



Enhancing Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

For Prelims: [Central Public Works Department](#), [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, of 2016](#), [Accessible India Campaign](#)

For Mains: Significance in promoting inclusivity and equal rights for PWDs, Government Policies & Interventions

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [Central Public Works Department \(CPWD\)](#) has prioritised improving **accessibility for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in public buildings**. Despite the enactment of the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016](#), challenges remain, leading the CPWD to implement measures to ensure adherence to accessibility standards.

What is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwDs) Act, 2016?

▪ About:

- The RPwDs Act, 2016, implements the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), ratified by India in 2007.
 - It replaced the **Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995**.
- In India, there were around 26.8 million **persons with disabilities or Divyangjan**, constituting **2.21% of India's total population (2011 Census)**.
- The [National Sample Survey Office \(NSSO\)](#) estimates that 2.2% of the Indian population is disabled.
 - NSSO 76th round, 2019 states that additionally, the incidence of disability in the Indian population during a 365-day period per **1,00,000 people was recorded to be 86**.

▪ Expanded Definition of Disability:

- Disability is defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- In the RPWD Act, 2016, the types of disabilities increased from 7 to 21, with a provision for the Central Government to add more.

▪ Rights and Entitlements:

- Appropriate governments tasked with **ensuring equal rights for persons with disabilities**.
- Additional benefits such as **reservation in higher education** (minimum 5%), **government jobs** (minimum 4%), and **allocation of land** (minimum 5%) provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs.
- **Free education guaranteed for every child** with a benchmark disability between 6 and 18 years.
 - Government-funded and recognized educational institutions mandated to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities.
- Emphasis on making public infrastructure and facilities accessible to persons with

disabilities, enhancing their participation and inclusion.

▪ **Mandates for Public Buildings:**

- Rule 15 of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017** mandates the central government to establish guidelines and **standards for public buildings to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.**
 - These standards encompass the physical environment, transport, and **information and communication technology** for persons with disabilities.
 - Every establishment, including public buildings, must adhere to these standards based on the 2016 harmonised guidelines.
- **Recent amendments to Rule 15** require establishments to comply **with the 2021 harmonised guidelines**, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.
 - The comprehensive guidelines cover planning, tendering, and specifications for various accessibility features such as ramps, grab rails, lifts, and toilets with considerations for persons with disabilities.
 - All building plans must align with these guidelines to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities.
- Existing buildings are mandated to **undergo retrofitting within five years to meet accessibility standards**, promoting better inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

Note

- The **21 disabilities, in RPWD Act, 2016, include** Blindness, Low-vision, [Leprosy Cured Persons](#), Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), Locomotor Disability, Dwarfism, **Intellectual Disability**, Mental Illness, Autism Spectrum Disorder, [Cerebral Palsy](#), Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological Conditions, **Specific Learning Disabilities (Dyslexia)**, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language Disability, Thalassaemia, Hemophilia, [Sickle Cell Disease](#), Multiple Disabilities including deaf-blindness, [Acid Attack victim](#), and [Parkinson's disease](#).

What are the Other Initiatives Related to the Empowerment of the Disabled?

- [Unique Disability Identification Portal.](#)
- [DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme.](#)
- [Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/fitting of Aids and Appliances.](#)
- [National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities.](#)
- [Divya Kala Mela 2023.](#)

Status of Accessibility in Public Buildings

- The [Accessible India Campaign](#) aims to enhance **accessibility for PwD in public buildings, transportation, and websites.**
- A total of 1,671 buildings across 48 cities in states and Union Territories underwent access audits to assess their level of accessibility for PwD.
- The Centre received financial proposals for retrofitting 1,484 buildings to make them more accessible for PwD.
 - Out of the proposed retrofitting projects, work has been sanctioned for 1,314 buildings, indicating progress in addressing accessibility concerns.
- The government identified 2,839 state government buildings requiring retrofitting to improve accessibility, with funds allocated from the states' resources for this purpose.

What are the Concerns Regarding Accessibility in Public Buildings?

- PwDs and activists report that the guidelines established in 2016 have **not been effectively implemented.** Furthermore, the newer 2021 guidelines are facing similar neglect from state

governments.

- Analysts state that **no state has yet incorporated the harmonized guidelines into their building by-laws**, indicating a widespread failure to address accessibility issues.
- Experts highlight a **lack of awareness and accountability** among engineers of public works departments responsible for implementing accessibility guidelines.
- Funds for retrofitting projects are available, but many states and cities have **not submitted applications for them**, indicating a failure to prioritise accessibility initiatives.
- The Central Public Works Department's **memo lacks clarity and may lead to unnecessary resource wastage**, further hindering the effective implementation of accessibility measures.

Central Public Works Department (CPWD)

- The CPWD was originally established in July 1854 as the Ajmer Provisional Division. Its primary objective was to execute public works, encompassing disciplines such as **architecture, engineering, project management, and building construction and maintenance**.
- Currently, CPWD operates under the Ministry of Urban Development and has a nationwide presence.
- CPWD serves as the prime engineering bloc of the Union government, consisting of three divisions: Buildings and Roads (B&R), Electrical and Mechanical (E&M), and Horticulture.
- In 2016, CPWD embraced **modern dust-free construction methods**, particularly the monolithic system, for all projects exceeding a budget of Rs 100 crore.
 - The **monolithic system involves pouring concrete for beams and slabs together**, forming a unified construction component.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. India is home to lakhs of persons with disabilities. What are the benefits available to them under the law? (2011)

1. Free schooling till the age of 18 years in government run schools.
2. Preferential allotment of land for setting up business.
3. Ramps in public buildings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Does the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 ensure effective mechanism for empowerment and inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in the society? Discuss. (2017)

Local Currency Trade between India-Indonesia

For Prelims: [Reserve Bank of India](#), [Look East Policy](#), [Non-Aligned Movement](#), [G20](#), [East Asia Summit](#)

For Mains: Internationalisation of Indian Currency, Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Source: [BL](#)

Why in News?

The [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) and the [Bank Indonesia \(BI\)](#) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishing a framework to promote the use of **local currencies (the Indian Rupee (INR) and the Indonesian Rupiah (IDR))** for cross-border transactions.

- Earlier in 2023 [India and Malaysia](#) announced that they will settle trade in INR in addition to other currencies.



What are the Key Highlights of the MoU between RBI and Bank Indonesia?

- The primary objective of the MoU is to facilitate **bilateral transactions in INR and IDR**, covering **all current account transactions, permissible capital account transactions**, and other economic and financial transactions as mutually agreed upon by both countries.
- The framework enables **exporters and importers to invoice and pay in their respective domestic currencies**, thereby fostering the development of an INR-IDR foreign exchange market. This approach optimizes costs and settlement time for transactions.
 - It is expected to **promote trade between India and Indonesia**, deepen financial integration, and enhance the historical, cultural, and economic relations between the two nations.

INTERNATIONALISATION OF RUPEE

MEANING

- Increasing the use of Indian rupee in cross-border transactions

INVOLVES

- Rupee for import and export
- Rupee for current and capital account transactions

Indian Rupee is fully convertible in current account, but partially in capital account (BoP)

NEED

- Weaponisation of USD by US (for sanctions)
- Wane of de-dollarisation
- Increasing internationalisation of Chinese Renminbi
- India's minimal share in global forex market turnover (1.7%)

RBI'S EFFORTS

- Indian currency in cross-border trade – key component in **Foreign Trade Policy 2023**
- Mechanism introduced for rupee trade settlement with **18 countries**
 - Banks from these countries allowed to open **Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs)**
- Circular on "International Trade Settlement in Indian Rupees" (2022)
- External **commercial borrowings in INR** enabled

SIGNIFICANCE

- Reduced dependency on USD
- Lesser need for holding forex reserves
- Better bargaining power of Indian business
- Less exposure to currency volatility

CHALLENGES

- Rupee not fully convertible
- Less need for other countries to hold INR; India's low share in global exports
- Rupee may become more vulnerable to external shocks
- India's lesser control on Rupee supply

STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN

- More liberalised settlements in INR (in India and overseas)
- India to expand its reach in the global financial market
- Transition to an export-oriented economy to reduce trade deficit



India-Indonesia Relations

Commercial Relations:

- Indonesia has emerged as the **second largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN region.**
 - Bilateral trade has increased from USD 4.3 billion in 2005-06 to USD 38.84 billion in 2022-23.

Political Relations:

- Both countries were chief **supporters of independence for Asian and African countries**, leading to the **Bandung Conference of 1955** and the formation of the **Non-Aligned Movement in 1961.**
- Since India adopted the **'Look East Policy' in 1991**, there has been rapid development in bilateral relations.
- Both countries are members of **G20, East Asia Summit** and the **United Nations.**

Cultural Relations:

- The **Hindu, Buddhist and later Muslim faiths** travelled to Indonesia from the shores of India. The stories from the great epics of **Ramayana and Mahabharata** form a source of Indonesian folk art and dramas.
- There are approximately 100,000 people of Indian origin in Indonesia, mainly located in Greater Jakarta, Medan, Surabaya, and Bandung.

What are Efforts for the Internationalisation of the Rupee?

Liberalisation of Capital Markets:

- India increased the availability of rupee-denominated financial instruments, such as **bonds**

([Masala Bond](#)) and derivatives, to enhance the rupee's appeal.

▪ **Promotion of Digital Payment Systems:**

- Initiatives like the [Unified Payments Interface \(UPI\)](#) have facilitated digital transactions in rupees.
- Recently, [Sri Lanka and Mauritius have adopted UPI.](#)

▪ **Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs):**

- India permitted **authorized banks from 18 countries (Ex. Russia and Malaysia) to open [Special Vostro Rupee Accounts \(SVRAs\)](#)** for settling payments in rupees at market-determined exchange rates.
- Objectives of the Mechanism are lower transaction costs, greater price transparency, faster settlement time, and overall promotion of international trade.

▪ **Currency Swap Agreements:**

- Signed by the RBI with several countries (Ex. [Japan](#), [Sri Lanka](#) and [SAARC members](#)) enables the exchange of rupee and foreign currency between respective central banks, bolstering the international usage of the rupee.

▪ **Bilateral Trade Agreements:**

- The government's signing of bilateral trade agreements with other countries has facilitated greater cross-border trade and investment, promoting the use of the rupee in international transactions.

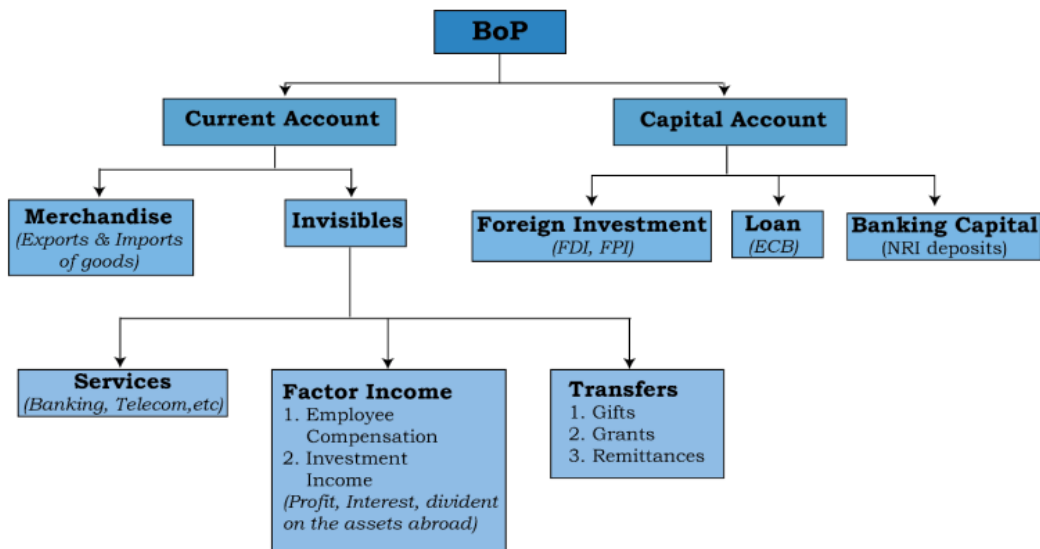
Balance of Payments (BoP)

- The [Balance of Payments \(BoP\)](#) is a crucial indicator of a country's economic health, summarising its international transactions with the rest of the world.

- Those transactions that **happen between Indian residents and Foreigners or nonresident Indians (NRIs)** are recorded in India's balance of payment.

- **Structure:** The BoP is broadly divided into two main accounts:

- **Current Account:** This account reflects the **flow of goods, services, income, and current transfers.**
 - It deals with **transactions that do not change the overall assets or liabilities of Indian residents** abroad or foreign residents in India. It includes:
 - Exports and Imports of goods and services
 - Investment income (interest, dividends) and compensation of employees
 - Current transfers (gifts, aid, Remittances)
- **Capital Account:** This account captures transactions involving **capital assets.**
 - It records transactions that **directly impact a country's foreign assets** and liabilities.
 - Acquisition or disposal of non-produced non-financial assets (land, intellectual property)
 - Includes [Foreign Direct Investment \(FDI\)](#), [Foreign Portfolio Investment \(FPI\)](#), Investing in businesses abroad, borrowing from foreign entities, and deposits made by **NRIs in Indian banks** are examples of capital account transactions.



▪ Forex Reserves:

- Indian forex reserves are vital assets held by the **RBI in foreign currencies.**
 - They serve as a financial cushion, ensuring liquidity to meet external obligations and stabilize the nation's currency and economy.
- **Components of Indian Forex Reserves:**
 - **Foreign Currencies:**
 - The Indian forex reserves mainly consist of foreign currencies such as the US Dollar, Euro, and British Pound. These currencies provide liquidity and facilitate international trade transactions.
 - **Gold Reserves:**
 - It is an essential hedge against inflation and a safety net during economic uncertainties.
 - **India has 800.78 tonnes of gold reserves.**
 - **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs):**
 - **SDRs** are international reserve assets the IMF has created. They supplement the foreign exchange reserves of the member countries.
 - The SDR is based on a basket of international currencies comprising the USD, Japanese yen, euro, pound sterling and Chinese Renminbi.
 - **Reserve Portion in IMF:**
 - The reserve portion in the IMF represents India's quota in the **International Monetary Fund**. It reflects India's position and voting power within this global financial institution.
 - Impact on Indian Forex Reserves: Strengthens international standing.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q1. Convertibility of rupee implies (2015)

- (a) being able to convert rupee notes into gold
- (b) allowing the value of rupee to be fixed by market forces
- (c) freely permitting the conversion of rupee to other currencies and vice versa
- (d) developing an international market for currencies in India

Ans: (c)

Government Proposes Higher Reporting Limits for Ministry Expenditure

For Prelims: [Public Accounts Committee](#), New Service and New Instruments of Service, [Supplementary Demands for Grants](#), [GDP growth rate](#), [Comptroller and Auditor General](#)

For Mains: New Financial Limits Proposed by the Finance Ministry, Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Increasing the Financing Limit

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The [Public Accounts Committee](#) of Parliament has recently endorsed the Finance Ministry's proposal to increase the financial thresholds for expenditure on '**New Service**' and '**New Instruments of Service**' by government ministries and departments.

- This proposed revision in financial limits marks the 4th instance since Independence. The last revision occurred in 2005 but came into effect in 2006.

What are the New Financial Limits Proposed by the Finance Ministry?

- **New Service and New Instruments of Service:**
 - **New Service (NS)** denotes expenditure resulting from a **new policy decision not previously brought to Parliament's notice**, encompassing new activities or investments (**Article 115(1)(a)** of the Constitution).
 - **New Instrument of Service (NIS)** refers to a relatively significant expenditure stemming from a **notable expansion of an existing policy**.
- **New Limit:**
 - For expenditures between **Rs 50 crore and Rs 100 crore**, reporting to Parliament is mandatory, but approval is not needed upfront.
 - Prior parliamentary approval is required only if the spending surpasses Rs 100 crore.
 - The reporting limit for '**New Instrument of Service**' has been fixed at up to 20% of the original appropriation or up to Rs 100 crore, whichever is higher.
 - Parliament's approval becomes mandatory for amounts exceeding 20% of the original appropriation or above Rs 100 crore, subject to savings within the same grant section.

Note

Previously, the limits were very low between **Rs 10 lakh to Rs 2.5 crore** and the value differed across nearly 50 items of expenditure.

What are the Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Increasing the Financing Limit?

▪ Potential Benefits:

- **Reduced Frequency of Supplementary Demands:** In recent years, PAC and CAG highlighted increased supplementary spending without proper reporting or approval.
 - By raising the financial limits for spending, the need for **Supplementary Demands for Grants** would decrease. This streamlines the budgetary process.
- **Reduced Administrative Bottlenecks:** The revision in financial limits reduces **bureaucratic hurdles** associated with seeking approvals for relatively smaller expenditures.
 - This promotes efficiency in decision-making and implementation processes within government departments and agencies.
- **Adaptation to Economic Growth:** With an expected **GDP growth rate of 6-7%** year-on-year, the size of the budget is anticipated to increase substantially in the coming years.
 - Raising financial limits ensures that the budget can accommodate the evolving needs of a growing economy.

▪ Potential Drawbacks:

- **Undermining Budgetary Discipline:** There is a risk that higher financial limits could be exploited for **misuse or misallocation of funds** if adequate oversight mechanisms are not in place.
 - This may lead to instances of corruption or wasteful spending.
 - It may also result in budgetary overshooting or deficits, impacting overall **fiscal health**.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Increased financial autonomy for ministries and departments might result in **reduced accountability for how public funds are utilized**.
 - This could make it challenging to track expenditures and ensure that they align with intended purposes.
- **Impact on Parliamentary Oversight:** Raising financial limits might reduce the frequency of parliamentary scrutiny over government expenditures, **limiting opportunities for meaningful debate and oversight**.
 - This could weaken the checks and balances essential for transparent governance.

What is the Public Accounts Committee?

- **About:** The Public Accounts Committee is an entity composed of selected members of parliament, established by the **Parliament of India**, with the primary mandate of **scrutinizing the revenue and expenditure** of the Government of India.
 - Its primary responsibility lies in auditing the reports provided by the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**, with the assistance of the CAG during investigations.
 - Notably, none of its members are permitted to hold ministerial positions in the government.
- **Members:** The PAC consists of a maximum of 22 members, with 15 elected by the Lok Sabha and up to 7 members from the Rajya Sabha.
 - Members are chosen annually through proportional representation via **a single transferable vote**.
 - The chairperson is appointed by the **Lok Sabha speaker**, and the term of office for members is 1 year.
 - The chairperson is predominantly from the opposition party.

What are the Different Types of Grants under Article 115?

▪ Supplementary Grant:

- **Purpose:** When unforeseen expenses arise **during the current financial year**, and the allocated budget **for a specific service is insufficient**, a supplementary grant is sought.
- **Approval Process:** The government presents an estimate of the additional funds required before Parliament for **approval before the end of the financial year**.

▪ Additional Grant:

- **Purpose:** This grant is requested when a **need arises for additional expenditure on a completely new service** not foreseen in the original budget for the current financial year.
- **Approval Process:** Similar to the supplementary grant, the government presents an estimate of the required funds before Parliament for approval before the end of the financial year.
- **Excess Grant:**
 - **Purpose:** This grant deals with situations where the **actual expenditure on a service has exceeded the amount** originally budgeted and **sanctioned by Parliament.**
 - **Approval Process:** Unlike the previous two, **an excess grant is presented after the end of the financial year in which the expenses were incurred.** The Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Railways present a "Demand for Excess Grant" to Parliament for their consideration.
 - Before the demands for excess grants are submitted to the Lok Sabha for voting, they must be approved by the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Q. Which of the following are the methods of Parliamentary control over public finance in India? (2012)

1. Placing Annual Financial Statement before the Parliament
2. Withdrawal of moneys from Consolidated Fund of India only after passing the Appropriation Bill
3. Provisions of supplementary grants and vote-on account
4. A periodic or at least a mid-year review of programme of the Government against macroeconomic forecasts and expenditure by a Parliamentary Budget Office
5. Introducing Finance Bill in the Parliament

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (a)

ASI Survey of Bhojshala Complex

For Prelims: Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), King Bhoja, Bhojshala, Vagdevi temple

For Mains: Role of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Temple Architecture

Source: [TH](#)

Why in News?

The Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh [High Court](#) has ordered the [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) to conduct a scientific survey of the **Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex** in Dhar district to clarify its original nature.

What is the Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque Complex?

▪ About:

- The **Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex** was originally a temple of [goddess Sarasvati](#) built by [Parawara King Bhoja](#) in **11th Century AD**.
- The mosque is built using structural members of the temple. The monument also retains some slabs inscribed with [Sanskrit and Prakrit](#) literary works.
- Noted as a great patron of art and literature, **King Bhoja** is said to have established a school, now known as **Bhojshala**.
- Under an agreement with the ASI, Hindus perform puja in the temple every Tuesday, and Muslims offer Namaz every Friday.

▪ Dispute:

- The controversy revolves around the **original status of the site as a temple**.
- The petitioner cites an ASI report claiming that the **original Bhojshala and Vagdevi temples** were demolished to build a mosque. A survey was requested to determine the actual history of the site.
- One respondent challenged the suit's maintainability, citing the **principle of res judicata** (a thing adjudged), noting a similar petition was **dismissed** by the High Court's Principal Bench in 2003.

▪ High Court's Order:

- The court noted that the temple's character remains mysterious until determined. All parties agree on the need to clarify the monument's nature, a task assigned to the ASI under the [Monument Act, 1958](#).
 - The court mandated the ASI to promptly conduct a **comprehensive scientific survey**, excavation, and investigation using advanced methods like [GPR-GPS](#) and [carbon dating](#), encompassing not only the site but also its 50-meter peripheral ring area.

What are the Methods Adopted by the ASI for Excavation?

▪ Invasive Methods:

- **Excavation**, the most invasive **archaeological technique**, involves digging using **stratigraphic principles** to gather information about the past while simultaneously destroying it.
 - **Stratigraphy** is adopted by archaeologists to peel off layers in reverse order and understand the **logical formation of the archaeological record**.

▪ Non-Invasive Methods: Non-invasive methods are used when investigations are undertaken inside a **built structure** and no excavation is permitted. It has several Methods:

- **Active Methods:** Inject energy into the ground and measure the response. The methods provide an estimate of the **ground's material properties**, such as **density, electrical resistance, and wave velocity**.
 - **Seismic Techniques:** Use shock waves to study subsurface structures.
 - **Electromagnetic Methods:** Measure electromagnetic responses after energy injection.
- **Passive Methods:** Measure existing physical properties.
 - **Magnetometry:** Detect magnetic anomalies caused by buried structures.
 - **Gravity Surveying:** Measure gravitational force variations due to subsurface features.
- **Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR):**
 - ASI uses GPR to produce a **3-D model** of buried archaeological features.
 - GPR operates by introducing a short radar impulse from a surface antenna and records the time and magnitude of return signals from the subsoil.

- Radar beam spreads like a cone, causing reflections before the antenna passes over the object.
- Radar beams spread out in a cone, leading to reflections that may not directly correspond to physical dimensions, creating false images.
- **Carbon Dating:**
 - Determine **organic material age** by measuring carbon content (C-14).

What are the Limitations of Various Methods in Archaeological Surveys?

- Similar physical properties of different materials can generate the same response, leading to **ambiguity** in identifying targets.
- The **data collected is limited** and contains **measurement errors**, making it challenging to accurately estimate the spatial distribution of properties.
- Archaeological structures are often made of **heterogeneous materials** with complex geometry, making data interpretation challenging.
- Geophysical tools might not accurately reconstruct target images, especially in complex scenarios.
- In cases like disputes over religious sites, **emotional and political factors** can influence interpretations and decisions.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI, under the **Ministry of Culture**, is the premier organization for the archaeological research and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- It administers more than 3650 ancient monuments, archaeological sites, and remains of national importance.
- Its activities include carrying out surveys of antiquarian remains, exploration and excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and maintenance of protected monuments, etc.
- It was founded in 1861 by **Alexander Cunningham**- the first Director-General of ASI. Alexander Cunningham is also known as the **“Father of Indian Archaeology”**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Prelims

Q. With reference to the history of India, consider the following pairs: (2020)

	Famous Place	Present State
1.	Bhilsa	Madhya Pradesh
2.	Dwarasamudra	Maharashtra
3.	Girinagar	Gujarat
4.	Sthanesvara	Uttar Pradesh

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 2 and 4 only

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q.1 Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss

(2013)

Q.2 Indian philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss. (2020)

Election Commission of India

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Election Commissioner of India resigned from his post, just days ahead of the announcement of the [Lok Sabha elections](#).

What is the Election Commission of India?

▪ About:

- The [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#) is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
 - It was established in accordance with the Constitution on 25th January **1950** (**celebrated as [National Voters' Day](#)**). The secretariat of the commission is in New Delhi.
- The body administers elections to the [Lok Sabha](#), [Rajya Sabha](#), and [State Legislative Assemblies](#) in India, and the offices of the [President and Vice President](#) in the country.
 - It is **not concerned with the elections to [panchayats](#) and [municipalities](#)** in the states. For this, the Constitution of India provides for a separate [State Election Commission](#).

▪ Constitutional Provisions:

- **Part XV (Article 324-329):** It deals with elections and establishes a commission for these matters.
- **Article 324:** Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.
- **Article 325:** No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.
- **Article 326:** Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be **based on adult suffrage**.
- **Article 327:** Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.
- **Article 328:** Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.
- **Article 329:** Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.

▪ Structure of ECI:

- Originally the commission **had only one election commissioner** but after the **Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989**, it was made a multi-member body.
- The Election Commission shall consist of the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and such number of other election commissioners, if any, as the President may from time-to-time fix.
- Presently, **it consists of the CEC and two Election Commissioners (ECs)**.
 - At the state level, the election commission is helped by the **Chief Electoral Officer**.

▪ Appointment & Tenure of Commissioners:

- The President appoints CEC and Election Commissioners as per [the CEC and Other ECs](#)

(Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

- They have a fixed tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- The salary and conditions of service of the **CEC and ECs** will be equivalent to that of the **Cabinet Secretary**.
 - Under the 1991 Act, it was equivalent to the salary of a **Supreme Court Judge**.

▪ **Removal:**

- They **can resign anytime** or can also be removed before the expiry of their term.
- The CEC can be removed from office only through a process of removal similar to that of a SC judge by Parliament, while **ECs can only be removed on the recommendation of the CEC**.

▪ **Limitations:**

- The Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications (legal, educational, administrative or judicial) of the members of the Election Commission.
- The Constitution has not specified the term of the members of the Election Commission.
- The Constitution has not debarred the retiring election commissioners from any further appointment by the government.

Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India Case, 2023

- A five-judge bench of the **Supreme Court (SC)** unanimously ruled that the appointment of the **Chief Election Commissioner** and the Election Commissioners shall be made by the President on the advice of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the **Leader of the Opposition** of the Lok Sabha and **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**.
 - **In case no leader of the Opposition is available**, the leader of the largest opposition Party in the Lok Sabha in terms of numerical strength will be a part of such committee.
- The Parliament passed the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**, in response to the **directive of the Supreme Court in the Anoop Baranwal v Union of India case, 2023**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (2022)

Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle Technology

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

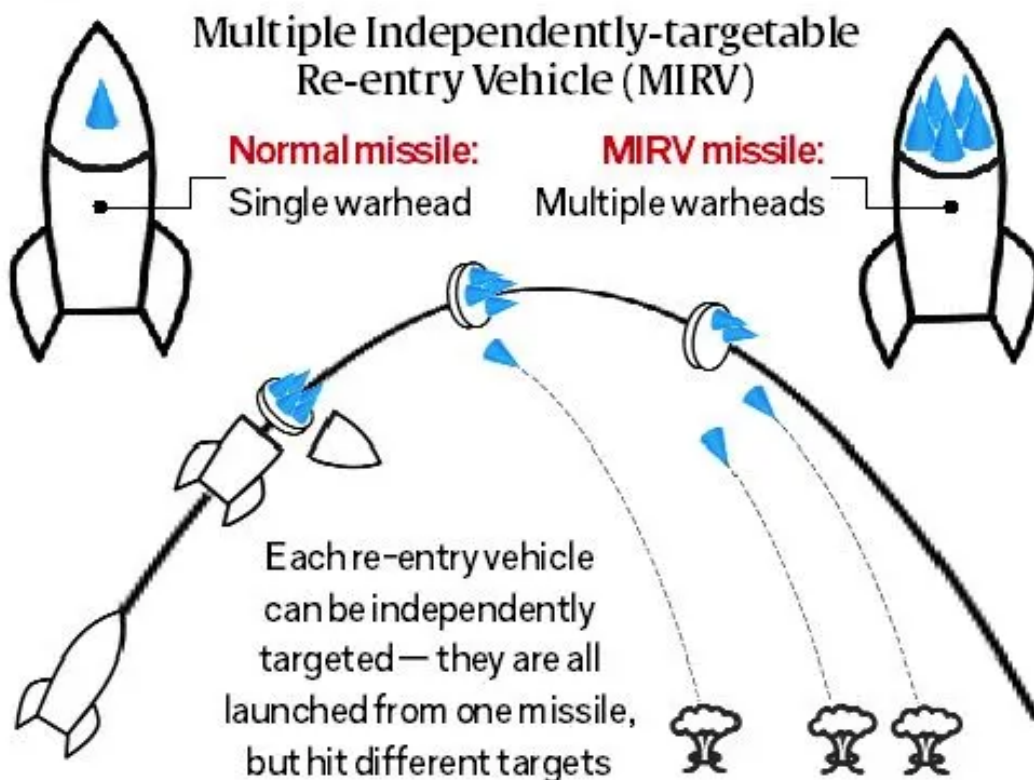
India has recently made a significant advancement in missile technology, joining the select group of nations possessing **Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capabilities**.

- This milestone was achieved through the successful **flight test named Mission Divyastra**, conducted by the [Defence Research and Development Organisation \(DRDO\)](#). It marked the first time the indigenously developed [Agni-5 missile](#) integrated MIRV technology.

What are the Key Facts About MIRV Technology?

- **Inception:**
 - MIRV technology originated in the **United States**, with the deployment of a **MIRVed Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) in 1970**.
 - MIRV allows a **single missile to carry multiple warheads (3-4)**, each capable of targeting different locations independently.
 - MIRV technology enhances the **missile's effectiveness by increasing the number of potential targets** it can engage.
 - MIRVs can be launched from both land-based platforms and sea-based platforms, such as submarines, expanding their operational flexibility and range.
- **Global Adoption and Proliferation:**
 - Nations possessing MIRV technology include major nuclear powers such as the **United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and India**, while Pakistan tested the technology (Ababeel Missile) in 2017.
 - The test flight of **Agni-5** marked the **first time that the MIRV technology was tested in India**, which aims to deploy multiple warheads at different locations in a single launch.
 - The Agni-5 weapon system is equipped with indigenous avionics systems and high-accuracy sensor packages, which ensured that the re-entry vehicles reached the target points within the desired accuracy.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - MIRVs were initially designed to **enhance offensive capabilities** rather than to defeat ballistic missile **defences**.
 - Their ability to deploy multiple warheads independently makes them significantly more challenging to defend against compared to traditional missiles.
- **Challenges:**
 - Deploying MIRV technology presents complex challenges, including the **miniaturisation of warheads**, the development of **advanced guidance systems**, and ensuring the reliability of individual re-entry vehicles.
 - Addressing these challenges is crucial for maintaining the effectiveness and reliability of MIRV systems in strategic operations.

ONE MISSILE, MANY WARHEADS



Agni-5 Missile

- Agni is an **Inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) developed indigenously** by the DRDO.
- It is capable of carrying nuclear warheads and has a target range of more than 5,000 km. It uses a three-stage solid-fuelled engine.
 - Agni-5 has been successfully tested several times since 2012. In December 2022, DRDO also tested the night-time capabilities of Agni-5.
- **Missiles in Agni Family:**
 - **Agni I:** Short-range ballistic missile (Range more than 700 km).
 - **Agni II:** Medium-range ballistic missile (Range more than 2000 to 3500 km).
 - **Agni III:** Intermediate-range ballistic missile (Range more than 3000 km).
 - **Agni IV:** Intermediate-range ballistic missile (Range more than 3500 km).
 - **Agni-P (Agni Prime):** A **nuclear-capable**, two-stage **canisterised** solid propellant ballistic missile (Range 1,000 to 2,000 km).
- The next upgrade of the Agni missile, **Agni-6**, is expected to be a full-fledged **intercontinental ballistic missile with a range well over 7,000 km**.

FORMIDABLE ARSENAL

SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES		
Short Range Ballistic Missiles		
Prithvi-I	150 km	1,000 kg
Prithvi-II	250 km	500 kg
Prithvi-III	350 km	1,000 kg
Dhanush	350 km	1,000 kg
Agni-I	700 km	1,000 kg
Shaurya	700 km	1,000 kg
Prahaar	150 km	200 kg
Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs)		
Agni-II	2,000 km	1,000 kg
Agni-III	3,000 km	2,000-2,500 kg
Agni-IV	4,000 km	1,000 kg
Intercontinental Range Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs)		
Agni-V	5,000 km	1,500 kg ((3-10 MIRV))
Agni-VI (Under Development)	6,000 km	1,000 kg (10 MIRV)
Surya (Under Development)	10,000 km	1,000 kg (10 MIRV)

SUBMARINE LAUNCHED BALLISTIC MISSILES		
K-15 Sagarika (B-05)	750 km	500 kg
K-4	3,000 km	1,000 kg

SHORT RANGE SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES		
Trishul	9 km	5 kg
Akash	30 km	50 kg
Maltri	15 km	10 kg
Barak-8	70 km	60 kg

ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILES		
Nag Anti-tank guided missile	7 km	8 kg
Hellina (Helicopter launched Nag missile)	7 km	8 kg

ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILES		
Prithvi Air Defence Missile (Exo-atmospheric at 50-80 km altitude)	2,000 km	DM (Proximity)
Advanced Air Defence Missile (Endo-atmospheric at 15-30 km altitude)	150-200 km	DM (Hit-to-kill)
Prithvi Defence Vehicle (Exo-atmospheric at more than 120 km altitude)	2,000-3,000 km	DM (Proximity)

CRUISE MISSILES		
Subsonic Cruise Missiles		
Nirbhay	750-1,000 km	500 kg
Supersonic Cruise Missiles		
BrahMos	290 km	300 kg
Hypersonic Cruise Missiles		
BrahMos-II	290 km	300 kg

AIR-TO-AIR MISSILE		
Astra	80-110 km	15kg

Read more: [Agni-5 Ballistic Missile](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Years Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q1. What is “Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)”, sometimes seen in the news? (2018)

- (a) An Israeli radar system
- (b) India’s indigenous anti-missile programme
- (c) An American anti-missile system
- (d) A defence collaboration between Japan and South Korea

Ans: (c)

Q2. With reference to Agni-IV Missile, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2014)

1. It is a surface-to-surface missile.
2. It is fuelled by liquid propellant only.
3. It can deliver one-tonne nuclear warheads about 7500 km away.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. How is S-400 air defence system technically superior to any other system presently available in the world? (2021)

Yaounde Declaration

Source: [DTE](#)

Recently, the **Yaoundé Declaration** marked a significant milestone in the fight against malaria, as health ministers from 11 African countries pledged to **end [malaria deaths](#)**.

- The **total number of malaria cases globally increased from 233 million in 2019 to 249 million in 2022**.
- Africa witnessed a significant rise in malaria cases during this period, reaching 233 million cases. **Africa accounts for 94% of global malaria cases and 95% of malaria-related deaths.**
- While progress against malaria has stagnated in the [WHO Africa region](#), the 11 African countries involved in the Yaounde conference account for **over 70% of the global malaria burden**.
 - The declaration aims to strengthen health infrastructure, expand personnel capacity, and enhance program implementation. They also seek to foster partnerships for funding, research, and innovation.
- Despite the declaration, **experts highlight the need for concrete action** on the ground. The **African Union's goal to control and eliminate malaria by 2030** faces significant financial gaps, with USD 1.5 billion needed to sustain basic malaria services and additional funds required for climate adaptation in the health sector.

Read more: [2023 World Malaria Report](#), [World Malaria Day](#)

Pi Chatbot Powered by Inflection-2.5

Source: [IE](#)

Pi, the world's 'friendliest' chatbot, powered by the new **Inflection-2.5 [large language model \(LLM\)](#)**, has emerged as a breakthrough in conversational AI technology, offering deep and meaningful interactions.

- Pi, developed by **Inflection AI, a California-based company**, offers empathetic, helpful, and safe conversations, setting it apart from other chatbots.
 - Inflection 2.5 is an **upgrade to a large language model (LLM)** created by Inflection AI.
- Inflection 2.5 allows Pi to access and process information from the real-time web, providing users with up-to-date answers to questions.
 - Inflection 2.5, competes with leading LLMs like GPT-4 while using only 40% of its computational power for training.
- Unlike [ChatGPT](#) and [Gemini](#), Pi is designed as a companion rather than a personal assistant, offering support, intelligence, and companionship.

Read more: [Large Language Models](#)

India to Become Third Largest Economy by 2031

Source: [FE](#)

CRISIL, a major rating agency in India, forecasts the country's [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) growth](#) to be 6.8% in the next fiscal year (FY25).

- CRISIL expects India's economic growth to moderate slightly from the current fiscal year (FY24) due to factors like **higher interest rates** but still sees a healthy 6.8% growth for FY25.
- Over the next seven years, CRISIL predicts an average **annual growth rate of 6.7%**, potentially propelling India to become the **world's third-largest economy by 2031, trailing behind the US and China.**
 - India, with a GDP size of USD 3.7 trillion, is currently the **fifth largest economy in the world**, after the US, China, Japan and Germany.
- The projected growth is expected to elevate India's [per capita income](#) (reach \$4,500 by 2031), allowing it to reach **upper-middle-income status by 2031.**
- Crisil's India Outlook report projects that between fiscal 2025 and 2031, the size of the Indian economy will inch closer to the **USD 7 trillion mark.**

Read more: [India's Economic Outlook](#)

Revamped PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojna

Source: [TH](#)

The Centre has tweaked the new ₹75,000-crore [PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojna \(Prime Minister's Rooftop Solar: Free Electricity Scheme\)](#)

- Originally intended to **fully subsidise installation of 1-3 Kilowatt (KW) solar systems in 1 crore households**, the scheme now offers **up to 60% coverage of costs**, with households required to cover the remainder, albeit with accessible loans.
 - The scheme envisaged **to generate up to 300 units of free electricity every month** which would translate to benefits of ₹15,000-18,000 annually for households.
- India had aimed to install 40 GW of [rooftop solar](#) by 2022 but has only achieved approximately 12 GW thus far.
 - Currently a rooftop solar system costs about **₹50,000** per KW.

Read more: [Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana](#)

Sea Defenders-2024

Source: [PIB](#)

Recently, the maritime security exercise '**Sea Defenders-2024**' was held between the [Indian Coast Guard \(ICG\)](#) and the United States Coast Guard (USCG) at **Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**

- The Exercise included a variety of scenarios including a **Pollution Response Demonstration**, in which Indian Coast Guard ships and aircraft showcased their expertise in responding to [oil spills](#) and other environmental hazards at sea.
 - It also simulated **Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) Operations** for inspecting vessels suspected of illegal activity.
- Furthermore, the joint exercise provided a platform for personnel from both coast guards to refine

their firefighting and damage control skills, fostering a spirit of collaboration and camaraderie.

Read more: [Indian Coast Guard](#)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/12-03-2024/print>

