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## Antariksh Venture Capital Fund

### Why in News?

- The Union Minister has stated that India's dedicated **Antariksh Venture Capital Fund** for the space sector is progressing steadily.
- Investment in selected startups is expected to begin from the **first quarter of FY2027**. This marks a major step in supporting private players in India's growing space economy.

### About Antariksh Venture Capital Fund

- **Nature & Structure**
  - A **close-ended fund** registered with **SEBI** as a **Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)**.
- **Key Investor & Sponsor**
  - Lead investor: **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)**, under the Department of Space.
  - Sponsored by **SIDBI Venture Capital Limited**.
- **Investment Objective**
  - Provide growth capital to Indian space companies at various stages of development.
  - Support scaling of operations and commercialisation of new technologies.
  - Focus exclusively on Indian companies in the **space sector** with **Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4 and above**.
- **Significance**
  - Addresses the critical need for patient capital in the space sector.

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- Empowers startups to contribute to India's broader space ambitions under **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

## About Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)

### • Establishment & Role

- A **single-window, independent nodal agency** under the Department of Space.
- Created as part of **space sector reforms** to facilitate greater private sector participation.

### • Key Functions

- Promote, enable, authorise, and supervise space activities of Non-Governmental Entities (NGEs).
- Acts as an interface between **ISRO** and private players.
- Responsibilities include: building launch vehicles & satellites, providing space-based services, sharing ISRO infrastructure, and setting up new space facilities.

### • Structure

- Three Directorates:
  - Promotion Directorate (PD)
  - Technical Directorate (TD)
  - Program Management and Authorization Directorate (PMAD)

## Significance

### • For Space Ecosystem

- Boosts private investment, innovation, and commercialisation in satellites, launch vehicles, and space services.

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- Supports India's goal of becoming a global space economy leader.

- **Broader Impact**

- Aligns with **National Space Policy** and reforms to open the sector to private players.
- Strengthens India's position in the global space race alongside missions like Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Antariksh Venture Capital Fund, IN-SPACE, Category II AIF, Technology Readiness Level (TRL), SIDBI Venture Capital
- Facts: Investments to begin Q1 FY2027; Sponsored by SIDBI VC; Lead investor IN-SPACE

### GS-3 (Science & Technology + Economy)

- Space sector reforms, private participation, venture capital in emerging technologies.

### GS-2 (Governance)

- Role of autonomous agencies like IN-SPACE in promoting private sector involvement.

### Essay / Interview

- "Private Sector as the New Engine of India's Space Economy: Opportunities and Challenges"
- "From ISRO Monopoly to Collaborative Ecosystem: The Evolution of India's Space Policy."

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## MCQs

1. The Antariksh Venture Capital Fund is sponsored by: (a) ISRO (b) SIDBI Venture Capital Limited (c) NITI Aayog (d) Ministry of Finance **Answer: (b)**
2. With reference to IN-SPACe, consider the following statements:
3. It is a single-window nodal agency under the Department of Space.
4. It facilitates private sector participation in space activities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither

**Answer: (c)**

3. The Antariksh Venture Capital Fund primarily invests in companies with:
  - (a) TRL 1-3
  - (b) TRL 4 and above
  - (c) Only established PSUs
  - (d) Foreign space companies

**Answer: (b)**

4. Which of the following is NOT a function of IN-SPACe?
  - (a) Authorising space activities of private entities
  - (b) Sharing ISRO infrastructure with NGEs



- (c) Launching satellites on behalf of private players
- (d) Promoting space-based services by non-governmental entities

**Answer: (c)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. "The Antariksh Venture Capital Fund represents a significant step in opening India's space sector to private capital." Discuss its objectives and expected impact on the Indian space ecosystem. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the role of IN-SPACE in promoting private participation in India's space activities. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Venture capital is crucial for scaling deep-tech sectors like space." Analyse this statement with reference to India's space policy reforms. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Government Monopoly to Private-Led Innovation: The Future of India's Space Economy."

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## Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) Scheme Extended till 30 September 2026

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### Why in News?

- The **Ministry of Textiles** has extended the **Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) Scheme** for exports of apparel/garments and made-ups up to **30 September 2026**.
- This extension provides continued support to the textile and apparel export sector, which is a major employment generator and foreign exchange earner for India.

### About RoSCTL Scheme

- **Launch & Objective**

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- Operational since **7 March 2019**.
- Aims to reimburse **embedded State and Central taxes/levies** on exports of manufactured goods, garments, and made-ups.
- Successor to the earlier **Rebate of State Levies (RoSL) Scheme**.
- **Key Difference from RoSL**
  - RoSL provided rebate only on State levies.
  - RoSCTL provides rebate on **both State and Central taxes and levies** (in addition to Duty Drawback).
- **Form of Rebate**
  - Issued as **duty credit scrips** electronically on the Customs system.
  - Scrips can be used for payment of **Basic Customs Duty** on imports.
  - Scrips are **freely transferable** (entire amount at once; no partial transfer).
  - Validity: **One year** from creation (does not change on transfer).
- **Eligibility**
  - All exporters of garments/apparel and made-ups manufactured in India.
  - Excludes entities/IECs under the **Denied Entity List** of DGFT.
- **Implementing Agency**
  - **Department of Revenue**, Ministry of Finance.

## Significance of the Extension

- **For Textile Sector**
  - Provides policy certainty and cost competitiveness to exporters.

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- Supports one of India's largest employment-generating sectors (especially women and rural employment).
- **Broader Economic Impact**
  - Boosts exports, improves current account balance, and strengthens foreign exchange reserves.
  - Aligns with **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and **Make in India** by making Indian textiles more competitive globally.
- **Export Promotion**
  - Complements other schemes like RoDTEP and helps offset embedded taxes not covered under Duty Drawback.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: RoSCTL Scheme, Duty Credit Scrips, RoSL Scheme, Duty Drawback, DGFT Denied Entity List
- Facts: Extended till 30 September 2026; Operational since 7 March 2019; Implemented by Department of Revenue

### GS-3 (Economy)

- Export promotion schemes, textile sector, and their role in economic growth and employment.

### GS-3 (Indian Economy)

- Rebate mechanisms, tax rationalisation, and measures to enhance export competitiveness.

### Essay / Interview

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- “Export Promotion Schemes and India’s Quest for Global Competitiveness”
- “From Tax Rebates to Self-Reliance: The Evolution of India’s Textile Export Policy.”

## MCQs

1. The RoSCTL Scheme provides rebate on:

- (a) Only State taxes
- (b) Only Central taxes
- (c) Both State and Central taxes and levies
- (d) Only GST

**Answer: (c)**

2. RoSCTL Scheme is implemented by:

- (a) Ministry of Textiles
- (b) Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance
- (c) DGFT
- (d) Ministry of Commerce

**Answer: (b)**

3. The rebate under RoSCTL is given in the form of:

- (a) Cash refund
- (b) Duty credit scrips
- (c) Tax exemption certificate
- (d) Export subsidy in foreign currency

**Answer: (b)**



4. The RoSCTL Scheme is a successor to which earlier scheme?

- (a) RoDTEP
- (b) MEIS
- (c) RoSL
- (d) SEIS

**Answer: (c)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. “Export promotion schemes like RoSCTL play a vital role in enhancing the competitiveness of India’s textile sector.” Discuss the features and significance of the RoSCTL Scheme. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Differentiate between RoSL and RoSCTL schemes and explain why the shift to RoSCTL was necessary. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Rationalisation of taxes and rebates is essential for boosting India’s exports.” Analyse this statement with reference to schemes like RoSCTL and RoDTEP. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Rebates to Resilience: Strengthening India’s Export Ecosystem in a Competitive Global Market.”

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## YUVIKA Programme: ISRO’s Initiative to Nurture Young Scientific Talent

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### Why in News?

- The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science & Technology highlighted the government’s efforts to nurture scientific temper among youth through the **Yuva Vigyani Karyakram (YUVIKA)** programme.



- This initiative by ISRO aims to inspire young students, especially from rural areas, to pursue careers in science and technology.

## About YUVIKA Programme

- **Full Form & Objective**

- **YUva Vigyani KAryakram (YUVIKA)** – a learning and awareness programme of the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.
- Aims to impart basic knowledge on **Space Technology, Space Science, and Space Applications** to school students.
- Special preference is given to students from **rural areas**.

- **Target Group**

- Students who have completed Class 8 and are currently in **Class 9**.
- Three students from each State/Union Territory participate every year (covering CBSE, ICSE, and State Board syllabi).

- **Selection Criteria**

- Based on **academic performance** in Class 8 and **extracurricular activities**.
- **Special weightage** to students from rural areas.
- In case of a tie, the **younger candidate** is given priority.

- **Programme Structure**

- A **two-week residential programme**.
- Includes invited talks by eminent scientists, facility and lab visits, interactive sessions, practical demonstrations, and feedback sessions.

- **Long-term Goal**

- Create awareness about emerging trends in science and technology.

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- Encourage more students to pursue **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)** education and careers.

## Significance

- **For Youth & Nation Building**

- Nurtures scientific temper among school students – the future building blocks of the nation.
- Promotes inclusivity by giving preference to rural students.

- **For Space Sector**

- Builds a talent pipeline for India's growing space programme (Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan, Aditya-L1, etc.).
- Supports the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in space technology.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: YUVIKA Programme, ISRO, STEM Education, Rural Preference
- Facts: Two-week residential programme; Class 9 students; Three students per State/UT

### GS-3 (Science & Technology)

- ISRO's outreach programmes and human resource development in space science.

### GS-2 (Governance & Social Justice)

- Inclusive education and bridging urban-rural divide in access to science education.

### Essay / Interview

- "Nurturing Scientific Temper among Youth: The Role of Programmes like YUVIKA"

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- “From School to Space: Building India’s Future in STEM through Inclusive Initiatives.”

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## MCQs

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1. The YUVIKA programme is conducted by:

- (a) Ministry of Education
- (b) ISRO
- (c) DRDO
- (d) NITI Aayog

**Answer: (b)**

2. YUVIKA programme is primarily aimed at students of which class?

- (a) Class 6-7
- (b) Class 8-9
- (c) Class 10-11
- (d) Class 12

**Answer: (b)**

3. Which of the following is given special weightage in selection for YUVIKA?

- (a) Urban students
- (b) Rural students
- (c) Only CBSE students
- (d) Only girls

**Answer: (b)**



4. The duration of the YUVIKA residential programme is:

- (a) One week
- (b) Two weeks
- (c) One month
- (d) Three months

**Answer: (b)**

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## Mains Questions

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1. “Programmes like YUVIKA play a crucial role in nurturing scientific temper among school students.” Discuss the objectives and significance of ISRO’s YUVIKA programme. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the importance of bridging the urban-rural divide in access to science and technology education in India. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Investing in young scientific talent is essential for India’s emergence as a knowledge economy.” Analyse this statement with reference to initiatives like YUVIKA. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Igniting Young Minds: The Role of Space and Science Outreach Programmes in Shaping India’s Future.”

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## 7th Round of India-Algeria Foreign Office Consultations Held in Algiers

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### Why in News?

- The **7th round of Foreign Office Consultations** between India and Algeria was held in **Algiers**.
- The meeting provided an opportunity to review bilateral relations and explore new areas of cooperation in trade, energy, defence, and people-to-people ties.

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## About Algeria

- **Location & Geography**
  - Located in the **Maghreb region** of North Africa.
  - Shares land borders with seven countries: Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Morocco.
  - Has a long coastline on the **Mediterranean Sea** to the north.
- **Capital**
  - **Algiers**
- **Climate**
  - Mediterranean climate in the north (warm, dry summers and mild, rainy winters).
  - Arid desert climate in the south (Sahara region).
- **Major Geographical Features**
  - Mountain ranges: **Atlas Mountains, Tell Atlas, Saharan Atlas, Hoggar Mountains, and Tassili n'Ajjer.**
  - Highest point: **Mount Tahat.**
  - Major rivers: **Djedi River and Chelif River.**
- **Natural Resources**
  - Abundant reserves of **oil and natural gas.**
  - Other resources: solar energy, iron, zinc, lead, silicon, and helium.

## Significance of India-Algeria Relations

- **Strategic Partnership**

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- Algeria is an important partner in North Africa and a member of the African Union and Arab League.
- Both countries share common positions on multilateral issues such as climate change, UN reforms, and South-South cooperation.

## • Economic & Energy Cooperation

- Algeria is a major producer of oil and gas. India imports hydrocarbons and seeks deeper energy ties.
- Potential for collaboration in solar energy, given Algeria's vast solar potential.

## • Defence & People-to-People Ties

- Growing defence cooperation and increasing cultural exchanges.
- Algerian students and professionals contribute to people-to-people linkages.

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### UPSC CSE Relevance

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#### Prelims

- Key terms: Algeria, Maghreb Region, Atlas Mountains, Mount Tahat, Foreign Office Consultations
- Facts: Capital - Algiers; Mediterranean coastline; Major resources - oil, gas, solar energy

#### GS-2 (International Relations)

- India's engagement with North African countries and African Union members.

#### GS-1 (Geography)

- Physical and economic geography of North Africa.

#### Essay / Interview

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- “Strengthening South-South Cooperation: India’s Expanding Footprint in Africa”
- “Energy Diplomacy in a Multipolar World: India’s Engagement with Resource-Rich Nations like Algeria.”

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## MCQs

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1. Algeria is located in which region of Africa?

- (a) West Africa
- (b) Maghreb region of North Africa
- (c) East Africa
- (d) Southern Africa

**Answer: (b)**

2. Which of the following is the capital of Algeria?

- (a) Tunis
- (b) Algiers
- (c) Tripoli
- (d) Rabat

**Answer: (b)**

3. With reference to Algeria, consider the following statements:

1. It has a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Mount Tahat is its highest point.
3. It is a major producer of oil and natural gas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?



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

**Answer: (d)**

4. The 7th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Algeria was held in:

- (a) New Delhi
- (b) Algiers
- (c) Cairo
- (d) Johannesburg

**Answer: (b)**

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### Mains Questions

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1. "India's engagement with North African countries like Algeria is gaining strategic depth." Discuss the areas of cooperation and their significance for India's broader Africa policy. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the geographical and resource profile of Algeria and its relevance for India's energy security. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Strengthening bilateral ties with resource-rich African nations is crucial for India's economic and strategic interests." Analyse this statement with reference to recent India-Algeria consultations. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Maghreb to the Indian Ocean: India's Expanding Footprint in Africa."

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## E20 Fuel Mandate: Government Requires Minimum 95 RON Octane Rating at Petrol Pumps

### Why in News?

- The Central Government has implemented a new fuel mandate requiring petrol pumps to supply **E20 fuel** with a **minimum octane rating of 95 RON**.
- This step aims to promote higher ethanol blending, improve fuel efficiency, reduce emissions, and support the broader goal of energy transition and Atmanirbhar Bharat in the biofuel sector.

### About E20 Fuel

- **Composition**
  - Blend of **20% ethanol** and **80% petrol**.
  - Ethanol is a **biofuel** derived primarily from renewable sources such as sugarcane, maize, and grains.
- **Key Advantage**
  - Higher octane rating (minimum **95 RON**) compared to regular petrol (typically 91-92 RON).
  - Enables smoother combustion, better engine performance, and potentially lower emissions.
- **Implementation**
  - All petrol pumps are now required to dispense E20 meeting the 95 RON standard.
  - Part of the government's push to increase ethanol blending under the **Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme**.



## What is Ethanol?

- **Properties**

- Also known as ethyl alcohol (chemical formula  $C_2H_5OH$ ).
- Clear, colourless, biodegradable liquid.
- Pure ethanol is non-toxic, but fuel-grade ethanol contains **denaturants** to make it undrinkable.

- **Sources**

- Produced from renewable feedstocks like sugarcane, corn, barley, wheat, and cellulosic materials (agricultural residues and wood).

## Significance of the E20 Mandate

- **Environmental Benefits**

- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on imported crude oil.
- Supports cleaner combustion due to higher oxygen content in ethanol.

- **Energy Security**

- Promotes domestic production of ethanol, reducing import bills.
- Aligns with India's target of **20% ethanol blending** (E20) by 2025-26.

- **Economic Impact**

- Boosts the agricultural economy (especially sugarcane and maize farmers).
- Creates employment opportunities in the biofuel value chain.



## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

### Prelims

- Key terms: E20 Fuel, Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP), RON (Research Octane Number), Biofuel
- Facts: 20% ethanol + 80% petrol; Minimum 95 RON; Derived from sugarcane/maize/grains

### GS-3 (Economy & Environment)

- Energy transition, biofuel policy, ethanol blending programme, and sustainable development.

### GS-3 (Agriculture)

- Linkage between ethanol production and farmer income.

### Essay / Interview

- “Ethanol Blending and India’s Energy Security: Opportunities and Challenges”
- “From Fossil Fuels to Biofuels: India’s Path towards a Greener and Self-Reliant Energy Future.”

## MCQs

1. E20 fuel refers to:
  - (a) 20% ethanol + 80% petrol
  - (b) 20% petrol + 80% ethanol
  - (c) 20% biodiesel blend
  - (d) 20% hydrogen blend

**Answer: (a)**



2. The minimum octane rating mandated for E20 fuel is:

- (a) 87 RON
- (b) 91 RON
- (c) 95 RON
- (d) 98 RON

**Answer: (c)**

3. Ethanol used in E20 is primarily derived from:

- (a) Coal
- (b) Natural gas
- (c) Sugarcane, maize, and grains
- (d) Crude oil

**Answer: (c)**

4. Which of the following is a major objective of promoting E20 fuel?

- (a) Increasing crude oil imports
- (b) Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and oil import dependence
- (c) Lowering farmer incomes
- (d) Increasing dependence on fossil fuels

**Answer: (b)**



## Mains Questions

1. “The E20 fuel mandate represents a significant step in India’s energy transition strategy.” Discuss its benefits, challenges, and linkage with agricultural and environmental goals. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the role of ethanol blending in achieving India’s energy security and reducing carbon emissions. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Biofuels like ethanol can bridge the gap between energy demand and environmental sustainability.” Analyse this statement in the context of the E20 programme. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Import Dependence to Biofuel Self-Reliance: India’s Ethanol Blending Journey.”

## Samprati and Jainism Spread: How Ashoka’s Grandson Became a Champion of Jainism

### Why in News?

- On **Mahavir Jayanti (31 March)**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Samrat Samprati Museum** in Koba, Gandhinagar, dedicated to Jain history and the legacy of **Samrat Samprati**, grandson of Emperor Ashoka.
- While Ashoka is celebrated for spreading Buddhism, Samprati is remembered in Jain tradition as a key royal patron who actively expanded Jainism across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

### Historical Context: Mauryan Empire & Religious Patronage

- **Ashoka’s Legacy**
  - Ashoka (c. 269-232 BCE) promoted Buddhist principles of Dhamma and moral governance.



- His efforts influenced Buddhist traditions in Southeast Asia and beyond.

- **Jainism in the Mauryan Period**

- Jainism continued to flourish alongside Buddhism.
- Chandragupta Maurya (Ashoka's grandfather) is believed in Jain tradition to have embraced Jainism in his later years, migrated south during a famine, and attained sallekhana (voluntary fasting to death) at Shravanabelagola.
- Ashoka's first wife, Padmavati, is also said to have been a Jain.

- **Division After Ashoka**

- After Ashoka's death (232 BCE), the empire may have been divided among his grandsons.
- Samprati (son of Kunala) is believed to have ruled parts of the empire between **230-220 BCE** (some traditions suggest a longer reign of about 50 years).

## **Samprati: The Jain Counterpart to Ashoka**

- **Conversion & Commitment**

- Most Jain texts describe his conversion under the influence of the Jain monk **Suhastin** in Ujjain.
- He adopted strict Jain lay practices, including daily worship of Jina icons, and showed deep personal devotion rather than purely political motivation.

- **Spread of Jainism**

- Actively sent Jain monks to distant regions to propagate the faith.
- Credited with building and renovating thousands of temples and installing millions of Jain icons.



- Helped consolidate Jainism in regions like Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Malwa, and Rajputana.
- Some traditions extend his influence to parts of Central Asia, China, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan.

## • Scale of Contribution

- Jain texts attribute to him the construction of **125,000 temples**, renovation of **36,000**, consecration of millions of icons, and establishment of **700 charitable centres**.
- In western India, many ancient temples without clear historical records are traditionally linked to Samprati.

## Sources & Legacy

- Documented in Jain texts such as **Sampratikatha**, **Parishishtaparvan**, and **Prabhavakcharita**.
- Seen as the Jain parallel to Ashoka – a ruler who not only patronised but also institutionalised the religion through widespread temple-building and icon worship.
- His legacy remains particularly strong in the **Shvetambara** Jain tradition.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: Samrat Samprati, Mahavir Jayanti, Samprati Museum (Gandhinagar), Mauryan Empire, Jainism, Shvetambara Tradition
- Facts: Grandson of Ashoka; Ruled c. 230-220 BCE; Credited with spreading Jainism through temples and icons

### GS-1 (History & Culture)

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- Religious history of ancient India, Mauryan period, and patronage of Jainism and Buddhism.

## GS-1 (Indian Heritage)

- Role of royal patrons in the spread and institutionalisation of religions.

## Essay / Interview

- “Samprati and Ashoka: Parallel Legacies in the Spread of Jainism and Buddhism”
- “Religious Tolerance and Patronage in Ancient India: Lessons from the Mauryan Era.”

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## MCQs

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1. Samrat Samprati was the grandson of which Mauryan emperor?

- (a) Chandragupta Maurya
- (b) Bindusara
- (c) Ashoka
- (d) Dasharatha

**Answer: (c)**

2. In Jain tradition, Samprati is primarily associated with the spread of:

- (a) Buddhism
- (b) Jainism
- (c) Shaivism
- (d) Vaishnavism

**Answer: (b)**



3. The Samrat Samprati Museum was recently inaugurated in:

- (a) Shravanabelagola
- (b) Koba, Gandhinagar
- (c) Ujjain
- (d) Patna

**Answer: (b)**

4. Which Jain monk is traditionally credited with converting Samprati?

- (a) Mahavira
- (b) Suhastin
- (c) Hemachandra
- (d) Bhadrabahu

**Answer: (b)**

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### Mains Questions

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1. "While Ashoka is celebrated for spreading Buddhism, his grandson Samprati played a similar role in the expansion of Jainism." Discuss the historical significance of Samprati's contributions to Jainism. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Compare and contrast the religious policies and patronage of Ashoka and Samprati in the post-Mauryan context. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Royal patronage was instrumental in the institutionalisation and spread of religions in ancient India." Examine this statement with reference to Jainism and Buddhism during the Mauryan period. (15 marks / 250 words)



4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Parallel Paths of Faith: Ashoka, Samprati and the Enduring Legacy of Religious Patronage in Ancient India.”

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## FCRA Amendment Bill 2026

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### Why in News?

- The Union Government has **deferred discussion** on the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026**, which was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill seeks to strengthen oversight on foreign funding to NGOs and associations to prevent misuse against national interest, public order, or security.
- It has sparked controversy, with Opposition parties alleging it could adversely affect minority institutions, especially Christian organisations. The issue has gained political heat ahead of the Kerala Assembly elections.

### About FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act)

- **Purpose**
  - Regulates acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by individuals, NGOs, and associations.
  - Ensures foreign funds do not harm national interest, sovereignty, or public order.
- **Evolution**
  - First enacted in **1976**.
  - Major revision in **2010** to create a consolidated framework.
  - Amended in 2016, 2018, and significantly in **2020** to tighten controls.
- **Current Scale**
  - Around **16,000 organisations** are FCRA-registered.



- They receive approximately ₹22,000 crore annually in foreign contributions.

## Key Provisions of FCRA Amendment Bill 2026

### • Designated Authority

- Introduces a government-appointed “**designated authority**” to take over, supervise, and manage foreign-funded assets when an organisation’s FCRA registration is:
  - Cancelled
  - Surrendered
  - Expired or not renewed

### • Asset Management

- If registration is later renewed, unutilised funds/assets may be returned.
- If the organisation becomes defunct or registration is not restored within the specified period, assets can be permanently taken over, transferred to government bodies, or sold.

### • Special Provision for Religious Institutions

- If the asset is a place of worship, the authority can assign its management to another person while preserving its **religious character** (Clause 16A(7)).

### • Government Justification

- Addresses gaps in handling lapsed/cancelled registrations.
- Prevents misuse of foreign funds for activities like forced conversions.

## Controversy & Opposition Concerns

### • Fear of Excessive Control



- Critics argue the Bill gives excessive power to the Union Government over NGO assets.
- Risk of arbitrary cancellation or non-renewal leading to takeover of properties.

## • Impact on Minority Institutions

- Particularly affects Christian organisations and other minority groups heavily dependent on foreign funding for education, healthcare, and charitable work.
- Raised strongly in Kerala, where Christians form a significant voter base.

## • Kerala Political Angle

- The issue has become a major talking point ahead of the April 9 Kerala Assembly elections, with both the ruling Left and Congress opposing the Bill.

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### UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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#### Prelims

- Key terms: FCRA 2010, FCRA Amendment Bill 2026, Designated Authority, Foreign Contribution, NGO Regulation
- Facts: Around 16,000 FCRA-registered organisations; Annual foreign contribution ~₹22,000 crore

#### GS-2 (Governance & Polity)

- Regulation of NGOs, foreign funding laws, and Centre-State relations in internal security and minority affairs.

#### GS-2 (IR & Social Justice)

- Impact on minority institutions, civil society, and the balance between regulation and freedom of association.



## Essay / Interview

- “Regulation vs Autonomy: The Debate on Foreign Funding of NGOs in India”
- “Balancing National Security and Civil Liberties in the Age of Global Funding.”

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## MCQs

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1. The FCRA Amendment Bill 2026 proposes to introduce:
  - (a) A complete ban on foreign funding
  - (b) A designated authority to manage assets when registration lapses
  - (c) Automatic renewal of all FCRA registrations
  - (d) Merger of FCRA with GST **Answer: (b)**
2. FCRA was originally enacted in which year?
  - (a) 1961
  - (b) 1976
  - (c) 2010
  - (d) 2020

**Answer: (b)**

3. Which of the following is NOT a stated objective of the FCRA?
  - (a) Regulate foreign contributions
  - (b) Prevent harm to national interest
  - (c) Promote foreign direct investment in NGOs
  - (d) Ensure funds are used for permitted purposes

**Answer: (c)**



4. The controversy around the FCRA Amendment Bill 2026 has been particularly intense in which state due to upcoming elections?

- (a) Tamil Nadu
- (b) Kerala
- (c) West Bengal
- (d) Maharashtra

**Answer: (b)**

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### Mains Questions

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1. "The FCRA Amendment Bill 2026 aims to strengthen oversight but has raised concerns over excessive government control." Critically examine the provisions and implications of the Bill. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Discuss the evolution of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act and the need for periodic amendments in the context of national security and civil society functioning. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Regulation of foreign funding to NGOs must balance transparency with the autonomy of civil society organisations." Analyse this statement with reference to the ongoing debate on the FCRA Amendment Bill. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Foreign Funding, National Interest and Civil Liberties: Rethinking the FCRA Framework in Contemporary India."

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### India's Push for Piped Natural Gas (PNG)

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#### Why in News?

- The Union Government is actively promoting **Piped Natural Gas (PNG)** as a cleaner, more secure alternative to **LPG** to reduce import dependence and improve

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energy security. With India importing nearly three-fifths of its LPG (90% routed through the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz), the shift to PNG is seen as a strategic move amid global disruptions. Officials estimate domestic natural gas production could support up to **30 crore** PNG connections.

## Types of Gaseous Fuels in India

- **LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas):** Mixture of propane and butane; supplied in cylinders.
- **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas):** Natural gas cooled to liquid form for easier transport; regasified later.
- **PNG (Piped Natural Gas):** Natural gas supplied directly via underground pipelines to households.
- **CNG (Compressed Natural Gas):** Natural gas compressed for use as vehicular fuel.

PNG offers continuous supply without cylinder handling, making it more convenient and safer in the long run.

## Current Status & Policy Push

- **LPG Scenario**
  - India has around **33 crore** LPG connections.
  - Heavy import dependence makes supply chains vulnerable to geopolitical tensions.
- **PNG Expansion**
  - Current PNG connections: Over **1.5 crore** (expected to reach 2 crore soon).
  - Target: **12 crore** connections by 2034.
  - Near-term addition: Around **15 lakh** new connections.



- Policy shift: Discouraging dual (LPG + PNG) connections; encouraging full transition to PNG where pipelines are available.

## • Infrastructure Development

- Existing natural gas pipeline network: ~25,000 km.
- Additional 10,500 km under construction.

## Advantages of PNG

- **Energy Security:** Reduces reliance on imported LPG and vulnerable routes like Hormuz.
- **Convenience:** Uninterrupted, metered supply without cylinder booking or replacement.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Lower logistics and handling costs over time.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Cleaner burning fuel with lower emissions compared to LPG.

## Challenges in PNG Expansion

- High initial capital investment for pipeline infrastructure.
- Land acquisition and regulatory approvals delays.
- Uneven geographical coverage (limited in rural and remote areas).
- Limited awareness and technical readiness among users.
- LNG supply operates on a “just-in-time” model with limited storage, adding vulnerability.

## Way Forward

- Accelerate pipeline infrastructure expansion, especially in underserved regions.
- Increase domestic natural gas production and exploration.



- Strengthen LNG import diversification and storage capacity.
- Improve inter-ministerial coordination for faster project clearances.
- Promote awareness campaigns and technical support for industries and households.

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## UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

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### Prelims

- Key terms: PNG, LPG, CNG, LNG, EBP Programme, City Gas Distribution (CGD)
- Facts: 33 crore LPG connections; Target 12 crore PNG by 2034; Pipeline network ~25,000 km + 10,500 km under construction

### GS-3 (Economy & Energy)

- Energy security, fuel transition, import dependence, and infrastructure development.

### GS-3 (Environment)

- Cleaner fuels, emission reduction, and sustainable energy transition.

### Essay / Interview

- “From Cylinder to Pipeline: India’s Transition to Piped Natural Gas and Energy Security”
- “Reducing Import Dependence: The Strategic Importance of PNG in India’s Energy Mix.”

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## MCQs

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1. Piped Natural Gas (PNG) is supplied to consumers through:
  - (a) Cylinders
  - (b) Underground pipelines



- (c) Road tankers
- (d) Cryogenic ships

**Answer: (b)**

2. According to recent estimates, domestic natural gas production in India could potentially support up to how many PNG connections?

- (a) 10 crore
- (b) 20 crore
- (c) 30 crore
- (d) 50 crore

**Answer: (c)**

3. Which of the following is NOT an advantage of PNG over LPG?

- (a) Continuous supply
- (b) Lower logistics cost in the long run
- (c) Easier delivery in remote areas without pipelines
- (d) Cleaner combustion

**Answer: (c)**

4. The existing natural gas pipeline network in India is approximately:

- (a) 10,000 km
- (b) 25,000 km
- (c) 50,000 km
- (d) 1,00,000 km



Answer: (b)

## Mains Questions

1. "The shift from LPG to Piped Natural Gas is crucial for India's energy security and sustainability." Discuss the advantages, challenges, and policy measures needed for successful PNG expansion. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the vulnerabilities in India's LPG supply chain and how promoting PNG can address them. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Energy transition must balance economic, environmental, and infrastructural realities." Analyse this statement in the context of India's push for PNG. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Cylinder Dependence to Pipeline Security: India's Quest for a Resilient and Sustainable Energy Future."

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