reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), consider the following statements:
1. It evolved from the “Shanghai Five” grouping formed in 1996.
 2. India and Pakistan became full members in 2017.
 3. Its official languages are Russian and English.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Q8.** The Wakhan Corridor, sometimes in the news, separates India’s reach to which Central Asian country from Pakistan-administered territory?
- (a) Uzbekistan (b) Turkmenistan (c) Kazakhstan (d) Tajikistan
- Q9.** With reference to India’s language framework, consider the following statements:
1. English is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
 2. The three-language formula traces its origin to the Kothari Commission.
 3. The Eighth Schedule currently lists 22 languages.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
- Q10.** The National Building Code (NBC), which prescribes fire and life-safety norms for buildings, is published by:
- (a) National Disaster Management Authority
(b) Bureau of Indian Standards
(c) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
(d) Central Public Works Department

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 – (a) 1 and 2 only. NAFED is the apex body of *agricultural marketing* cooperatives, not consumer cooperatives (that is NCCF); statement 3 is wrong.

Q2 – (b) Department of Consumer Affairs. The PSF, earlier under Agriculture, was transferred to the Department of Consumer Affairs to manage price volatility of onion, potato and pulses.

- Q3 – (a) 1 and 3 only.** Delimitation Commission orders have the force of law and *cannot* be questioned before any court; statement 2 is wrong.
- Q4 – (c) 106th Amendment.** The 106th Amendment (2023) – Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam – reserves one-third of seats for women, to apply after delimitation.
- Q5 – (c) Sikkim.** The South Lhonak Lake GLOF (October 2023) devastated the Teesta-III (Chungthang) hydropower project in North Sikkim.
- Q6 – (d) 1, 2 and 3.** All statements are correct; the NDMA, chaired by the PM under the DM Act 2005, issued the 2020 GLOF guidelines.
- Q7 – (a) 1 and 2 only.** The SCO's official languages are Russian and Chinese, not English; statement 3 is wrong.
- Q8 – (d) Tajikistan.** The narrow Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan separates India from Tajikistan.
- Q9 – (b) 2 and 3 only.** English is *not* in the Eighth Schedule (it is an associate official language); statement 1 is wrong.
- Q10 – (b) Bureau of Indian Standards.** The NBC 2016 is published by the BIS as a recommendatory code adopted via local bye-laws.

QUICK REVISION RECAP · PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS

- **NAFED (1958)** = agricultural marketing apex · **NCCF (1965)** = consumer cooperatives apex · both under the **Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002**.
- **Seat freeze:** 42nd Amendment (1971 Census) → 84th (extended) → 87th (readjustment on 2001 Census); total Lok Sabha seats fixed at **543**.
- **GLOF trigger:** moraine/ice-dam failure · **South Lhonak (Sikkim, 2023)** hit **Teesta-III** · NDMA GLOF guidelines **2020**.
- **SCO:** Shanghai Five 1996 → SCO 2001 (Uzbekistan) · India & Pakistan **2017** · 10 members · languages **Russian & Chinese** · security arm **RATS**.
- **Connectivity to Central Asia:** **INSTC** + **Chabahar** + **Ashgabat Agreement**; **Wakhan Corridor** separates India from Tajikistan.
- **Fire safety:** **NBC 2016** by **BIS** · **RACE** protocol · fire services a **State subject** · oxygen enrichment lowers ignition threshold.
- **Language:** **Eighth Schedule** = **22 languages** (English excluded) · three-language formula from **Kothari Commission** · Official Languages Act **1963**.
- **Price control tools:** **Price Stabilisation Fund** (Dept of Consumer Affairs) · **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** for stock limits · **Operation Greens** (TOP → TOTAL).
- **Delimitation:** Commission's orders have the **force of law** and cannot be challenged in court · women's reservation = **106th Amendment (2023)**, effective after delimitation.
- **Himalayan cryosphere:** Indian Himalayas hold ~**7,500 glacial lakes** and ~**15,000 glaciers** · the 2026 Nepal flood traced to a Tibet glacier collapse via **ISRO** satellite imagery.
- **English in India:** ~**10%** speak English (2011 Census) · an **associate official language** of the Union · the three-language formula is under challenge before the **Supreme Court**.
- **SCO institutions:** summit of **Heads of State** is the apex body · addresses the “three evils” – **terrorism, separatism, extremism** · 2025 marked its **25th anniversary**.

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