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World Happiness Report 2026

Why in News?

- ❖ The **World Happiness Report 2026**, published on **19 March 2026** by the University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre in partnership with Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, has once again ranked **Finland** as the world's happiest country for the ninth consecutive year.
- ❖ The report's flagship finding this year is the strong negative correlation between **heavy social media use** and subjective well-being among adolescents and young adults (aged 15-24) in many high-income countries.
- ❖ India has shown a modest but steady improvement, rising from **126th rank in 2024** to **118th rank in 2025** (the report uses 2025 data for 2026 publication). The report continues to serve as a key global benchmark for subjective well-being and informs policy debates on mental health, digital regulation, and social support systems.

Key Highlights of World Happiness Report 2026

- **Top 10 Happiest Countries (2026 ranking)**
 1. Finland
 2. Iceland
 3. Denmark
 4. Costa Rica (biggest riser)
 5. Sweden
 6. Norway
 7. Netherlands
 8. Luxembourg
 9. Switzerland
 10. Australia

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- **Bottom 10 (Least Happy)**

- Afghanistan (bottom for multiple years)
- Sierra Leone
- Malawi
- Zimbabwe
- Others include conflict-affected and economically distressed nations

- **India's Performance**

- Rank: **118th** (improvement from 126th in 2024)
- Score: ~4.0-4.1 (on 0-10 Cantril Ladder scale)
- Factors contributing to improvement: increased social support, better perceptions of freedom, and modest gains in life expectancy
- Persistent drags: low GDP per capita ranking, high perceptions of corruption, moderate social support scores

- **Key Thematic Finding - Youth & Social Media**

- Among people under 30, happiness levels in many high-income countries have fallen sharply since ~2015-2017.
- Heavy social media use (especially >3-4 hours/day) strongly linked to lower life satisfaction, higher anxiety, depression, and loneliness.
- The decline is particularly pronounced among girls and young women in North America, Western Europe, and parts of East Asia.
- Contrast: In many low- and middle-income countries (including India), youth happiness has remained more stable or even improved slightly.

- **Other Notable Trends**

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- Costa Rica's sharp rise attributed to strong social support networks and environmental quality.
- Nordic countries continue to dominate due to high trust, social safety nets, income equality, and low corruption.
- Afghanistan remains at the bottom due to prolonged conflict, economic collapse, and humanitarian crisis.

Methodology of the World Happiness Report

- **Core Measure**

- **Cantril Ladder** (0-10 scale): Respondents rate their current life relative to the best/worst possible life.

- **Six Explanatory Variables**

- GDP per capita (log)
- Healthy life expectancy at birth
- Social support ("Do you have someone you can count on in times of trouble?")
- Freedom to make life choices
- Generosity (donations in past month)
- Perceptions of corruption (in government & business)

- **Data Sources**

- Gallup World Poll (~100,000 respondents annually across 140+ countries)
- World Bank, WHO, and other international databases for control variables

Implications

- **For India**

- Modest rank improvement → reflects gains in social support, digital access, and post-COVID recovery.



- Youth mental health concerns remain valid (rising screen time, social media pressure).
- Need to strengthen mental health support in schools/colleges and regulate harmful online content.

• Global Policy

- Renewed focus on regulating social media platforms to protect adolescents.
- Emphasis on building social safety nets, reducing inequality, and fostering community trust.

• Broader Relevance

- Happiness rankings increasingly used in policy discourse (Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, UAE's Ministry of Happiness).
- Highlights limitations of GDP-centric development models.

UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: World Happiness Report, Cantril Ladder, Subjective Well-being, Social Support, SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-being)
- Data: Finland (1st), India (118th in 2026 report), Top riser (Costa Rica)
- Related: Gross National Happiness (Bhutan), UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

GS-2 (Governance & Social Justice)

- Alternative development indices beyond GDP
- Mental health & youth well-being policies

GS-2 (IR)

- Global well-being rankings & soft power

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GS-3 (Society & Economy)

- Link between social media, mental health, and happiness

Essay / Interview

- “Beyond GDP: The Growing Importance of Happiness and Well-being in Development Discourse”
- “Social Media, Youth Mental Health, and the Global Happiness Crisis: Lessons from the 2026 Report”

MCQs

1. With reference to the World Happiness Report 2026, consider the following statements:
2. Finland has been ranked the happiest country for the ninth consecutive year.
3. India improved its ranking from 126th in 2024 to 118th in the 2026 report.
4. The report identifies heavy social media use as a major factor harming youth well-being in many countries.

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)

2. The World Happiness Report is published by:
 - (a) United Nations Development Programme
 - (b) University of Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, Gallup, and UN SDSN
 - (c) World Economic Forum



(d) OECD

Answer: (b)

3. The primary measure used to rank countries in the World Happiness Report is:

(a) GDP per capita

(b) Cantril Ladder (0-10 life evaluation scale)

(c) Human Development Index

(d) Genuine Progress Indicator

Answer: (b)

4. Which country showed the biggest rise in the World Happiness Report 2026 rankings?

(a) Sweden

(b) Costa Rica

(c) Netherlands

(d) Australia

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The World Happiness Report 2026 highlights the growing disconnect between economic growth and youth well-being in many countries." Discuss the key findings and their implications for public policy in India. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the factors that continue to place Nordic countries at the top of global happiness rankings. What lessons can India draw to improve subjective well-being? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Social media has become a significant determinant of youth mental health and life satisfaction." Examine this statement in light of the World Happiness Report 2026 and suggest regulatory and societal measures. (15 marks / 250 words)



4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Beyond GDP: Reimagining Development Through the Lens of Happiness and Well-being.”

Oil, Power, and Politics of Disruption: The Impact of the West Asia War

Introduction

Oil has historically shaped global geopolitics, acting as both an economic lifeline and a strategic weapon. In the context of the ongoing conflicts in West Asia, the nexus between oil, power, and politics has intensified, triggering disruptions that affect not just the region but the entire global economy.

Oil as an Instrument of Power

- Oil-rich nations like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq wield significant geopolitical influence.
- Control over production and exports allows these states to shape global energy markets.
- Energy dependency creates asymmetrical power relations between producers and consumers.

West Asia War and Energy Disruptions

1. Threat to Critical Oil Routes

- The Strait of Hormuz handles nearly one-fifth of global oil trade.
- Any conflict or blockade in this region can severely disrupt global supply chains.

2. Attacks on Energy Infrastructure

- Wars increase risks to oil fields, pipelines, and refineries.
- Even perceived threats lead to market panic and price spikes.

3. Shipping and Insurance Costs

- Increased insecurity raises shipping costs and insurance premiums.
- This directly impacts global oil prices and trade flows.

Politics of Disruption

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1. Weaponisation of Oil

- Oil is used as a **strategic tool** through supply manipulation or sanctions.
- Organizations like OPEC influence production decisions, affecting global markets.

2. Sanctions and Strategic Rivalries

- Sanctions on countries like Iran disrupt global supply.
- Great power competition intensifies around energy security and influence.

3. Market Volatility

- Even limited escalation in West Asia leads to **sharp price fluctuations**.
- Speculation amplifies the economic impact of geopolitical tensions.

Global Economic Implications

- Rising oil prices fuel **inflation and economic instability**.
- Developing nations face increased import burdens and fiscal stress.
- Energy shocks can slow global growth and disrupt supply chains.

India's Perspective

For India:

- Imports over **85% of its crude oil**, with a significant share from West Asia.
- Vulnerable to disruptions in the region.

Strategic Responses

- Diversification of oil imports
- Development of **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)**
- Promotion of renewable energy and green transition

Energy Transition: A Partial Solution

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- The shift to renewables aims to reduce dependence on oil.
- However, in the short term, oil remains central to global energy systems.
- New geopolitical challenges may emerge around **critical minerals**.

Challenges Ahead

- Ensuring **energy security amid geopolitical instability**
- Balancing fossil fuel dependence with climate commitments
- Managing supply chain vulnerabilities
- Preventing escalation in key oil-producing regions

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in West Asia reinforces how deeply oil is intertwined with global power politics. Disruptions in this region have far-reaching consequences, affecting economies, security, and international relations. As the world transitions to cleaner energy, managing the geopolitics of oil remains crucial for ensuring global stability and sustainable development.

UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Strait of Hormuz, Kharg Island, OPEC+, Dark Fleet, Strategic Petroleum Reserves
- Data: Hormuz oil transit (~20%), India Gulf oil dependence (~85%), Brent price spike (2026)
- Related: Energy Security, Energy Transition, Multi-alignment

GS-2 (IR)

- India's West Asia policy amid US-Iran escalation
- Energy as geopolitical instrument

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GS-3 (Economy)

- Oil shocks & CAD/inflation impact
- Energy security & diversification

GS-3 (Environment)

- Fossil fuel dependence vs. green transition

Essay / Interview

- “Oil as the Ultimate Geopolitical Weapon: Lessons from the 2026 West Asia War”
- “India’s Energy Security in a Volatile Persian Gulf: Challenges & Strategic Choices”

MCQs

1. With reference to the 2026 West Asia war’s impact on global energy markets, consider the following statements:
2. The Strait of Hormuz handles approximately 20% of global seaborne oil trade.
3. Kharg Island accounts for ~90% of Iran’s crude oil exports.
4. India imports over 85% of its crude oil via Gulf routes.

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)

2. Which of the following is NOT a direct consequence of the March 2026 US strikes on Kharg Island?



- (a) Temporary disruption of Iran's oil exports
- (b) Surge in global war-risk insurance premiums
- (c) Immediate closure of the Strait of Hormuz
- (d) Brent crude price spike

Answer: (c)

3. India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) currently cover approximately how many days of consumption?

- (a) 5 days
- (b) 9-10 days
- (c) 20 days
- (d) 30 days

Answer: (b)

4. The 1973 Oil Embargo was imposed by OPEC against:

- (a) India & Soviet Union
- (b) US & its allies
- (c) China & Japan
- (d) European Union

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The 2026 West Asia war has once again demonstrated how oil remains the ultimate geopolitical weapon." Discuss the mechanisms of energy disruption and their implications for global economic stability. (15 marks / 250 words)



2. Analyse the impact of the current Persian Gulf crisis on India's energy security, inflation, and foreign policy choices. Suggest strategic responses. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Accelerating the energy transition is the only long-term answer to oil geopolitics." Critically examine this statement in the context of India's current vulnerabilities and green energy ambitions. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Oil, Power, and Disruption: How the West Asia Conflict Exposes the Fragility of Global Energy Security."

Ras Laffan Attack & South Pars Strike: Escalation in West Asia War Threatens Global LNG Supply & India's Energy Security

Why in News?

- ❖ In the third week of the US-Israel-Iran war (escalated since mid-February 2026), **Iran launched a retaliatory missile barrage on 13-14 March 2026** targeting **Ras Laffan Industrial City** in Qatar – home to the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) production, liquefaction, and export complex.
- ❖ The strikes came hours after **Israeli airstrikes** damaged parts of the **South Pars gas field** (shared between Iran and Qatar), the world's largest natural gas field. The attack has caused **sizeable fires, extensive infrastructure damage**, and forced **temporary suspension** of LNG production at Ras Laffan. Brent crude briefly crossed **\$119/bbl** before settling around **\$112/bbl** – nearly 50% above pre-war levels.
- ❖ For India – which sources ~41-50% of its LNG and ~one-third of LPG from Qatar – the incident poses a severe threat to energy security, inflation control, and the ongoing "Goldilocks growth" narrative.

Key Details of the Attacks

- **Sequence of Events**
 - Israel strikes South Pars (shared Iran-Qatar field) → partial damage to Iranian side facilities.



- Iran retaliates → missiles hit Ras Laffan (Qatar), Samref refinery (Saudi Arabia), Yanbu facilities (Saudi Arabia), and targets in Kuwait.
- Qatar declares force majeure; LNG production halted temporarily.
- **Ras Laffan Industrial City**
 - World's largest LNG complex – operated by **QatarEnergy** (formerly Qatar Petroleum)
 - Accounts for ~20% of global LNG supply
 - Current capacity: ~77 million tonnes per annum (MTPA); expanding to ~126 MTPA by 2027-2030
 - Concentrated infrastructure: production, liquefaction trains, export terminals
- **South Pars Gas Field**
 - World's largest natural gas field (shared by Iran & Qatar)
 - Supplies majority of Qatar's LNG output via North Field (Qatar side)
- **Oil & Gas Market Impact**
 - Brent crude: \$112-119/bbl range (highest since 2022)
 - Global LNG spot prices: Sharp spike (Asia spot ~\$18-22/MMBtu)
 - Force majeure declarations → long-term contract deliveries at risk

India's LNG & LPG Dependency on Qatar

- **LNG Imports**
 - India's total LNG import (2024-25): ~27 million tonnes
 - Qatar share: ~11.2 million tonnes (~41.4%) – almost entirely from Ras Laffan
 - Major long-term contracts:
 - Petronet LNG: ~7.5 MTPA



- GSPC: ~1 MTPA
- GAIL & others: smaller volumes
- **LPG Imports**
 - Qatar supplies ~one-third of India's LPG imports
 - Earlier disruptions already caused shortages in Bengaluru & other cities
- **Domestic Gas Balance**
 - Total consumption: ~189 MMSCMD
 - Domestic production: ~90 MMSCMD
 - LNG meets ~50% of demand → any Qatar disruption widens the gap

Background: India-Qatar Energy Ties

- **Strategic Partnership**
 - Qatar is India's largest LNG supplier
 - Bilateral trade: >\$14 billion (2024-25), dominated by energy
 - India exports cereals, machinery, metals; imports LNG, LPG, petrochemicals
- **Diversification Efforts**
 - Increased sourcing from US, Norway, Canada, Algeria, Russia
 - Russia now supplies ~35-40% of crude oil but limited LNG volumes
- **Previous Disruptions**
 - 2022-23 Red Sea & Ukraine war → shipping delays & higher costs
 - 2026 war → physical damage to production & liquefaction facilities

Implications for India

- **Energy Security**
 - Prolonged Ras Laffan outage → severe LNG & LPG shortages

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- Higher spot market purchases → increased import bill
- **Inflation & Economy**
 - Fuel & fertiliser price pass-through → CPI inflation risk (already ~5-6%)
 - Widening CAD, rupee pressure
- **Strategic & Diplomatic**
 - Tests India's multi-alignment (Gulf ties vs. Iran connectivity vs. US-Israel partnership)
 - Naval presence in Arabian Sea / Gulf of Oman intensified
- **Long-term**
 - Accelerates push for renewables, green hydrogen, domestic gas exploration
 - Strategic Petroleum Reserves drawdown may be required

UPSC CSE & State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Ras Laffan, South Pars, Strait of Hormuz, LNG Force Majeure, QatarEnergy
- Data: Qatar's global LNG share (~20%), India's Qatar LNG share (~41%), Brent spike (~\$112-119/bbl)
- Related: Energy Security, Atmanirbhar Bharat, National Green Hydrogen Mission

GS-2 (IR)

- India-Gulf energy diplomacy
- West Asia conflict & multi-alignment challenges

GS-3 (Economy)

- Oil & gas shocks → inflation, CAD, fiscal stress
- Energy import dependence & diversification

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GS-3 (Environment)

- Fossil fuel vulnerability vs. renewable transition

Essay / Interview

- “Energy as Geopolitical Leverage: The Ras Laffan Attack and India’s Energy Security Dilemma”
- “From Strait of Hormuz to Ras Laffan: How West Asia Disruptions Threaten India’s Growth Story”

MCQs

1. With reference to the Ras Laffan attack in March 2026, consider the following statements:
2. Ras Laffan accounts for roughly one-fifth of global LNG supply.
3. Qatar is India’s largest LNG supplier, contributing ~41% of imports.
4. The attack followed Israeli strikes on the South Pars gas field.

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)

2. Ras Laffan Industrial City is located in:
 - (a) Saudi Arabia
 - (b) UAE
 - (c) Qatar



(d) Iran

Answer: (c)

3. The South Pars gas field is shared between:

(a) Saudi Arabia & UAE

(b) Iran & Qatar

(c) Iraq & Kuwait

(d) Oman & Yemen

Answer: (b)

4. India's domestic natural gas production meets approximately what percentage of its total consumption?

(a) 10%

(b) 25%

(c) 50%

(d) 75%

Answer: (c)

Mains Questions

1. "The Ras Laffan attack has shifted the West Asia conflict from transit route threats to direct damage of production infrastructure." Discuss the implications for global LNG markets and India's energy security. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse how India's heavy dependence on Qatar for LNG exposes it to geopolitical risks. Suggest a multi-pronged strategy to enhance energy resilience. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Recurring energy shocks from West Asia highlight the urgency of India's renewable energy transition." Examine this statement in the context of the 2026 Ras Laffan crisis and India's long-term energy goals. (15 marks / 250 words)

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4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Oil & Gas Geopolitics in West Asia: How the 2026 Conflict Exposes Vulnerabilities in India’s Energy Security Architecture.”

Supreme Court Strikes Down 3-Month Age Cap on Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers: Landmark Verdict in Hamsaanandini Nanduri Case

Why in News?

- ❖ On **18 March 2026**, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising **Justices J.B. Pardiwala** and **R. Mahadevan** delivered a landmark judgment in **Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India** (W.P. (C) No. 1234 of 2024 & connected matters).
- ❖ The Court struck down the **3-month age limit** prescribed under **Section 60(4) of the Code on Social Security, 2020** (which mirrored the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017) for grant of maternity leave to adoptive mothers.
- ❖ The provision was declared **unconstitutional** and violative of **Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21** of the Constitution. The Court directed that adoptive mothers shall be entitled to **26 weeks of paid maternity leave** (same as biological mothers for first two children) regardless of the child’s age at the time of adoption.

Key Excerpts from the Judgment

- **Core Holding**
 - “The right to parenthood is not restricted to biological procreation. Adoption is an equally valid exercise of reproductive autonomy and the state cannot discriminate between biological and adoptive motherhood.”
 - “The classification based on the age of the child is manifestly arbitrary and has no rational nexus with the object of the legislation.”
- **Key Legal Findings**
 - **Article 14 violation:** The 3-month cap creates an “impossible criteria” – most children are declared legally free for adoption only after several months/years in care institutions.



- **Article 21 violation:** Right to life & personal liberty includes reproductive autonomy, dignity of adoptive motherhood, and the child's right to family life.
- **Wollstonecraft Dilemma:** The state cannot expect women to participate equally in paid work while denying them equal caregiving support for non-biological children.
- **Shared responsibility of parenthood:** "Parenthood is not a solitary function performed by one parent but a shared responsibility."
- **Directions Issued**
 - All adoptive mothers entitled to 26 weeks paid maternity leave irrespective of child's age.
 - Retrospective benefit for pending cases.
 - Centre & states to amend rules/notifications within three months.

Background: Legal Evolution of Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**
 - Originally 12 weeks for biological mothers only.
- **2017 Amendment**
 - Increased to 26 weeks for biological mothers (first two children).
 - Introduced 12 weeks for adoptive mothers – but only if child is below 3 months.
- **Code on Social Security, 2020**
 - Retained the same provision (Section 60(4)) – 12 weeks for adoption of child < 3 months.
- **Petitioner's Challenge**
 - Argued the cap renders the benefit "largely inoperative" and discriminatory.
 - Cited Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 – most adoptions involve children above 3 months.
- **Government Defence (rejected)**



- Older children can use crèche facilities.
- Benefit meant only for early bonding phase.

Implications

- **For Adoptive Parents**
 - Removes major barrier to adoption (especially older children).
 - Equalises treatment of biological & adoptive motherhood.
- **For Gender Equality & Family Policy**
 - Advances gender-neutral & inclusive leave framework.
 - Reduces workplace discrimination against adoptive mothers.
- **Social & Demographic**
 - Encourages adoption (CARA data: ~3,500 adoptions in 2024-25; many older children).
 - Supports child welfare & family strengthening.
- **Legal Precedent**
 - Strengthens Article 21 jurisprudence on reproductive autonomy & dignity.
 - Reinforces NALSA (2014) logic of substantive equality beyond formal equality.

UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017, Code on Social Security 2020, Article 14 & 21, Reproductive Autonomy, Wollstonecraft Dilemma
- Data: Leave for adoptive mothers - previously 12 weeks (child <3 months), now 26 weeks
- Related: Juvenile Justice Act 2015, CARA, NALSA Judgment

GS-1 (Society)

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- Changing family structures & adoption trends
- Gender equity in social policy

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial expansion of fundamental rights (Article 21)
- Labour & social welfare legislation

GS-2 (Social Justice)

- Rights of women & children in non-traditional families

Essay / Interview

- “From Biological to Inclusive Motherhood: The Supreme Court’s Verdict on Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers”
- “Reproductive Autonomy & Substantive Equality: Expanding the Contours of Article 21”

MCQs

1. With reference to the Supreme Court judgment on maternity leave for adoptive mothers (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. The Court struck down the 3-month age limit for children adopted.
3. Adoptive mothers are now entitled to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave.
4. The judgment was delivered by Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan.

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)

2. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act that increased leave to 26 weeks for biological mothers was passed in:

- (a) 2016
- (b) 2017
- (c) 2018
- (d) 2020

Answer: (b)

3. The Supreme Court relied on which of the following to equate adoptive and biological motherhood?

- (a) Right to privacy only
- (b) Reproductive autonomy under Article 21
- (c) Directive Principles of State Policy
- (d) Preamble to the Constitution

Answer: (b)

4. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act that governs adoption in India was enacted in:

- (a) 2000
- (b) 2015
- (c) 2020
- (d) 2021

Answer: (b)



Mains Questions

1. “The Supreme Court’s March 2026 verdict on maternity leave for adoptive mothers marks a progressive expansion of reproductive autonomy and substantive equality.” Discuss its legal reasoning and social significance. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the evolution of maternity leave provisions in India from the 1961 Act to the 2026 judgment. How does the ruling address discrimination against adoptive families? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Family leave policies must reflect diverse family structures and caregiving responsibilities.” Critically analyse the Supreme Court’s verdict and its implications for gender-neutral and inclusive labour laws in India. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Biological to Adoptive Parenthood: The Supreme Court’s Verdict and the Quest for Inclusive Family Policies in India.”

RELIEF Scheme

Why in News?

- ❖ On **18 March 2026**, the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, through the **Export Promotion Mission (EPM)**, formally notified the **RELIEF (Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) Scheme** to provide immediate financial and operational relief to Indian exporters severely affected by the ongoing **US-Israel-Iran war** in West Asia. The scheme addresses extraordinary freight surcharges, war-risk insurance premium spikes, and physical risks to cargo following:
 - Missile/drone attacks on shipping lanes and ports
 - Repeated Iranian threats to close the **Strait of Hormuz**
 - Actual attacks on vessels and energy infrastructure (e.g., Ras Laffan in Qatar, Kharg Island in Iran) The scheme is time-bound (covering shipments from mid-February to mid-June 2026) and is being implemented by **ECGC Ltd** with real-time monitoring via a dedicated dashboard.



Key Features of the RELIEF Scheme

- **Coverage Period & Scope**
 - Retrospective: Shipments made between **14 February 2026** and **15 March 2026**
 - Prospective: Shipments planned between **16 March 2026** and **15 June 2026**
 - Destination/transshipment countries: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Yemen
- **Risk Coverage Enhancements (for insured exporters)**
 - Existing ECGC policies → **up to 100% additional risk coverage** for conflict-linked losses (above normal policy limits)
 - New prospective shipments → **95% risk coverage** under ECGC's standard export credit insurance
- **MSME-specific Relief (non-insured / under-insured)**
 - Reimbursement of up to **50%** of extraordinary freight surcharges and war-risk insurance premiums
 - Cap: **₹50 lakh per exporter**
 - Applicable only to Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
- **Operational & Logistical Relief**
 - Waiver of **storage & dwell time charges** at major ports (JNPT, Mundra, Kandla, Chennai, etc.) for stranded cargo
 - Procedural relaxations (e.g., simplified documentation, extended free period for containers) coordinated by the **Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG)**
- **Monitoring & Implementation**
 - Nodal agency: **ECGC Ltd**
 - Real-time dashboard for claim tracking and fund utilisation

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- Periodic review by **EPM Steering Committee** (headed by Commerce Secretary)

Background: Context of the Scheme

- **West Asia Crisis (2026)**
 - Escalation began with killing of Ayatollah Khamenei (Feb 2026) → US-Israel strikes on Kharg Island, Ras Laffan attacks, Hormuz threats
 - Global freight rates for Gulf routes up **300-500%**; war-risk premiums surged
 - Indian exporters (textiles, pharma, engineering goods, agri-products) facing cancellations, demurrage, and insurance cost shocks
- **Existing Export Support Mechanisms**
 - ECGC already provides standard export credit insurance
 - Market Access Initiative (MAI), RoDTEP, Interest Equalisation Scheme
 - RELIEF is a **special, time-bound intervention** under the Export Promotion Mission (EPM) framework
- **India's Trade Exposure to West Asia**
 - Gulf countries: ~15-18% of India's total merchandise exports
 - Major items: gems & jewellery, petroleum products, engineering goods, textiles, pharmaceuticals
 - India is the second-largest trading partner of UAE and a major partner of Saudi Arabia & Qatar

Implications

- **For Exporters**
 - Immediate liquidity relief for MSMEs and large exporters
 - Reduced risk of contract cancellations and financial distress
- **For Economy**



- Stabilises export earnings → supports CAD management
- Prevents job losses in labour-intensive export sectors
- **Strategic & Diplomatic**
 - Demonstrates government's proactive response to geopolitical shocks
 - Reinforces India's multi-alignment policy (supporting Gulf partners while maintaining Iran ties)
- **Long-term**
 - Highlights need for supply-chain diversification (Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia)
 - Accelerates push for rupee trade, domestic shipping capacity, and green freight corridors

UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: RELIEF Scheme, Export Promotion Mission (EPM), ECGC, Force Majeure, War-risk Premium
- Data: Scheme period (Feb-June 2026), MSME cap (₹50 lakh), Gulf export share (~15-18%)
- Related: RoDTEP, Interest Equalisation Scheme, Market Access Initiative

GS-2 (IR)

- India-Gulf economic diplomacy amid West Asia conflict
- Multi-alignment & energy-trade security

GS-3 (Economy)

- Export promotion & trade facilitation measures
- Geopolitical risks to external sector



GS-3 (Security)

- Non-traditional security threats to trade & supply chains

Essay / Interview

- “Geopolitical Disruptions and Export Resilience: The Role of Schemes like RELIEF in Safeguarding India’s Trade”
- “From Hormuz to Ras Laffan: Managing Energy & Trade Risks in a Volatile West Asia”

MCQs

1. With reference to the RELIEF Scheme notified in March 2026, consider the following statements:
2. It provides up to 100% additional risk coverage for existing ECGC policies on shipments made between 14 Feb and 15 Mar 2026.
3. MSME exporters can claim up to 50% reimbursement of extraordinary freight & insurance costs (capped at ₹50 lakh).
4. The scheme applies only to exports destined for Iran and Iraq.

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: (b)

2. The nodal agency for implementation of the RELIEF Scheme is:

- (a) EXIM Bank
- (b) ECGC Ltd



(c) DGFT

(d) Department of Commerce

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following countries is NOT included in the regional scope of the RELIEF Scheme?

(a) Qatar

(b) Saudi Arabia

(c) Oman

(d) Turkey

Answer: (d)

4. The RELIEF Scheme was launched under the umbrella of:

(a) Atmanirbhar Bharat

(b) Export Promotion Mission (EPM)

(c) Make in India

(d) National Logistics Policy

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "Geopolitical shocks in West Asia have repeatedly exposed vulnerabilities in India's export supply chains." Discuss the key features of the RELIEF Scheme and evaluate its effectiveness in protecting exporters. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse how the RELIEF Scheme fits into India's broader strategy of export resilience and trade diversification amid recurring energy & maritime disruptions. (10 marks / 150 words)



3. “While short-term relief measures like RELIEF are essential, long-term export competitiveness requires structural reforms.” Critically examine this statement in the context of the 2026 West Asia crisis and India’s external trade sector. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Hormuz to Ras Laffan: Managing Geopolitical Risks to India’s Export Engine in an Uncertain Global Order.”

Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) Framework

Why in News?

- ❖ On **18 March 2026**, the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** notified **ALMM List-III** covering **solar ingots and wafers** under the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) Order, 2019. The new list will become **mandatory from 1 June 2028** for all solar projects eligible under government schemes, programmes, net-metering, and projects selling power to government entities.
- ❖ This is the third major expansion of the ALMM framework (after modules in 2021 and cells in 2024), completing the upstream value chain coverage and reinforcing India’s push for **domestic solar manufacturing** under **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and the **National Green Hydrogen Mission**.
- ❖ The move has been welcomed by domestic manufacturers (Waaree, Adani Solar, Tata Power Solar, etc.) but has raised concerns among developers about potential cost increases and supply chain disruptions in the transition period.

Key Details of the ALMM Framework & List-III Notification

- **Structure of ALMM**
 - **List-I** – Solar PV Modules (mandatory since April 2021; phased implementation)
 - **List-II** – Solar PV Cells (mandatory from April 2026)
 - **List-III** – Solar Ingots & Wafers (notified March 2026; effective **1 June 2028**)
- **Applicability**
 - Mandatory for:

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- All government-funded solar projects
- Schemes/programmes of MNRE, state governments
- Net-metering/rooftop solar projects
- Projects selling power to government entities (including SECI tenders)
- Exemptions: Open Access, Captive, Merchant, and certain export-oriented units (subject to conditions)
- **Grandfathering Provisions**
 - Projects awarded/bids submitted before the effective date of List-III (1 June 2028) are protected.
 - Existing pipeline projects (already under List-I/II) remain unaffected.
- **Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) Linkage**
 - ALMM does **not dilute** existing DCR provisions under various MNRE schemes.
 - Acts as a **quality & reliability filter** on top of DCR.
- **Enforcement & Penalties**
 - Violation → blacklisting, debarment from future tenders, financial penalties.
 - MNRE-empanelled testing labs and third-party audits ensure compliance.

Background & Evolution of ALMM Framework

- **Introduction**
 - Issued under **ALMM Order, 2019** (notified 2 January 2020).
 - Initial objective: Prevent dumping of sub-standard Chinese modules in government projects.
- **Phased Implementation**



- List-I (modules): Mandatory from April 2021 (initially only government projects; later expanded).
- List-II (cells): Mandatory from April 2026.
- List-III (ingots & wafers): Notified 2026; mandatory from June 2028.
- **Current Status (March 2026)**
 - List-I: >100 GW cumulative module capacity approved.
 - List-II: Cell manufacturing approvals crossed 50 GW.
 - List-III: Expected to accelerate upstream investment (ingot & wafer plants).
- **Domestic Manufacturing Growth**
 - India's solar module capacity: ~70 GW (2026) from ~5 GW (2020).
 - Cell capacity: ~30 GW operational + ~50 GW under construction.
 - Ingot & wafer capacity still nascent (~5-8 GW); List-III aims to scale it rapidly.

Implications

- **For Domestic Manufacturing**
 - Strong signal to invest in upstream (polysilicon → ingot → wafer → cell → module) value chain.
 - Expected to attract ₹40,000-50,000 crore investment in ingot/wafer plants by 2030.
- **For Solar Developers & EPCs**
 - Short-term cost increase (10-15%) due to higher domestic wafer/cell prices.
 - Long-term: Supply-chain resilience, reduced import dependence.
- **For Energy Transition**
 - Supports 500 GW non-fossil target by 2030.



- Strengthens India's position in global solar supply chain (currently ~5% of world module capacity).
- **For Geopolitical & Trade**
 - Reduces vulnerability to Chinese supply shocks.
 - Aligns with US-led "friend-shoring" and anti-dumping measures.

UPSC CSE State PCS Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: ALMM Framework, List-I/II/III, Domestic Content Requirement (DCR), Run-of-the-River (unrelated but similar renewable context)
- Data: List-III effective date (1 June 2028), Current module capacity (~70 GW)
- Related: MNRE, National Solar Mission, PLI Scheme for Solar PV

GS-3 (Economy & Infrastructure)

- Renewable energy manufacturing & supply-chain localisation
- Atmanirbhar Bharat in solar sector

GS-3 (Environment)

- Clean energy transition & energy security

GS-2 (Governance)

- Centrally sponsored schemes & quality control frameworks

Essay / Interview

- "ALMM Expansion to Ingots & Wafers: Accelerating India's Solar Manufacturing Self-Reliance"
- "From Import Dependence to Global Solar Leadership: The Role of ALMM in India's Energy Transition"



MCQs

1. With reference to the ALMM framework notified in March 2026, consider the following statements:
2. List-III covers solar ingots and wafers and becomes mandatory from 1 June 2028.
3. ALMM List-I (solar PV modules) became mandatory earlier than List-II (solar PV cells).
4. The framework applies only to private sector solar projects.

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: (b)

2. The Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) Order was originally issued in:

- (a) 2017
- (b) 2019
- (c) 2021
- (d) 2023

Answer: (b)

3. Which nodal ministry administers the ALMM framework?

- (a) Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- (b) Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
- (c) Ministry of Heavy Industries



(d) NITI Aayog

Answer: (b)

4. ALMM List-III is expected to become mandatory from:

(a) 1 April 2026

(b) 1 June 2028

(c) 1 January 2027

(d) 1 April 2030

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The expansion of ALMM to include List-III (ingots & wafers) completes the domestic solar value chain mandate." Discuss its significance for India's renewable energy manufacturing ecosystem and energy security. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Analyse the role of the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) framework in promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat in the solar sector. What are the likely short-term challenges for developers? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Quality assurance mechanisms like ALMM are essential for scaling up renewable energy capacity while ensuring long-term sustainability." Examine this statement in the context of the March 2026 notification of ALMM List-III. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Import Dependence to Domestic Solar Leadership: The Strategic Role of ALMM in India's Energy Transition."