

Headlines

Inflation falls - **Page No.1 , GS 3**

Rupee slide - **Page No.1 , GS 3**

Z-Morh tunnel - **Page No.1 , Fact**

Global politics - **Page No.8 , GS 2**

Indians abroad - **Page No.8 , GS 2**

Transforming MENtalities - **Page No.8 , GS 2**

PM-KISAN - **Page No.9 , GS 2**

Resisting transparency - **Page No.9 , GS 2**

Join me on Telegram :- Prashant Tiwari

Username:- **UPSCwithPrashant**



**The most effective
way to do it,
is to do it.**

- Amelia Earhart

New Glenn rocket

- Blue Origin called off the debut launch of its massive new rocket early on Monday because of technical trouble.
- The 98-metre New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. But launch controllers had to deal with an unspecified rocket issue in the final minutes of the countdown and ran out of time. Once the countdown clock was halted, they immediately began draining all the fuel from the rocket.
- Blue Origin did not immediately set a new launch date, saying the team needed more time to resolve the problem.
- The test flight already had been delayed by rough seas that posed a risk to the company's plan to land the first-stage booster on a floating platform in the Atlantic.
- New Glenn is named after the first American to orbit Earth, John Glenn. It is five times taller than Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket that carries paying customers to the edge of space from Texas.
- Amazon's Jeff Bezos founded the company 25 years ago.



Chagos Islands

- Britain and Mauritius said on Monday there had been good progress in talks to finalise a deal over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, including a U.S.-British military base, with London hoping for sign-off before Donald Trump's inauguration.
- Britain struck a deal in October to hand over control of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island of the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean, under a 99-year lease — an agreement that needs to be ratified.
- Since then, an ally of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump and new Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam have publicly criticised the deal.



Chagos Islands

- **Geography of the Chagos Archipelago:** It consists of 58 islands and is located approximately 500 km south of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.
- **History of the Chagos Archipelago:** The French were the first to colonize Mauritius along with the Chagos Islands in 1715.
- In the late 18th century, the French brought in slave labour from Africa and India to work in newly established coconut plantations.
- However, the UK took control of the region in 1814 after the fall of France's Napoleon Bonaparte.
- In 1965, the UK constituted the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), of which the Chagos Islands were a central part.
- **Mauritius' Claims Over Chagos:** Chagos was attached to Mauritius, another British colony in the Indian Ocean, for administrative purposes.
- When Mauritius gained independence in 1968, Chagos remained with Britain, which gave Mauritius a 3 million pound grant for the "detachment."
- **Strategic Importance of Chagos and Diego Garcia:** In 1966, Britain signed an agreement with the United States to use the BIOT for military purposes.

Inflation falls to a 4-month low in Dec.

Food inflation eased marginally to 8.4%, but some critical items reported sharper price rise; inflation of edible oils and fats hit a 33-month high

Vikas Dhoot

NEW DELHI

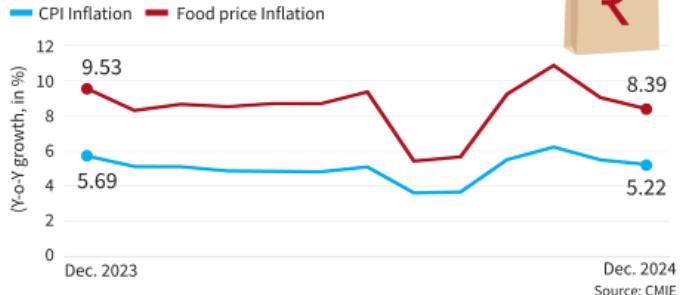
India's retail inflation eased a bit to a four-month low of 5.22% in December from 5.5% in November, with food inflation cooling marginally from 9.04% in November to 8.4% last month, the National Statistics Office said on Monday.

Overall consumer prices were 4.6% higher in December for urban residents compared with 4.9% in November, while rural consumers faced a steeper price rise of 5.8%, just marginally below the 5.95% recorded in November.

With December's inflation print, India's Consumer Price Inflation has averaged 5.63% in the third quarter of 2024-25, just a tad under the Reserve Bank of India projection of

Subtle relief

Consumer price rise eased to a 4-month low of 5.22% in December 2024, on a marginal dip in food inflation



₹

Dec. 2024
Source: CMI

5.7%. While the RBI expects inflation to cool to 4.5% in this quarter, the latest uptick gives it little room to initiate interest rate cuts in its early February monetary policy review, even as the slowdown in growth has spurred sharp calls from government and industry to fast-track reductions.

While food inflation had also cooled to a four-

month low, marking the second month of deceleration from October's 15-month high of 10.9%, some critical food items reported faster upticks in prices, including edible oils and fats whose prices rose at a 33-month high pace of 14.6%, up from November's 13.3% rise.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Page No. I, GS 3

Content.

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Fact

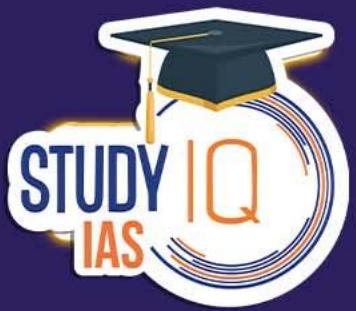
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934 was amended by the Finance Act, 2016 to constitute MPC.
- MPC is responsible for fixing the benchmark interest rate in India, bringing more transparency and accountability in fixing India's Monetary Policy.
- The committee comprises six members - three officials of the RBI and three external members nominated by the Government of India (GoI). The RBI Governor is the chairperson (ex officio) of the committee.
- The current mandate of the committee is to maintain 4% (+/- 2%) annual consumer price index-based inflation (CPI) rate and the committee is answerable to the GoI if the inflation exceeds the range prescribed for three consecutive quarters.

Fact

- The inflation target is set by the Center, in consultation with the RBI, once every 5 years.
- For the period 2021-25, the inflation is to be kept in the range of 4 (+/-2) percent.
- The Headline Consumer Price Inflation has been chosen as a key indicator.
- The idea to set up MPC was mooted by an RBI-appointed Urjit Patel Committee.
- Section 45ZB of the amended RBI Act, 1934 provides for an empowered 6-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).
- Some of the major provisions with reference to the MPC are:
- The Committee is to meet at least 4 times a year.
- The Committee will have 6 members.
- The members of MPC shall hold office for a period of 4 years and shall not be eligible for re-appointment.
- The quorum for a meeting of the MPC is 4 members.
- The RBI Governor will have a casting vote in case of a tie

Parameter	CPI	WPI
Meaning	It reflects the average change in prices paid by consumers at the retail level.	It reflects changes in average wholesale prices for goods sold in bulk.
Published by	National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation & Labour Bureau	Office of Economic Advisor (Ministry of Commerce & Industry)
Base Year	2012	2011-2012

Price paid by	Consumers	Wholesale dealers and manufacturers.
Number of items	448 items in rural and 460 items in urban	697 (including Primary, fuel & power and manufactured products)
Weightage of food items	The food group has a weight of 39.06%.	The food group (Food articles and manufactured food products) account for 24.4% of the total weight.
Status of services	Services are included in the CPI (like housing, education, medical care etc)	Services are not included in the WPI.



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P2I FOUNDATION New Year Batch

2026

₹27,999

2027

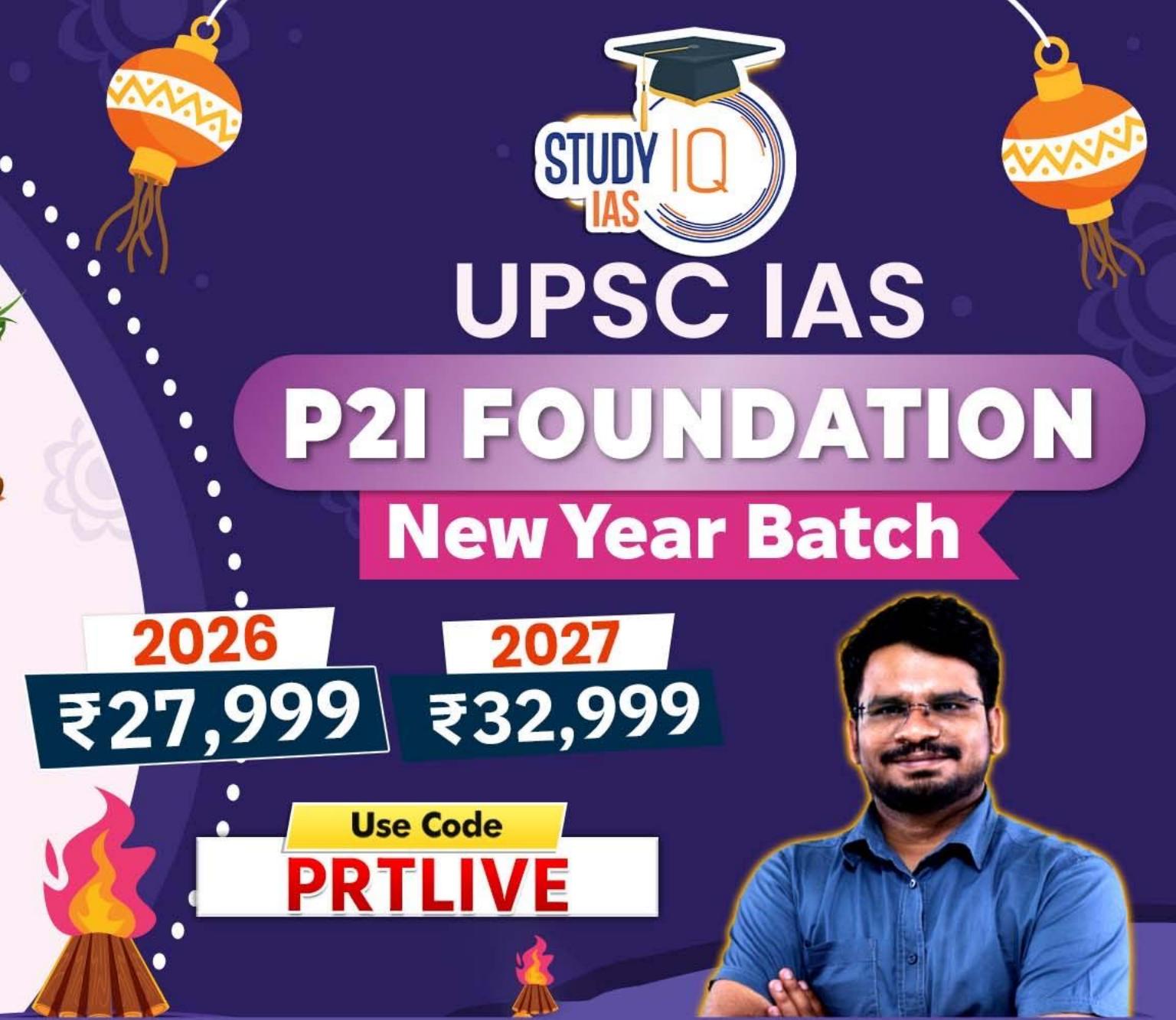
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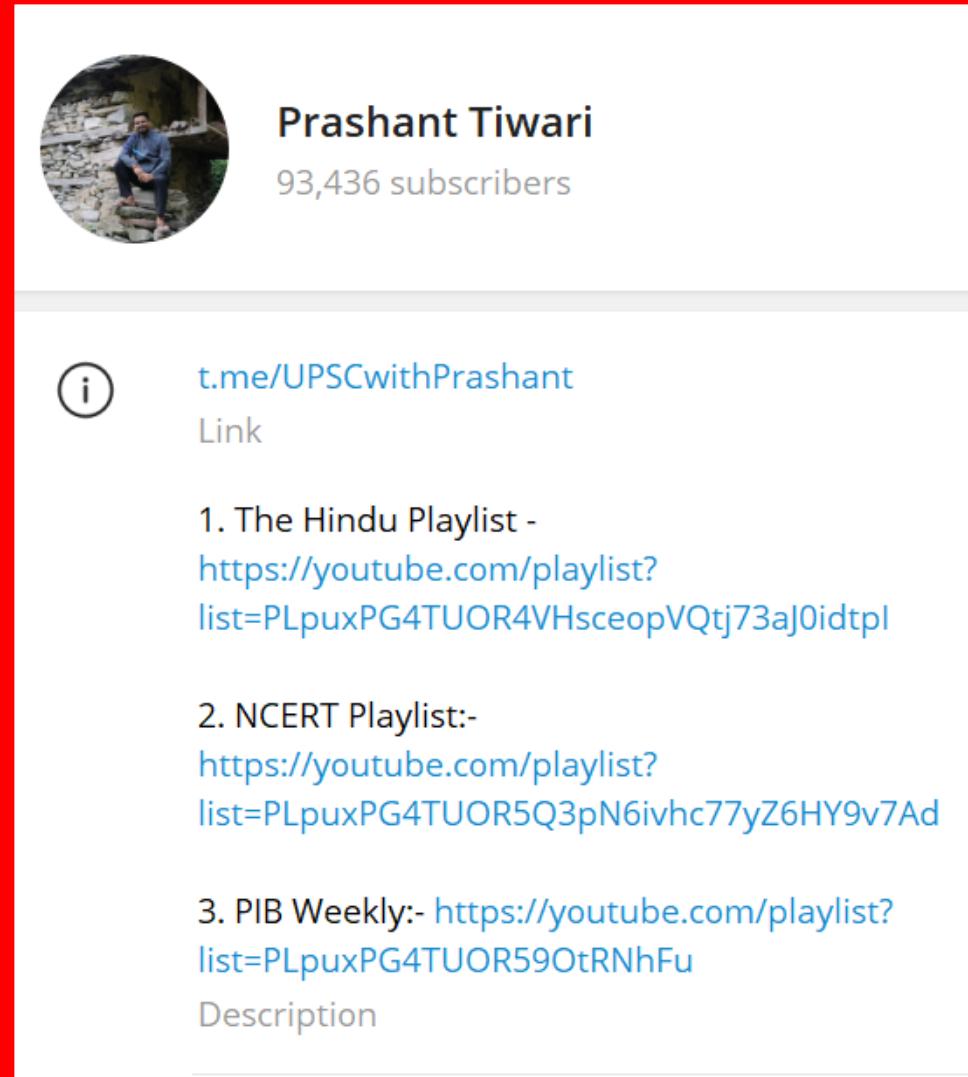
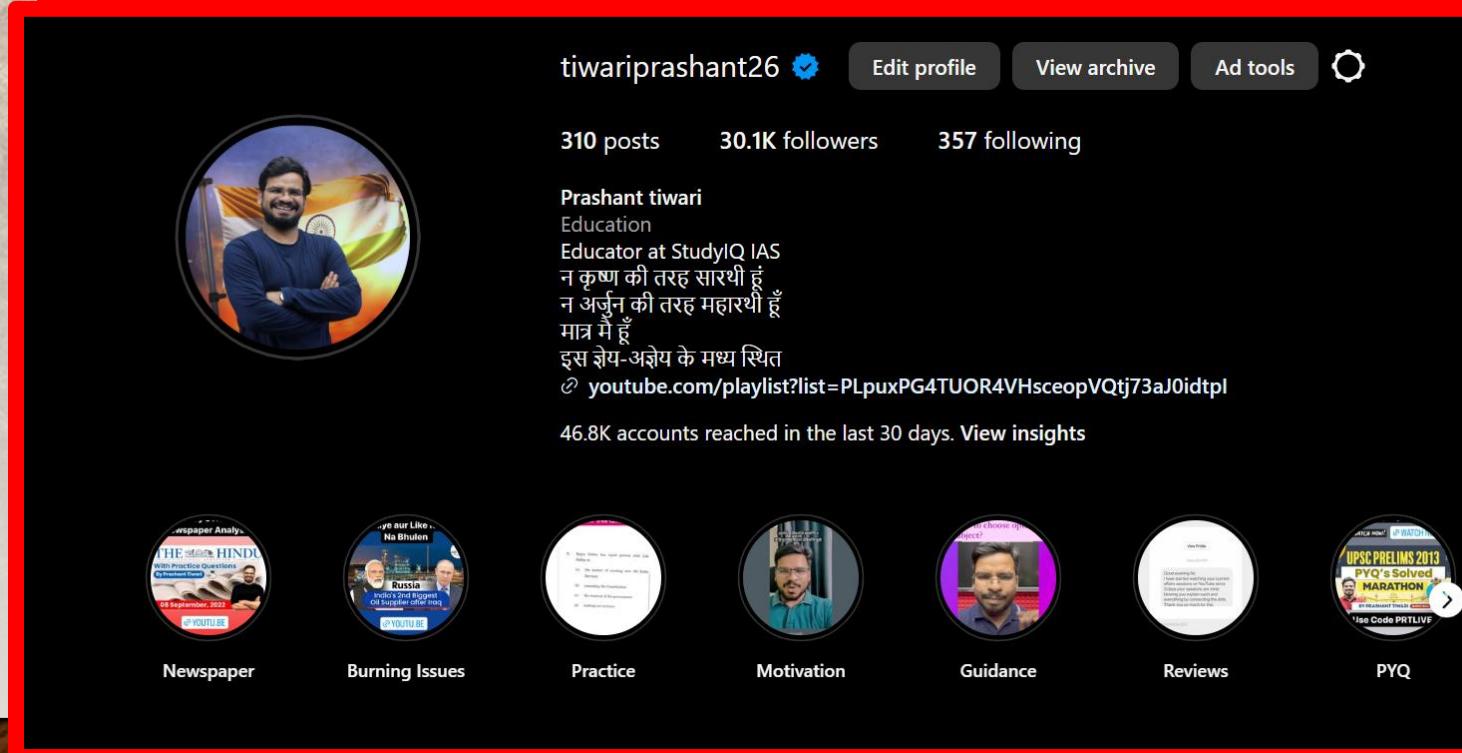
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Link

1. The Hindu Playlist -
[https://youtube.com/playlist?
list=PLpxPG4TUOR4VHsceopVQtj73aj0idtp1](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpxPG4TUOR4VHsceopVQtj73aj0idtp1)
2. NCERT Playlist:-
[https://youtube.com/playlist?
list=PLpxPG4TUOR5Q3pN6ivhc77yZ6HY9v7Ad](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpxPG4TUOR5Q3pN6ivhc77yZ6HY9v7Ad)
3. PIB Weekly:- [https://youtube.com/playlist?
list=PLpxPG4TUOR59OtRNhFu](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpxPG4TUOR59OtRNhFu)
Description

At 86.70 to \$, rupee records sharpest slide in two years

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

In what proved to be a Manic Monday for India's financial markets, the rupee recorded its sharpest slide in almost two years, to close 66 paise down against the U.S. dollar at 86.70, while benchmark stock indices fell about 1.4%-1.5% to hit their lowest level in over seven months.

A strengthening U.S. dollar and rising crude oil prices in the global markets fuelled the downturn for India's currency and stocks, with small-cap and mid-cap indices also bleeding along with all sectoral gauges. The advance-decline ratio for shares listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange hit 0.15, the lowest since June 4, 2024.

FULL REPORT ON

» PAGE 15
OPPOSITION FLAYS GOVT.
» PAGE 13

Content.

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Positive Impacts

- **Boosts Export Competitiveness:** A weaker rupee makes Indian goods and services cheaper in the international market, increasing their demand.
- **Export-oriented industries such as IT, textiles, and pharmaceuticals benefit significantly.**
- **Encourages Remittances:** A depreciating rupee makes remittances sent by Indians working abroad more valuable in rupee terms, benefiting their families and contributing to the economy.
- **Improves Domestic Production for Substitution:** Imported goods become more expensive, potentially encouraging domestic production to replace imports. This supports the “Make in India” initiative.
- **Boosts Tourism in India:** A weaker rupee makes India a cheaper destination for foreign tourists, potentially increasing revenue from tourism.

Negative Impacts

- **Costlier Imports:** The cost of essential imports, especially crude oil, increases. India imports 80% of its crude oil needs, and higher oil prices lead to inflation and pressure on household budgets.
- Other imports like electronics and machinery also become expensive, affecting industries and consumers.
- **Widening Deficits:** Costlier imports contribute to a higher trade deficit and current account deficit, which further weakens the rupee and strains the economy.
- **Rising Inflation:** A weaker rupee leads to imported inflation, as higher costs of goods like crude oil and machinery ripple through the economy.
- **Higher Debt Servicing Costs:** India's external debt, amounting to \$620 billion (as of June 2024), becomes more expensive to service as the rupee depreciates.
- **Impact on Outbound Travel and Education:** Traveling abroad becomes costlier for Indians.
- Tuition fees and living expenses for Indian students studying abroad also increase, adding financial stress.
- **Reduces Investment Confidence:** A depreciating rupee can deter foreign investments as it signals macroeconomic instability. Investors may pull out funds, further weakening the currency.

PM opens Z-Morh tunnel in J&K; silent on Statehood

Peerzada Ashiq

SONAMARG (GANDERBAL)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who inaugurated the strategic Z-Morh tunnel in Sonamarg area of Ganderbal on Monday, remained non-committal on the timeline of restoration of Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

He said the new network of roads and railway lines in the Union Territory has bridged the distance between Jammu and Kashmir and New Delhi.

In response to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's speech, where he referred to the Statehood demand, Mr. Modi remained silent on divulging any timeline. "When Modi makes a promise, he fulfils it. Every time has its right time. Right things will take place at the right time," he said.

Amid freezing conditions, Mr. Modi inaugurated the state-of-the-art 6.5-kilometre-long tunnel built at a cost of ₹2,700 crore. The



Grand launch: Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of a key tunnel in J&K on Monday. IMRAN NISSAR

tunnel has made tourist hotspot Sonamarg a round-the-year destination.

Referring to the militant attack of October 20, 2024 that left seven workers dead at the construction site, Mr. Modi said, "I salute the dedication of workers who braved harsh weather conditions and even risked their lives to complete this project. Seven workers also laid down their lives but the incident did not deter us from our pledge. No worker returned home."

Mr. Modi said the Z-Morh tunnel and the upcoming

Zojila tunnel, connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, will ease the lives of the people in Kargil and Leh. "During snowfall, avalanches and landslides, the road would get closed, hospitals cut-off and essentials difficult to access. However, life will become easy now for locals living here. We started work on the tunnel in 2015 and it's satisfying to inaugurate it. The tunnel will give new wings to tourism in Sonamarg," he said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Page No. I

BI-DIRECTIONAL TUNNEL TO LEH

First survey
1997

Planning started
1999
(after Kargil war)

Drass

Length of
tunnel
14.2 km

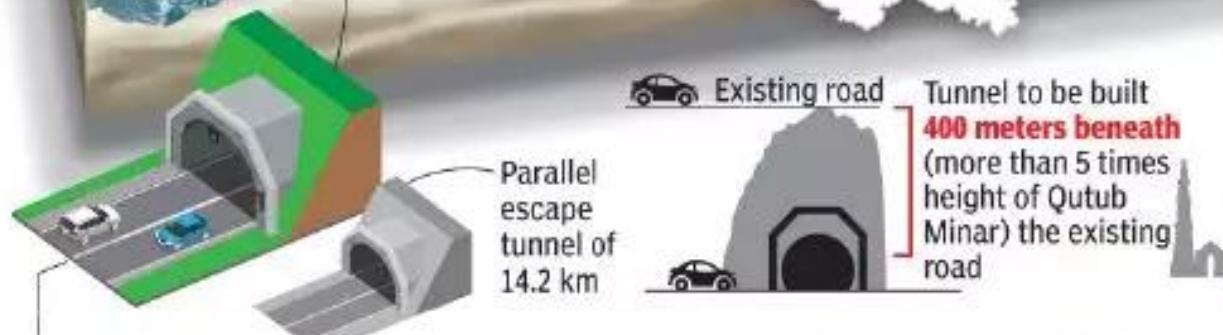
Cost of
Project
₹6,809cr

Completion
target
7 years

Baltal

Srinagar-Leh highway

Srinagar
J&K



Design speed at
80 kmph

8 ventilation sections

Pedestrian cross
passage at every 250
meters & vehicle cross
passage at 750 mters

Emergency
telecommunication
system

Peak min
temperature at
-45 degree

Content.

- Z-Morh tunnel and the upcoming Zojila tunnel, connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, will ease the lives of the people in Kargil and Leh.
- The Prime Minister inaugurated the Z-Morh tunnel aimed at improving all-weather connectivity between Ladakh and Kashmir.
- Location: The 6.5 km Z-Morh tunnel, located at 8,650 feet in Ganderbal, Kashmir, bypasses avalanche-prone zones on the Srinagar-Leh highway (NH-1).
- It was built under the Thajiwas glacier and the tunnel has been renamed Sonamarg tunnel.
- Timeline: Built at Rs 2,400 crore, the project began in 2015 under BRO but later, it was developed by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).
- Strategic Partnership: Paired with the Zojila tunnel, it improves road access to Ladakh, reducing the route by 6 km between Srinagar and Ladakh.
- The Zoji La tunnel (14.15 Km), Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel, will ensure all-weather connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil, and Leh.
- Strategic Significance: Ensures year-round connectivity to Ladakh for military and civilian needs.

The Trump card, global politics and outcomes for India

Who is Donald Trump? Dissecting the psychology of the next U.S. President is a popular pastime. His bold, disinhibited speaking style, his outspokenness, his focus on deal-making, his real estate background that defines his coercive leadership and politics, cast him very differently from his predecessors. He is a polarising figure, wading constantly into controversy, stubbornly resilient, a master of populist rhetoric, presenting himself as the voice of the "common people" arraigned against an out-of-touch political establishment.

It's 'America first'

What is Mr. Trump's approach to the "rules-based international order"? We know from his first Presidency, that he expounds an "America First" doctrine. He debunks multilateralism in global politics, and he trashes international agreements that he believes do not favour the United States. He prefers bilateral agreements over multilateral ones: witness his approach to the Paris Climate Agreement (from which he withdrew and is likely to withdraw again) and to trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He is dismissive of international institutions like the United Nations and regional bodies such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, saying that these disproportionately benefit other nations at the expense of the U.S. To the delight of his acolytes, he places American sovereignty over global governance.

In the Trumpian worldview, strategy revolves around the bully pulpit, strong personal branding, a willingness to take risks, unconventional deal-making, winner-take-all in place of win-win. Practical outcomes rather than theoretical constructs are emphasised.

Donald Trump's transactionalism is legend. His MAGA ("Make America Great Again") policy will have implications influencing global geopolitics. This will entail a rise of protectionism in global trade (free trade is an anachronism in this scheme of things), escalating tariffs and trade wars and increased economic uncertainty. Intensified competition with China where Beijing is clearly framed as an economic and ideological adversary will affect global stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Trump's scepticism about global institutions will inspire adventurism in global politics and nationalisms that override international law. Polarisation in global politics will be increasingly in evidence, and debates on



Nirupama Rao
a former Foreign
Secretary and
Ambassador of India

The world is in for 'interesting' and tumultuous times with the Trumpian worldview to take effect soon

free trade, immigration and globalisation will become increasingly fractious. Climate policy and action will be downgraded. Instability in global markets will affect nations, whether developed or developing, across the board. The world is in for 'interesting' and tumultuous times.

American isolationism under MAGA (since Mr. Trump has clearly signalled opposition to U.S. direct involvement in external conflict), can encourage powers such as China and Russia already united in their opposition to the U.S.'s power and influence, to expand their global footprint, using both economic and military means. MAGA could be synonymous with disruption beyond American shores and power realignments.

Ties with India, the line for New Delhi

The strategic outlook for India-U.S. relations under a second Trump Presidency is mixed. Relations between the two countries have witnessed a steady evolution and multi-faceted growth over the last two decades across partisan divides. That trend is expected to continue especially since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Trump have a warm friendship. India has stressed constructive engagement with the U.S. as a key strategic partner. India's growing geopolitical clout and a mutual interest with the U.S. in countering China (particularly because of the over-assertive Chinese military posture and transgressions across the Line of Actual Control) provide a strong impetus for a growing strategic partnership. India-U.S. defence cooperation will continue to strengthen together with partnerships in critical technologies (provided the new administration does not use export controls as pressure points) and business. Trade frictions could, however, be a complicating factor.

The countering of Chinese influence in the region by the incoming U.S. administration suggests that groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad or the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan), where India is an important constituent, will be strengthened. The maintenance of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific requires the continued involvement of the U.S., even though India is cautious about an over-reliance on America and seeks to ensure its own very own strategic autonomy. India's Indo-Pacific vision stresses regional cooperation, multilateralism and multipolarity.

India would do well to continue to emphasise its own strategic priorities, as shaped by history,

geopolitics, national security, its economic interests and civilisational identity. Its border security, a strong defence posture, military modernisation, intensified counterterrorism efforts through strengthened intelligence, anti-radicalisation, and a continued focus on fighting cross-border terrorism, remain of central concern.

The compulsion of economic growth is central to its strategic outlook. India's energy security, diversification of energy sources, building renewable energy and the maintenance of stable relationships with key energy suppliers are vital. Peace and stability in South Asia are important, as also vigilance about containing and neutralising destabilising influences in the region, particularly from China and Pakistan. Security of the Indo-Pacific as a key maritime and economic passageway is a strategic priority. India's partnerships with Japan, Australia, with the European Union and with The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, apart from the U.S. are essential to the balancing of China's rise, to ensure India's access to key technologies, to defence preparedness, and for its trade and economic development.

Key for its strategic future are its digital transformation, space exploration, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity for its digital infrastructure and building resilience against cyber threats from hostile nations and non-state actors. India's priorities should incorporate a deployment of soft power in an emphasis on democratic and constitutional values, pluralism, humanitarian engagement and diaspora outreach. The relationship with Russia must continue to be in focus because of the complex and diversified nature of India's strategic partnership with that country, and because of the counterweight it provides to the growing Sino-Russian alignment in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific.

On Trump again

The reality of the second Trump Presidency, and Mr. Trump's victory in the elections, indicate that established patterns of history and geopolitics that served as guides to the future may no longer apply as the positioning system for a global order that will instead be disruptive, polarised and unstable. Global politics, all said, may never be the same. As the American analyst, Ian Bremmer, recently noted, a G-Zero world has arrived, and the law of the jungle may provide the new global playbook.

Page No. 8, GS 2

Content.

- We know from his first Presidency, that he expounds an “America First” doctrine. He debunks multilateralism in global politics, and he trashes international agreements that he believes do not favour the United States.
- He prefers bilateral agreements over multilateral ones: witness his approach to the Paris Climate Agreement (from which he withdrew and is likely to withdraw again) and to trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- Climate policy and action will be downgraded. Instability in global markets will affect nations, whether developed or developing, across the board. The world is in for ‘interesting’ and tumultuous times.
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- The countering of Chinese influence in the region by the incoming U.S. administration suggests that groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad or the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan), where India is an important constituent, will be strengthened.
- The maintenance of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific requires the continued involvement of the U.S., even though India is cautious about an over-reliance on America and seeks to ensure its very own strategic autonomy. India's Indo-Pacific vision stresses regional cooperation, multilateralism and multipolarity.
- India would do well to continue to emphasise its own strategic priorities, as shaped by history, geopolitics, national security, its economic interests and civilisational identity. Its border security, a strong defence posture, military modernisation, intensified counterterrorism efforts through strengthened intelligence, anti-radicalisation, and a continued focus on fighting cross-border terrorism, remain of central concern.
- The compulsion of economic growth is central to its strategic outlook. India's energy security, diversification of energy sources, building renewable energy and the maintenance of stable relationships with key energy suppliers are vital.

Indians abroad

Absence of opportunities remains the main driver of migration

At the inauguration of the 18th edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Indian diaspora as India's "ambassadors to the world", having "seamlessly assimilated" into the local society, served the community, and contributed to India's growth and prosperity. The strength of the India-origin community worldwide of over 35 million – about 15.85 million NRIs and 19.57 million PIOs, who are foreign nationals – is their ability to adapt and thrive in different fields, including in politics, where Indian-origin people have become leaders of more than 30 other countries. Where they retain their Indian passports, the diaspora is known for its distinguished services in many professional spheres. The PBD's purpose is to celebrate this success and discuss issues of importance; President Droupadi Murmu handed out about 27 Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards. The event, which was first held in 2003, is organised around January 9, when Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915. The latest event, held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, brought more than 3,000 delegates from across 70 countries, with much of the focus on how the diaspora can help in developing India (Viksit Bharat programme).

The achievements of the Indian diaspora are, no doubt, a matter of pride for all Indians, but it is important that the event is not limited to a simple self-congratulatory or laudatory exercise. The issues for the diaspora, particularly for those who are still Indian nationals, are more acute now. The increase in far-right populist governments, particularly in the West, is making visa and entry conditions for Indians more difficult, and it is important for the government to address such issues. Intractable global conflicts, especially in West Asia where more than nine million Indians live and work, are also putting lakhs of Indians in peril, and the PBD engagement would benefit from discussions between the community on how best to increase awareness and enhance safeguards for them. Given the broad spread of the diaspora, it is necessary to ensure that India's ties with its diaspora be inclusive, and non-partisan on political issues. Recent actions by the government to deny or revoke OCI cards for those perceived to be critical of the government bely this necessity. Above all, it is important to acknowledge that one of the biggest drivers of Indians migrating is the lack of economic opportunities within India. While there are no easy fixes for this, the loss to India of some of its most talented people must be counted, even as the country celebrates their incredible success and impact on the global stage.

Page No. 8, GS 2

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- Above all, it is important to acknowledge that one of the biggest drivers of Indians migrating is the lack of economic opportunities within India.
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- **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)**, observed biennially on 9th January, is a noteworthy event that celebrates the contributions of the Indian diaspora to their homeland.
- **Background & History:** This bi-annual celebration commemorates the day in 1915 when Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi (migrant), returned to India from South Africa to lead the country's freedom struggle.
- **The PBD Convention** was first established in 2003 under the government of then Prime Minister Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as a platform to recognise and engage with the overseas Indian community.

Transforming 'men'-talities, redefining masculinity

As another International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women passes by (November 25), we face a stark truth: despite decades of advocacy, nearly one in three women worldwide has endured violence at the hands of men. While men are often the perpetrators, they can also be key agents of change. Addressing violence against women requires addressing men's roles and questioning traditional notions of masculinities based on strength, aggression and control. These notions need to be replaced by a culture where equality, empathy, and non-violence define alternative notions of manhood.

Violence against women can be seen, somewhat paradoxically, as a quintessential "men's issue" – a societal issue that demands the active engagement of men. From early childhood, boys are influenced by norms that tell them strength is dominance, that emotions are a weakness, and that asserting control is the way to protect their status. These deeply entrenched ideas not only harm women but also limit men's lives and their relationships, trapping them in cycles of suppressed emotions and aggressive behaviours. Recognising and reshaping these norms is essential for creating healthier relationships and a safer world.

The subject of men and masculinities has become a prominent focus within the development sector. Over the past two decades, academic research and grass-root efforts have revealed the importance of engaging with men, highlighted strategies that work, and shown how men are increasingly stepping out to challenge traditional gender norms. This growing shift reflects a recognition among men of their role in advancing gender equality.

An India report

UNESCO's Transforming MENtalities initiative has aimed to shift the way men engage with gender issues – not just as allies but as active participants in social transformation. This initiative challenges rigid and stereotyped ideas of masculinity and



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fosters positive, supportive roles for men, engaging them as champions for gender equality. As we inch closer to Agenda 2030 – working to create an inclusive and equal world – UNESCO, in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), is proud to present the report, "Engaging Men and Boys: A Report on Pathways to Gender Equality in India". This report documents 10 pioneering programmes across India that engage men and boys to address gender inequality.

Some of the interventions

Through impactful initiatives, these programmes encourage critical dialogues that are aimed at questioning traditional gender norms, reshaping concepts of masculinity, and fostering inclusive attitudes. By emphasising education, open discussions, and community-driven actions, these programmes empower participants to become advocates for gender equity within their household and within communities and institutions they are part of.

For example, '*Mardon Wali Baat* (A man's thing)', an initiative by The YP Foundation, uses storytelling and social media to foster conversations around positive masculinities with young men on campuses and in communities. This intervention helps young men critically examine the limiting narratives they have grown up with, empowering them to embrace values of respect and equality. Similarly, Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS), a collaboration between the ICRW and the Department of Education in the State of Rajasthan, uses interactive classroom activities to help adolescent boys see the harm in toxic masculinity and adopt more equitable gender attitudes. In one session, a boy reflected, "I used to think boys should only do outdoor chores. Now, I believe we should work alongside women at home." These moments of transformation create ripple effects that can reshape entire communities.

Initiatives such as '*Dekh Rekh* (caring for each other') and '*Hamari Shaadi* (our marriage')

encourage men's active participation in family nutrition and planning, tackling gender bias through small, everyday actions. These interventions prove that when men and boys are invited to engage with gender equality as a part of their lives, rather than as an abstract idea, change becomes possible.

The defining role of public figures

Change also becomes possible when men and boys have positive role models demonstrating equitable behaviours. These initiatives underscore the importance of role models who actively participate in household and care-giving responsibilities, reject violence as a solution, practise empathy, and embrace vulnerability. Public figures, in particular, can help normalise gender equality. For instance, a well-known Indian cricketer recently sparked a national conversation on shared parenting and responsibility by publicly committing to paternity leave. Actions such as these highlight how equitable relationships are rooted in care, respect, and partnership, redefining what it means to "be a man" in ways that uplift both individuals and communities.

The path to true equality is long, and the active participation of men is crucial in this journey. Beyond rejecting violence, men can challenge the stereotypes and cultural norms that perpetuate it. They must see themselves as essential contributors to change, helping dismantle toxic ideas of manhood. This requires a willingness to question the privileges that patriarchy grants the world and to explore ways to address the pressures and expectations that accompany these privileges. By reflecting on and reshaping their roles, men can play a transformative part in building a more equitable society for all.

In the new year, let us celebrate those men and boys who are "Transforming MEN'talities" and championing equality. Together, by redefining masculinity, we can create a world where every individual, regardless of gender, is free from violence and empowered to thrive.

Page No. 8, GS 2

Content.

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The way forward for PM-KISAN

The scheme, which started off strong, has been providing assistance to fluctuating numbers of farmers over the past six years

DATA POINT

T. Ramakrishnan

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), which provides yearly income support of ₹6,000 to eligible farmer families in three instalments, has been through highs and lows both in terms of coverage and payout. It became operational from December 2018.

Originally intended for small and marginal farmers, the scheme, which was launched in February 2019, was later extended to all farmers who owned land when the National Democratic Alliance retained power in May 2019. The government made it clear in Parliament that there was no proposal to expand the scheme further to bring in tenant farmers under the fold. At the time of expansion in 2019, the scheme was expected to cost ₹87,217.5 crore to the public exchequer for 2019-20 with the total number of beneficiaries being around 14.5 crore. However, in the last six years, neither did the amount disbursed exceed ₹70,000 crore during any year, nor did the number of beneficiaries touch the 14.5-crore mark.

As **Table 1** shows, allocation for the scheme in the beginning of 2019-20 and 2020-21 was ₹75,000 crore each. But in both years, the expenditure on account of disbursement ranged from around ₹49,000 crore to ₹61,000 crore. The year-on-year growth rate for 2020-21 was close to 25% while it moderated to around 10% next year. However, it was in that year (2021-22) that the absolute figure of payout was the highest (around ₹67,150 crore). With the authorities tightening coverage of the scheme, the annual aggregate amount disbursed began going down and saw a 13% dip in 2022-23. Last year, the amount was ₹62,000 crore.

Table 2 gives an account of the varying number of beneficiaries at the time of payment of instalment

at a given time. Since the scheme was inaugurated, the government has made payments 18 times. The last payment was made in October 2024. The number of beneficiaries started rising in the second year of implementation and this trend continued until the fourth year. Since then, governments, both at the Centre and in States, have been weeding out ineligible persons. At the same time, they have been taking steps to "saturate the scheme with all eligible farmers."

A "major saturation drive" commenced on November 15, 2023 to include more than 1 crore farmers. Another round was carried out from June 2024 and more than 25 lakh farmers were made beneficiaries. At the all-India level, the total number of beneficiaries, at the time of the release of the 18th payout, was approximately 9.59 crore. Of them, farmers from Scheduled Castes (SCs) accounted for 12% and those from Scheduled Tribes (STs) accounted for 9%. While women constituted a little more than 20% of SCs and others, their share among STs was around 29%. In December last year, the government informed the Lok Sabha that it did not maintain any separate data for Other Backward Classes, who were included in the category of "others."

A perusal of the data, as given in **Table 3**, on the year-wise distribution of funds in 10 States reveals that all of them have experienced ups and downs. For instance, Tamil Nadu, an important rice-producing State, had 44.6 lakh beneficiaries in 2020-21; now it has 21.9 lakh. The amount disbursed rose only to go down – from around ₹2,594 crore during 2020-21 to ₹1,439 crore during 2023-24. In Manipur, the number of beneficiaries decreased by about 70% between 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Farmers have been demanding a hike in the annual payout. While considering this, the government should incentivise those who efficiently use water, electricity, and other inputs during production.

PM-KISAN: Highs and lows

The data for the charts were sourced from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha replies and Budget documents



Table 1: The table shows the allocation for the scheme and the amount transferred since 2018-19

Year	Allocation	Revised Estimate	Amount transferred In ₹ crore
2018-19	0	20,000	6,005.5
2019-20	75,000	54,370.15	49,196.4
2020-21	75,000	65,000	60,989.9
2021-22	65,000	67,500	67,147.4
2022-23	68,000	60,000	58,253.8
2023-24	60,000	60,000	61,886.5
2024-25*	60,000	N.A.	41,687.3*

*After the 18th instalment (Aug-Nov 2024)

Table 2: The table shows the number of beneficiaries at the time of select instalments of payment

Instalment	Number of beneficiaries
1st (Dec 2018-Mar 2019)	3,16,19,876
5th (April 2020 - July 2020)	9,26,93,619
9th (Aug 2021- Nov 2021)	10,34,41,242
13th (Dec 2022- Mar 2023)	8,12,34,383
16th (Dec 2023- Mar 2024)	9,04,27,479
18th (Aug 2024- Nov 2024)	9,58,97,635

Table 3: The table shows the year-wise distribution of funds in 10 States from different regions of the country. Since the scheme came into effect in December 2018, the table shows numbers from 2019 as it was the first full inaugural year

State	2019-20		2023-24	
	Number of beneficiaries	Amount disbursed	Number of beneficiaries	Amount disbursed
Andhra Pradesh	49,90,936	2,710.5	44,88,790	2,813.79
Assam	12,29,282	1,396.4	16,54,726	1,358.68
Bihar	62,03,177	2,921.7	80,59,752	4,891.74
Karnataka	50,68,281	2,789.8	51,66,182	2,963.36
Maharashtra	91,29,512	4,898.9	96,94,408	5,888.33
Manipur	2,74,496	86.7	1,06,768	74.63
Punjab	23,10,245	1,262.7	10,26,631	582.67
Rajasthan	55,76,237	3,382.8	70,19,074	4,103.84
Tamil Nadu	36,84,641	2,130.9	23,21,564	1,438.76
Uttar Pradesh	1,98,83,400	11,006.6	2,26,33,008	13,808.24

Page No. 9, GS 2

Content.

- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), which provides yearly income support of ₹6,000 to eligible farmer families in three instalments, has been through highs and lows both in terms of coverage and payout.
- At the all-India level, the total number of beneficiaries, at the time of the release of the 18th payout, was approximately 9.59 crore.
- Of them, farmers from Scheduled Castes (SCs) accounted for 12% and those from Scheduled Tribes (STs) accounted for 9%. While women constituted a little more than 20% of SCs and others, their share among STs was around 29%.
- Farmers have been demanding a hike in the annual payout. While considering this, the government should incentivise those who efficiently use water, electricity, and other inputs during production.

Resisting transparency, eroding public trust

Last year, presiding officer Anil Masih was caught on CCTV camera manipulating votes in the Chandigarh mayor elections to help the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secure victory. The incident underlined the importance of infusing transparency in the electoral process to detect and prevent election fraud. It is ironic then that even before the year ended, the Central government brought an amendment to Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict public access to election-related records.

The amendment came days after the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to provide information under Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules. Copies of Form 17C and CCTV footage of the Assembly elections in Haryana were among the records sought by the petitioner.

Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules provides a framework for people to obtain information related to elections. Rule 93(2) originally stated that other than the records specifically exempt under Rule 93(1), all papers relating to elections shall be available for people to inspect and take copies of. The amendment to Rule 93(2) narrows the scope of people's right to information by adding a qualification that only "papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection". Records related to the electoral process, including Form 17C, video recordings and CCTV footage, will potentially get caught in the cross hairs of the new amendment.

Delays that led to doubts

The role of the ECI in the matter is particularly disconcerting. One of the safeguards in the Representation of the People Act, 1951, to prevent the ruling party from arbitrarily misusing its power to frame rules is that the rules can be made only "after consulting the



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Election Commission". It is baffling why the institution vested with the responsibility of ensuring free and fair elections is opposed to transparency, especially at a time when serious questions have been raised about the sanctity of the electoral process.

In the general elections of 2024, the ECI did not put out voter turnout figures in absolute numbers after the completion of voting in the initial phases. This, coupled with an unusually high revision of 6% in voter turnout in some phases of the election, without any explanation, prompted a public demand for disclosure of Form 17C. Part I of this Form is filled by the Presiding Officer of each polling station at the close of voting and is submitted to the Returning Officer of the constituency. It contains information on the voter turnout and the number of votes recorded in the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). Part II is filled on the day of counting by noting the votes secured by each candidate as recorded in the EVMs. The documents reveal whether or not voter turnout tallies with the votes polled and counted.

Several political parties also sought copies of Form 17C after the general elections, claiming an abnormally large increase in voter turnout between the figures declared by the ECI at the close of polls on the day of voting and the final turnout declared a few days later. For instance, an ally of the BJP, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), claimed a massive increase between the two figures in some constituencies in Odisha, raising doubts about the integrity of the election process. In the Assembly elections held in Haryana and Maharashtra, similar concerns were raised and applications were again filed seeking copies of Form 17C and other election records.

Refusal to disclose information

Unfortunately, all these requests were stonewalled by the ECI. In a petition to the ECI, the BJD complained that even its

candidates were denied copies of Form 17C, despite making requests under the Representation of the People Act and the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Further, when the matter of proactive disclosure of Form 17C was agitated in the Supreme Court, the ECI opposed it on the specious grounds that there is no legal mandate to share Form 17C with anyone other than the candidates and political parties through their designated polling agents. In fact, it claimed that there is a "one-to-one relationship between each Form 17C and its possessor" and its unrestricted disclosure is amendable to mischief as people may morph the images. Further, it argued that there is no technical facility to scan the documents.

The ECI's reluctance to share copies of Form 17C is inexplicable. Copies of Part I of Form 17C are given to polling agents who are present at the booth and there is no prohibition on their further dissemination. In Digital India, the claim that Returning Officers don't have the technical facility to scan and upload a couple of thousand pages is scarcely credible.

On December 26, 2024, more than six months after the general elections, the ECI released a set of 42 statistical reports terming it a "Treasure Trove for stakeholders including academicians, researchers, election watchers worldwide". This too had no data from Form 17C, which would conclusively resolve the vexed issue of difference between votes polled and counted.

Transparency is key to ensure public trust and participation in the electoral process. In 2024, the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds scheme as being violative of a voter's fundamental right to information. A challenge to the new amendment has already reached the apex court. Rather than wait for the verdict of the judiciary, the ECI and the BJP would do well to realise that this amendment has no place in a democracy and withdraw it.

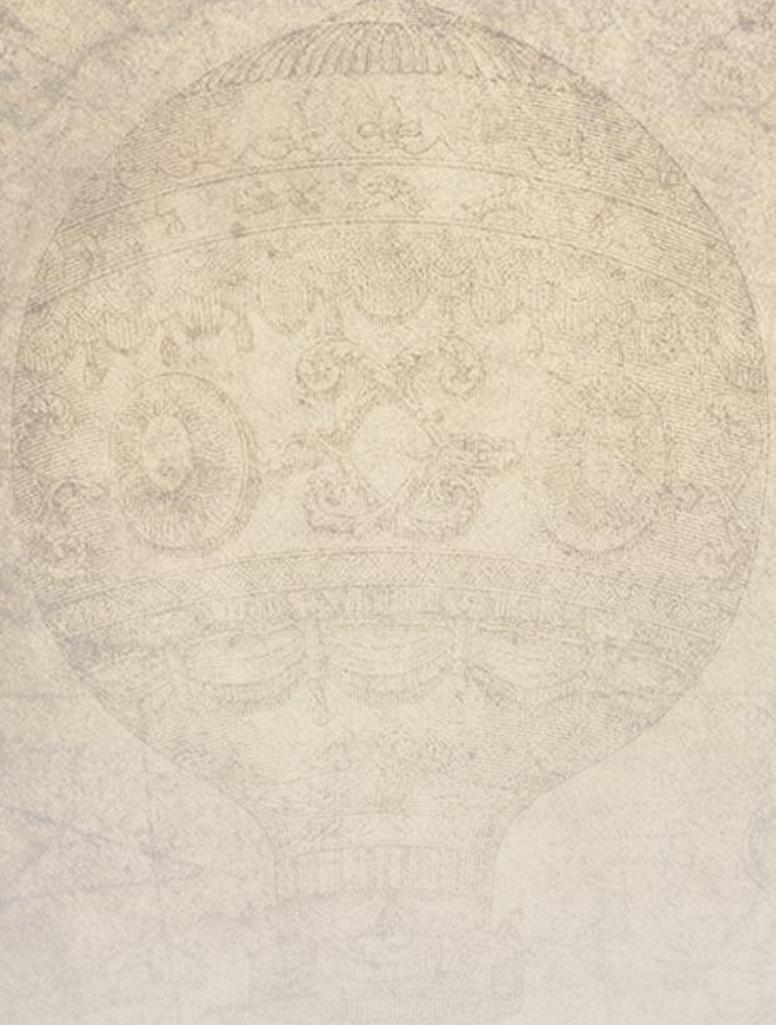
Page No. 9, GS 2

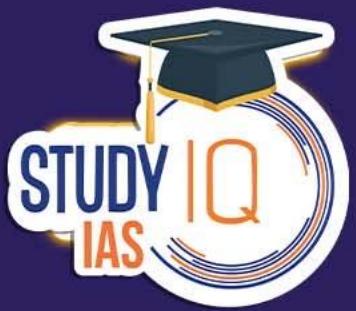
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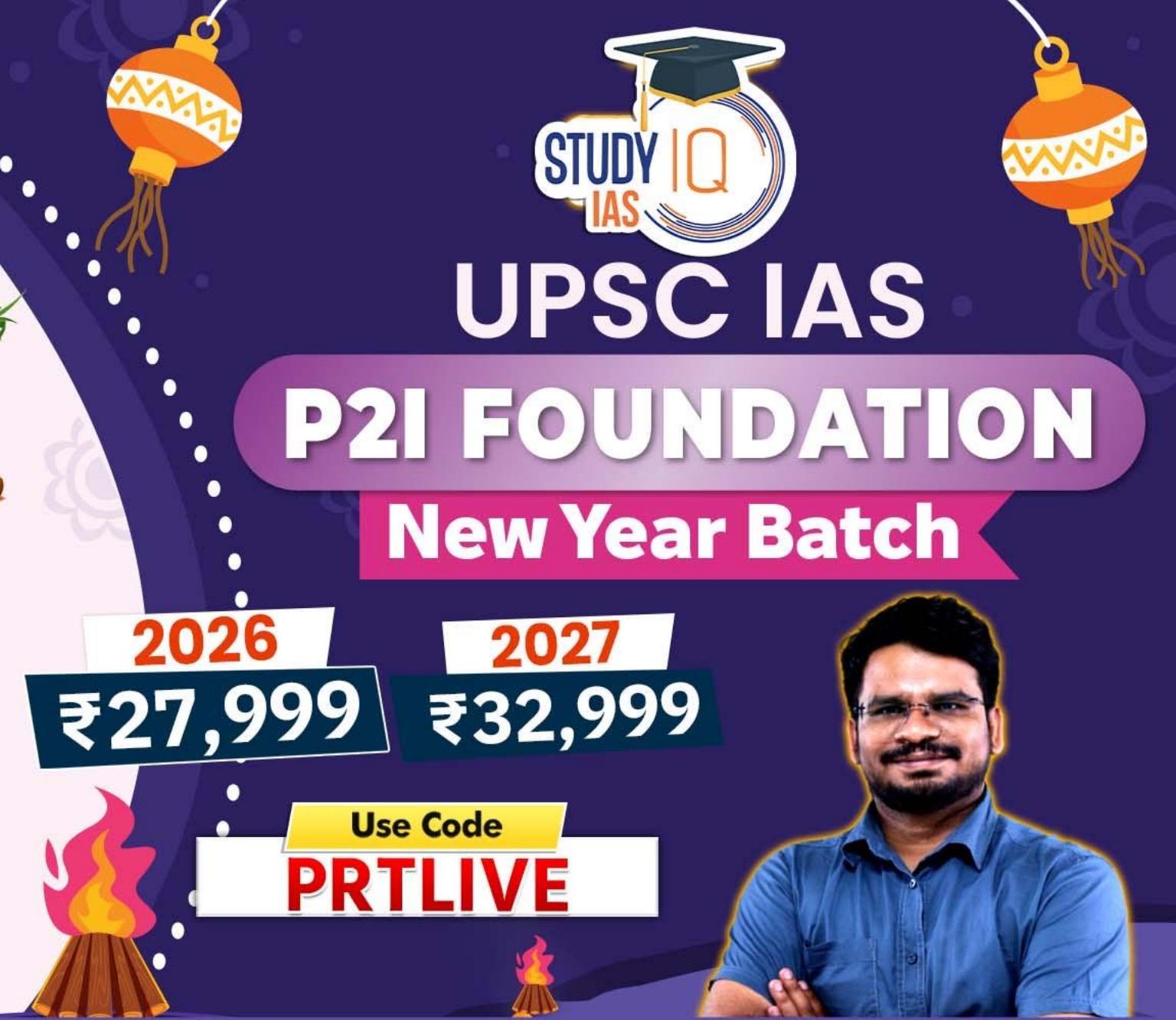
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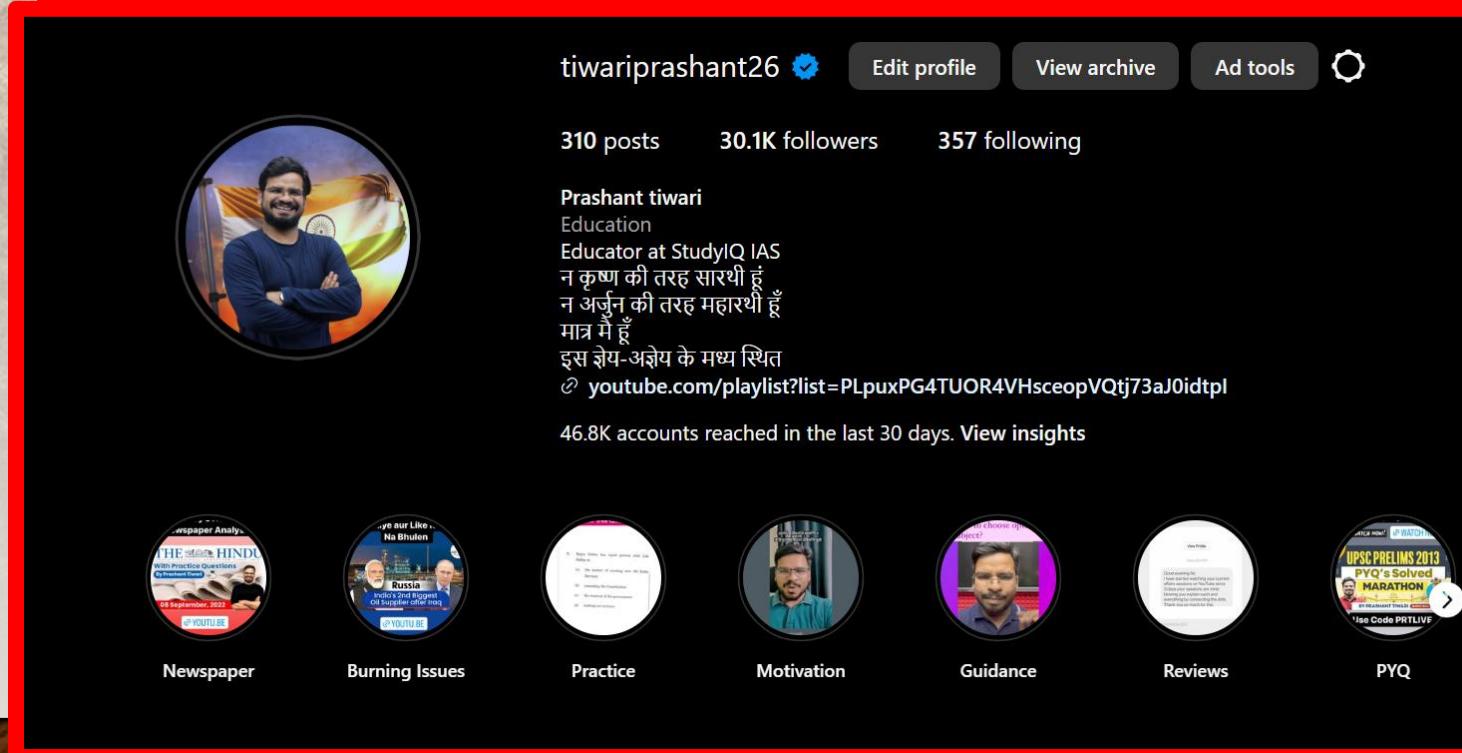
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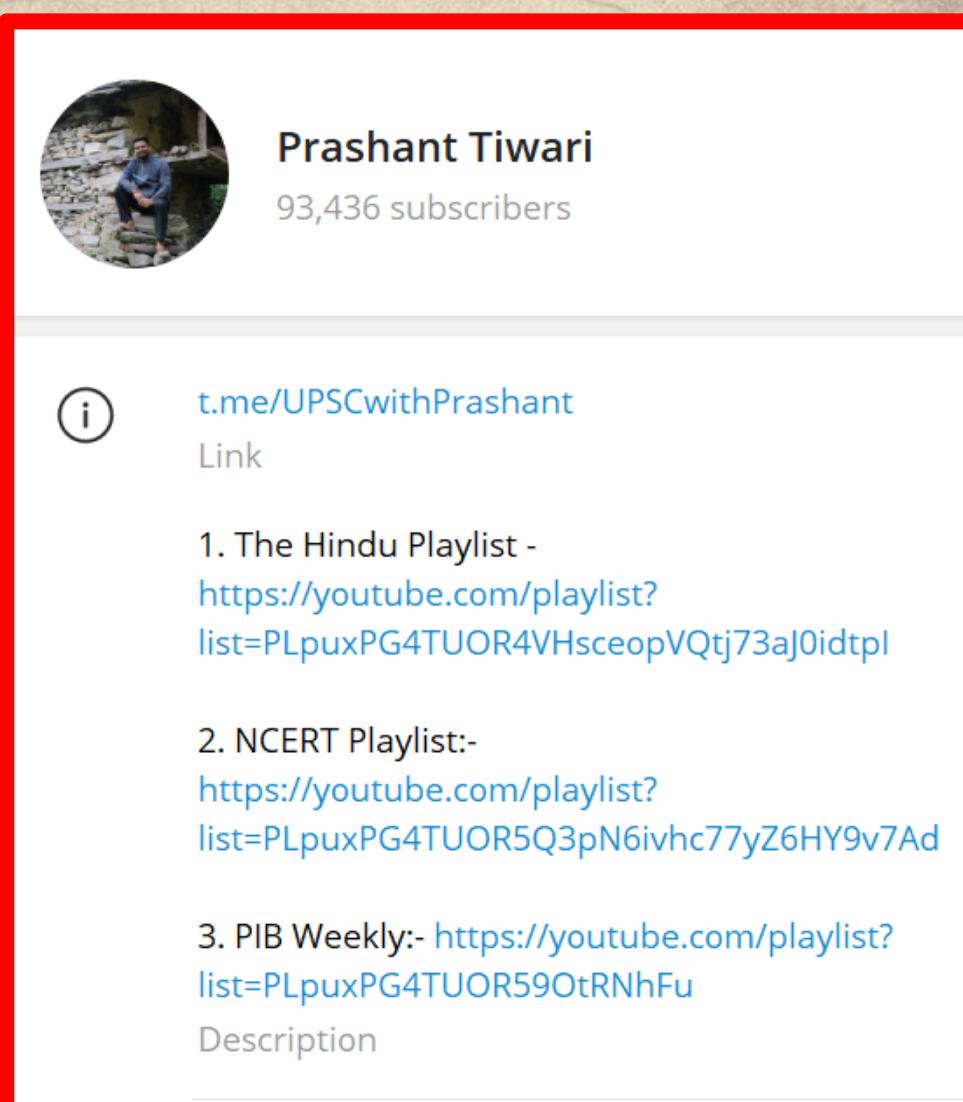
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