DISCIPLINE

Important Issues of the Day

- **Model Code of Conduct – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **Hot air – Page No. 6, GS 3**
- **Indian Scientific Service – Page No. 6, GS 3**
- **UAE-India – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **AI Impact Summit – Page No.12 , GS 3**
- **APEDA – Prelims**
- **Exercise Vayushakti – Prelims**

Poll sop

The ECI's proven bias on model code seems to have forced T.N.'s hand

When welfare measures to uplift underprivileged sections are deployed as a political tool in an election year it raises the question whether it is an instance of affirmative action or merely a cynical device that plays out as a poll-eve incentive. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's surgical action of crediting ₹5,000 each in the bank accounts of over 1.31 crore women beneficiaries of the *Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam* (KMUT), triggers exactly this uncomfortable thought. The KMUT, in operation since September 2023, envisages a monthly direct transfer of ₹1,000 "rights grant" recognising the dignity and contribution of women heads of families. Notably 32% of its beneficiaries are SC/STs. Citing political and legal apprehensions that the scheme, which is being projected as a rights-based social entitlement and not as a populist freebie, could be suspended prior to the Assembly election, Mr. Stalin chose to give it the force of a political multiplier by disbursing ₹3,000 each for February, March and April in one go. He also introduced a novel "summer assistance" of ₹2,000. Mr. Stalin's concerns about the possibility of the scheme being stopped after the announcement of the election schedule are not unwarranted. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has not been consistent in its interpretation of what constitutes a violation of the Model Code of Conduct. A recent precedent for voter incentivisation emerged during the 2025 Bihar elections, when the JD(U)-BJP coalition deposited ₹10,000 each to one crore women under the *Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana*. The ECI turned a blind eye to what was widely seen as an attempt to buy votes for the ruling coalition with funds from the exchequer. Previously, in Tamil Nadu, the ECI had suspended a cash support scheme for farmers (2004) and distribution of free colour television sets (2011). Adoption of double standards by the ECI when it comes to adjudication of such issues has become common.

The overall outgo from the exchequer on a single day exceeded ₹6,550 crore including an unplanned expenditure of ₹2,620 crore for the summer component. Offering cash benefits through government schemes on poll eve does not guarantee absolute voter loyalty. But it certainly places the ruling party in the pole position to politically leverage the exchequer. Unless the ECI plays fair in the implementation of the model code, it is difficult to fault such measures by those in power. At least, in the case of Tamil Nadu, this was an ongoing scheme since 2023, and only the newly added summer assistance raises a political stink. But, in the context of what the BJP-led coalition did in Bihar, this is innocuous.

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- The MCC is a consensus document. The political parties have themselves agreed to keep their conduct during elections in check and to work within the Code.

- It helps the EC in keeping with the mandate it has been given under Article 324 of the Constitution, which gives it the power to supervise and conduct free and fair elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures.

- The MCC is operational from the date on which the election schedule is announced until the date of the result announcement.

- The government cannot announce any financial grants, promise construction of roads or other facilities, and make any ad hoc appointments in government or public undertaking during the time the Code is in force.

- Though the MCC does not have any statutory backing, it has come to acquire strength in the past decade because of its strict enforcement by the EC.

- Certain provisions of the MCC may be enforced by invoking corresponding provisions in other statutes such as the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973, and Representation of Peoples's Act (RPA) 1951.

- Kerala was the first state to adopt a code of conduct for elections. In 1960, before the Assembly elections in the state, the administration prepared a draft code covering important aspects of electioneering such as processions, political rallies, and speeches.

- In 1974, the ECI released a formal MCC. It also set up bureaucratic bodies at the district level to oversee its implementation. Before 1977, MCC guided only political parties and candidates.

- In 1979, the Election Commission learned of ruling parties misusing power like monopolising public spaces and using public money for advertisement. The Election Commission revised MCC to include ruling political parties.

Consider the following statements:

1. In the election for Lok Sabha or State Assembly, the winning candidate must get at least 50 percent of the votes polled, to be declared elected.
2. According to the provisions laid down in the Constitution of India, in Lok Sabha, the Speaker's post goes to the majority party and the Deputy Speaker's to the Opposition.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

"The Model Code of Conduct is a moral instrument without statutory backing, yet it significantly shapes India's electoral democracy."
Critically examine the constitutional basis, enforceability, and challenges associated with the Model Code of Conduct. (250 words)

"मॉडल आचार संहिता एक गैर-सांविधिक नैतिक साधन है, फिर भी यह भारत के चुनावी लोकतंत्र को गहराई से प्रभावित करती है।"
मॉडल आचार संहिता के संवैधानिक आधार, प्रवर्तन क्षमता तथा उससे जुड़ी चुनौतियों का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

Hot air

Donald Trump is trying to turn back the clock on environmental issues

As part of his continuing assault on science, U.S. President Donald Trump revoked a foundational guideline of the American environment regulator that allowed it to control the transportation sector's emission of greenhouse gases. The repeal of the 'endangerment finding' was the final, formal blow following a series of actions by the U.S.'s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in weakening Obama-era administration fuel economy and greenhouse gas (GHG) standards for vehicle model years 2021-26 and loosening fuel efficiency norms. The 'endangerment finding' emerged after the US Supreme Court's 2007 decision, in *Massachusetts vs EPA*, which held that greenhouse gases qualify as "air pollutants" and required the EPA to determine whether they endanger public health or welfare. In December 2009, the EPA concluded that six greenhouse gases – including carbon dioxide and methane – "may reasonably be anticipated to endanger" health and welfare, drawing heavily on assessments by the IPCC and U.S. scientific bodies. The EPA's action had a seismic impact on the American automotive industry, setting in motion the first federal greenhouse gas standards, set in 2010, for cars and light trucks (2012-16), later extended through 2025. Manufacturers accelerated fuel-efficiency improvements, invested in hybrid systems, lightweight materials, and, eventually, battery-electric vehicles. Regula-

Though indirect, the stricter greenhouse gas emission norms also influenced a world-wide shift away from the 'small car' to the mid-sized Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV) with car markers improving the SUV's emissions profile. Mr. Trump seems to believe that doing away with the EPA regulations will revive America's 'gas guzzler' era, boost American manufacturing jobs, and somehow tie in with his administration's rediscovery of Venezuelan oil. These are pipedreams. Auto-manufacturing production lines today are optimised around electrification, hybridisation and emissions controls. With China dominating most of the production value chain, it is unlikely that auto-manufacturers, who have invested over a multi-decadal horizon into clean vehicles – and with the intention to export to countries where emissions norms are only getting stricter by the day – will change tack to a regress. At best, the norms will be a speed bump to electric vehicle rollout and could win Mr. Trump some brownie points with his voter base. The real danger lies in automakers in India citing such regulation as a pretext to weaken fuel efficiency standards. Although India's standards do not yet connect climate goals with cars, the domestic automotive sector should view them as a lodestar.

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Bridging a divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service'

India's post-Independence service rules were designed to ensure stability through generalist administrators – an approach that was essential for nation-building. However, governance has since become increasingly shaped by science, technology, and environmental challenges. As scientists joined government service, they remained governed by rules created for a different era. This mismatch has limited the effective integration of scientific expertise into policymaking. Unlike many advanced countries with dedicated scientific cadres, India lacks a specialised framework for scientific governance, making the case for separate scientific service rules increasingly compelling.

P. Ragavan

is a coastal ecosystem researcher with 15 years of research and field expertise on mangroves and seagrass

A paradox – administrator and scientist

Civil services recruitment is highly competitive, reflecting the rigour of the administrative system. Scientific careers, however, follow an equally demanding but different path – drawing from a smaller, highly specialised pool shaped by years of advanced education, research and peer review rather than a single examination. Within government, administrators receive structured training aligned with governance roles, while scientists are often placed in diverse technical portfolios without comparable frameworks for role-specific training, career progression, or clear alignment of authority and professional safeguards.

Scientific inputs in policymaking are often commissioned for immediate needs – such as legal cases or regulatory decisions – making research time-bound and narrow. A stronger approach would support continuous, long-term research that anticipates emerging challenges, allowing decisions to be guided by evidence and foresight rather than urgency.

Until science becomes a regular partner in governance rather than a reactive tool, its full potential to improve policy and public trust will remain underused. Thus, most scientific research is not specifically designed to improve the effectiveness of existing policies or to meet the future needs of countries in shaping policy change.

As India's responsibilities expanded into technically intensive sectors, environmental protection, climate change, oceans and coasts, public health, disaster management, nuclear safety, biotechnology, space science, and artificial intelligence, scientists became indispensable to government functioning.

Yet, instead of creating a distinct institutional framework that was suited to scientific work, scientists were largely absorbed into the existing administrative system. They continue to be governed by conduct rules, appraisal mechanisms, and hierarchies that were originally designed for general administrative functions. Over time, this has limited the ability of scientists to exercise their professional role fully within governance structures. While organisations such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and a few others have separate rules for recruitment, assessment, and promotion, they continue to be bound by the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964, a framework designed primarily for administrative governance rather than scientific independence.

Administrative rules are not neutral

Service rules shape behaviour and culture. While civil service rules stress discipline and neutrality, scientific work requires questioning assumptions and presenting evidence even when it challenges policy. Without frameworks that accommodate this, scientific inputs remain advisory rather than fully integrated into decision-making.

Scientific progress depends on continuous inquiry, testing of evidence, and honest assessment of risks and uncertainties. In governance, this translates into an ability to flag ecological risks, technological limitations, or long-term consequences in a transparent manner. When scientists are unable to formally record or communicate such assessments within institutional processes, their role risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive. Science that cannot question policy is not science. It is a decoration. Effective governance requires mechanisms that allow scientific assessments to be placed on record, even while final policy choices remain with elected authorities.

Many countries, which includes France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States have created distinct scientific cadres within government, with tailored service rules, career paths, and professional protections. These systems strengthen governance by ensuring transparent, independent scientific input into policymaking. For example, U.S. Scientific Integrity Policies protect scientists from political interference, require transparent documentation of advice, and prevent suppression or alteration of research findings, ensuring that policies are guided by credible evidence rather than political convenience.

India's situation is distinctive. Despite strong scientific institutions and highly trained professionals, government scientists often have limited institutional authority relative to their expertise. Their inputs may not always carry formal weight in decision-making processes, particularly in technically complex sectors. This can result in cautious communication, limited documentation of uncertainty, and an over-reliance on science during crises rather than as a continuous input into policy formulation. A governance system that does not fully utilise its scientific capacity risks long-term policy weaknesses. India's aspirations, to be a leader in climate action, environmental stewardship, public health, and technology, require institutions that value scientific evidence alongside administrative efficiency. What is needed is not additional committees or ad-hoc advisory bodies, but structural reform that clearly defines the role of scientists within governance and provides appropriate institutional safeguards.

The creation of an Indian scientific services, or ISS, offers a constructive way forward. The ISS could function as a permanent, all-India scientific cadre working alongside existing civil services. Scientists would be recruited through rigorous national-level selection and peer evaluation and placed within ministries and regulatory institutions as integral participants in decision-making. Separate scientific service rules would protect professional integrity, enable transparent recording of scientific assessments, and clarify the distinction between scientific advice and policy decisions. The ISS is not intended to replace administrative systems, but to complement them. Administrators ensure coordination and execution; scientists contribute evidence, risk assessment, and long-term perspective.

A potential framework

A possible structure for an ISS could include specialised cadres such as the Indian Environmental and Ecological Service, Indian Climate and Atmospheric Service, Indian Water and Hydrological Service, Indian Marine and Ocean Services, Indian Public Health and Biomedical Service, Indian Disaster Risk and Resilience Service, Indian Energy and Resources Service, Indian Science and Technology Policy Service, Indian Agricultural and Food Systems Service, and Indian Regulatory Science Service.

India has built strong scientific institutions. The next step is to integrate scientific expertise more directly into governance structures. The need for an ISS is no longer theoretical. It is a practical and timely reform to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and build more resilient governance for the future.

Under the current political leadership, India is steadily moving beyond its colonial legacy and building a confident new India. In this spirit, an ISS would be a forward-looking reform – much like the transformation of the Indian Civil Service after Independence – strengthening a science-driven administrative system that is aligned with India's national aspirations and global ambitions .

> A dedicated scientific cadre is needed to strengthen governance as science, technology and environmental challenges become central

The views expressed are personal

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The UAE-India corridor is sparking a growth story

Something remarkable has happened in the economic relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). When the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed in 2022, both sides had set a target of $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030. That milestone was reached five years ahead of schedule. In January this year, leaders set a new target of $200 billion by 2032. Few economic corridors in the world today are moving with the speed and ambition of this one.

Badr Jafar

is Special Envoy of the United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister for Business and Philanthropy

The scale and direction
The numbers tell part of the story. Non-oil trade between the two countries grew nearly 20% last year to reach $65 billion, demonstrating that this partnership has moved well beyond its energy origins. UAE entities have invested over $22 billion into India since 2000, while Indian companies have invested more than $16 billion into the UAE. Nearly five million Indian nationals live and work in the Emirates, forming its largest diaspora community and the human backbone of a corridor that now supports over 1,200 flights a week between the two countries – one of the busiest air routes on earth.

But what excites the most is not just the scale. It is the direction. This corridor is being reshaped by advanced manufacturing, financial services, technology, and logistics. Reliance Industries has partnered with TA'ZIZ on a $2 billion-plus investment in low-carbon chemicals manufacturing in Abu Dhabi. Ashok Leyland has relocated its electric bus production from the United Kingdom to the UAE. Larsen & Toubro has been selected as preferred contractor for one of the world's most ambitious solar-plus-storage projects in Abu Dhabi. Indian banks, technology firms, and health-care companies are building real operational presence across the Emirates. These are not tentative first steps. They are

The UAE-India corridor is driving growth, technology and strategic global expansion

confident long-term industrial commitments.

Investment is flowing with equal conviction in the other direction. DP World has committed an additional $5 billion to Indian infrastructure, expanding its already extensive network of ports and logistics parks across the country. Emirates NBD's acquisition of a majority stake in RBL Bank represents the largest single foreign direct investment in Indian banking history. ADNOC has signed long-term LNG supply agreements with Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited worth billions of dollars. Mubadala has deployed over $4 billion across Indian health care, renewables, and technology platforms. Abu Dhabi Investment Authority became the first sovereign wealth fund to establish a base in India's GIFT City.

It is for the long term
What underpins all of this is trust built over decades, reinforced by human connections, and supported by a policy architecture – the CEPA, which eliminated tariffs on roughly 90% of tariff lines, the 2024 Bilateral Investment Treaty, and now a strategic defence partnership - that gives businesses the certainty to make long-term bets.

The ambition is now extending into third markets. Bharat Mart, currently under construction in the UAE, will serve as a wholesale hub for Indian goods targeting Africa, West Asia and Eurasia, aiming to help double India's exports to these regions. India and the UAE are also exploring joint digital infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives across Africa. The corridor is becoming a platform not just for bilateral exchange but also for global reach.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as the next major frontier for this corridor. India this week hosts the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi (February 16-20, 2026) – the first global AI summit held in the Global South. It is a powerful statement of India's growing role in shaping how this technology develops and is governed. The UAE, which appointed the world's first Minister of State for AI back in 2017 and has invested heavily in AI infrastructure and research ever since, is a natural partner in this space. The UAE and India are already exploring cooperation on advanced computing capacity, data centres, and AI-driven innovation. In a technology that will reshape every sector of every economy, the countries that lead will not be those that build fastest alone, but those that build the smartest partnerships.

The next chapter
India's global moment is here. As the world's fourth-largest economy, with GDP at around $4 trillion, it is powered by entrepreneurial energy, manufacturing ambition, and digital infrastructure that are genuinely world-class. In conversations with Indian business leaders, there is one theme that is coming through consistently: the appetite to scale internationally has never been stronger. The question is no longer whether Indian enterprise will go global, but how effectively the right corridors can accelerate that journey.

This is also part of a wider realignment. The recent Delhi Declaration between India and Arab Foreign Ministers outlined an ambitious programme of cooperation across politics, economy, energy, technology, and security through 2028. The India-UAE corridor is at the vanguard of that broader convergence.

The UAE and India are demonstrating what becomes possible when two countries align policy, capital, and execution around a shared vision. The first $100 billion came faster than anyone expected. The next chapter will be defined not by the numbers alone, but by how deeply their economies integrate – and how far that integration reaches.

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AI Impact Summit 2026 begins today, Modi to inaugurate an India AI Expo

Global tech leaders, including Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman, along with representatives from around 20 countries, are expected at the AI Impact Summit this week; participation of Bill Gates, amid scrutiny over his association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, has drawn criticism

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Global tech leaders Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman and leaders of about 20 countries, including Brazil and France, are among those from about 100 countries expected to attend the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit this week. The event kicks off on Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the "India AI Impact Expo 2026", which includes pavilions from 13 other countries.

The event is being hosted from February 16 to 20 at the Bharat Mandapam complex in Delhi where the G-20 Summit was hosted first in 2023. It marks the fourth AI Summit after summits in the U.K., South Korea, and France. Officials said it would be showcased as the first time the summit on the transformative effect and challenges from AI is hosted in a Global South country.

"India has consistently championed the voice of developing economies in digital policy forums. The summit will push for equitable access to AI resources and fair rule-making," a senior government official said. Unlike developed countries, India was not seeking to build regulatory frameworks, but was focusing the summit on a "human-centric" approach, for the "economic good" of all, the official added.

Over 3,000 speakers

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office on Sunday, the AI Impact event will feature more than 3,000 speakers over 500 sessions and host more than 300 exhibitions and live demonstrations of AI technology and start-ups, which are "structured across three thematic chakras – People, Planet and Progress". The government hopes to attract more than 2.5 lakh visitors to the event, the statement said.

After the Expo inauguration on Monday, the summit will see an "all-woman" hackathon on Tuesday in Delhi.

Mr. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron will hold bilateral talks in Mumbai on February 17. On February 18, he will host a dinner banquet for the dignitaries and then chair a leaders' summit followed by a Tech-CEOs event on February 19. Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who will hold bilateral talks with Mr. Modi, is accompanied by a large AI official and tech company delegation and will host an entire session on February 20.

The heads of 18 other countries are attending. They range from European countries such as Switzerland, Spain, Serbia, Slovakia, Croatia, Estonia, Netherlands, Finland and Greece, to Mauritius, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in the neighbourhood and Kazakhstan, two countries from South America (Bolivia and Guyana) and one from Africa (Seychelles), a list provided by the External Affairs Ministry said.

Crown princes of Liechtenstein and the UAE will also attend as heads of their delegations as will some prominent former leaders such as former British Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Rishi Sunak. Ministerial delegations from over 45 countries would participate, officials said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, whose tenure ends this year, will also attend. Officials said that big tech leaders such as Google's Sundar Pichai and Open AI CEO Sam Altman will "headline" sessions as will Demis Hassabis (CEO of DeepMind Technologies), Dario Amodei (Anthropic CEO) and Brad Smith (Microsoft president). NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang, who was to be a key speaker, pulled out on Saturday "due to unforeseen circumstances".

Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is at the centre of allegations over his links with American businessman and convicted sex offender Jeffery Epstein, is expected to attend. When asked, officials did not confirm what his role in the event would be.

On Monday, Mr. Gates will be in Andhra Pradesh for a series of meetings with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and others to discuss digital technologies and health development issues.

Reacting to a poster of Mr. Gates at the AI Summit, Opposition MP Priyanka Chaturvedi called the invitation to him "shameful" and has asked the government not to give "platform and promote" him.

Restricted access on Day 1, expo to open from Day 2

NEW DELHI

Entry to the India AI Impact Summit 2026 will have some restrictions on the first day of the event, and the expo being organised along with it will open for all from February 17, according to an official advisory issued on Sunday. "Registration is free," a Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology official said. PTI

Preparations on for the AI Summit at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

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Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)

- **APEDA is a statutory export promotion authority established under the APEDA Act, 1985 (Act 2 of 1986) to promote the export of agricultural and processed food products from India. It replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPC).**

Established In:

- **Act passed: December 1985**

- **Came into effect: 13 February 1986**

- **Administrative Ministry: Functions under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India.**

Key Functions of APEDA:

- **Export Promotion & Market Development: Provides financial assistance, market intelligence, and global branding support to boost agri-exports.**
- **Registration of Exporters (RCMC): Registers exporters of scheduled products and ensures compliance with export norms.**
- **Quality Standards & Certification: Fixes export standards and monitors quality, including inspection of meat and processed products.**
- **Packaging & Value Addition Support: Promotes improved packaging, labeling, and value-added processing to enhance global competitiveness.**
- **National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP): Acts as Secretariat for certification and regulation of organic exports.**
- **Data Collection & Trade Statistics: Collects and publishes export data to support policy formulation and trade planning.**

Exercise Vayushakti-26

- **Exercise Vayushakti-26:**

- **A biennial firepower demonstration exercise by the Indian Air Force to display combat capability, precision strike ability, and multi-domain dominance.**

Host & Location:

- **Hosted by the Indian Air Force.**
- **Conducted at Pokhran Air-to-Ground Range, Jaisalmer (Rajasthan).**
- **Nation Involved: Solely conducted by the Indian Air Force (India).**

- **Participation of platforms: Rafale, Tejas, Su-30MKI, Mirage-2000, Jaguar, MiG-29, C-130J, C-17, Apache, Chinook, LCH, RPAs.**
- **Advanced weapons: Akash, SpyDer, SRLM, CUAS.**
- **Demonstrates day, dusk & night strike missions.**

Thank You!