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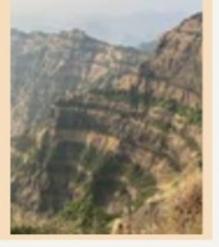
Govt eases curbs to allow limited FDI from China, others sharing land border

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UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026

The Pala Civil Times special feature



LS TAKES UP RESOLUTION ON REMOVAL OF SPEAKER



The Lok Sabha recently discussed a resolution seeking the removal of its Speaker, Om Birla. The motion, admitted after meeting the procedural requirement of support from at least 50 MPs, triggered a full parliamentary debate, which has been allotted ten hours and will conclude with a vote. During the proceedings, Members of Parliament highlighted issues related to the functioning and conduct of the Speaker's office, while procedural questions were raised regarding who would preside over the House during the debate.

Under Article 94(c) of the Constitution, the Speaker can be removed only by a resolution passed by a majority of all Lok Sabha members, following a notice period and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business. The process is designed to safeguard the independence and impartiality of the Speaker while providing a constitutional mechanism for accountability.

GAS FROM NEW SOURCES WILL END SHORTAGE, SAY OFFICIALS

India is currently experiencing a short-term crunch in natural gas and LPG supplies, driven by global disruptions in energy markets, including the ongoing conflict in West Asia. While domestic LPG production has increased by 10% by prioritizing household supply over industrial use, natural gas imports from distant sources such as Norway and the U.S. are expected to take longer to arrive due to shipping times of roughly two months.

The surge in global gas prices has made these distant imports economically viable, providing a medium-term solution to the supply gap. The government has also diversified its LNG sources and constituted a committee of oil marketing company executives to ensure timely LPG distribution, particularly addressing concerns from commercial users such as restaurants. Officials emphasize that the current shortage is temporary, and sustained supply is expected once international shipments are fully operational.

Short crisis

Gas shipments from distant regions, while economically feasible, might take longer to arrive, **leading to a shortage in the interim**

- On March 5, Centre had asked all oil refining companies to maximise production, with all propane and butane produced, recovered, or otherwise available to be used for producing LPG

- LPG output has increased 10% from previous levels since prioritising supplies to households over industries, says official

- Gas from Norway and the U.S. are now 'viable options' apart from Qatar

- Estimates suggest two months for India to bring gas from Norway or the U.S.



5% GST revenue must go to civic bodies: Karnataka panel

The Karnataka Fifth State Finance Commission has recommended that the State government allocate at least 5% of the total GST revenue generated in urban areas to Urban Local Self-Governments to strengthen infrastructure development and civic services. The commission noted that urban areas contribute nearly 70% of the State's total GST revenue, yet municipal bodies receive only a limited share of these resources. If implemented, the proposal could increase the revenues of municipal bodies by about 52%, enabling better urban governance and service delivery. The recommendation also highlights the major economic contribution of cities such as Bengaluru, where multiple city corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority significantly support the State's industries and services sectors. This example illustrates how fiscal devolution and revenue sharing can enhance local-level resource mobilisation, empowering urban local bodies to fund development and improve public infrastructure.

Key Functions of Urban Local Bodies

Urban Local Bodies are responsible for delivering essential civic services that ensure the functioning of cities. Their major responsibilities include:

- *Water supply and treatment*
- *Sewerage and sanitation*
- *Solid waste management*
- *Maintenance of roads and bridges*
- *Street lighting*
- *Public health services*
- *Fire services and emergency response*
- *Urban planning and regulation of construction*

These functions highlight why adequate fiscal resources and revenue mobilisation mechanisms are crucial for effective urban governance.

'Frame no-fault compensation policy for adverse events post COVIDvaccination' - SC



The Supreme Court of India has directed the Union government, through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to formulate a no-fault compensation policy for individuals who suffer serious adverse effects after COVID-19 vaccination. The Court noted that India currently lacks a structured and uniform mechanism to compensate people affected by adverse events following immunisation (AEFI), despite vaccination programmes being conducted as public health initiatives under State authority.

Meaning of No-Fault Compensation

A no-fault compensation system provides financial relief without requiring victims to prove negligence or fault by the government or vaccine manufacturers. The Court observed that such mechanisms are common in welfare states because certain harms arising from public health programmes require swift relief rather than lengthy litigation.

Reasons for the Direction

The Court highlighted that the COVID-19 vaccination drive was conducted on an unprecedented national scale, making it necessary for the State to ensure support for individuals facing rare but serious adverse effects.

Implications

The ruling may lead to the creation of a formal vaccine injury compensation framework, strengthening public trust in immunisation programmes while ensuring state accountability and welfare support in rare cases of vaccine-related harm.

Iran targets energy installations in Gulf as oil prices surge

Iran launched a new wave of strikes on energy installations across the Persian Gulf, targeting key oil infrastructure and escalating regional tensions. An attack on the Bapco oil facility at Al Ma'ameer (Bahrain) caused fires and damage, forcing the company to declare *force majeure*. Similar disruptions were reported by energy producers in Qatar and Kuwait, while the closure of the crucial shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz pushed global oil prices above \$100 per barrel.

The conflict also resulted in casualties and widespread destruction: two servicemen were killed in a helicopter crash in the United Arab Emirates, drone attacks injured dozens in Bahrain, and several Gulf nations—including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—intercepted multiple drones and ballistic missiles targeting oil facilities and urban areas. The attacks highlight how war in the region is damaging energy infrastructure, causing human casualties, and destabilising global oil markets.



Delhi sends fuel to Dhaka via 'friendship pipeline'

In a positive development in bilateral relations, India has supplied around 5,000 tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh to help address Dhaka's petroleum shortfall amid disruptions linked to tensions in West Asia. The fuel was sourced from the Numaligarh Refinery and delivered through the cross-border India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, operational since 2023 and has since facilitated cross-border energy trade. Officials described the move as part of ongoing energy cooperation between the two countries. Bangladesh has reportedly requested additional supplies, though further deliveries will depend on India's domestic fuel availability. The development highlights how energy interdependence and infrastructure connectivity are becoming key pillars of India-Bangladesh relations, strengthening economic cooperation and reinforcing India's role as a reliable regional partner during periods of supply stress.



Numaligarh Refinery Limited is a Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprise based in Golaghat (Assam) that operates a major petroleum refinery and is pioneering India's first bamboo-based bioethanol project, promoting renewable fuel and supporting local farmers.

Govt eases curbs to allow limited FDI from China, others sharing land border

The Union Cabinet of India has approved a calibrated relaxation of investment restrictions imposed under Press Note 3 of 2020 for countries sharing a land border with India. The revised policy allows limited automatic investment (up to 10%) in select non-strategic manufacturing sectors such as capital goods, electronic components, and solar supply-chain inputs (including polysilicon and ingot-wafer production), while retaining stricter controls for strategic areas like semiconductors.

Beneficial Owner

Under the revised investment norms, the concept of beneficial ownership refers to the individual or entity that ultimately owns, controls, or benefits from an investment, even if the investment is made through intermediary companies. In the context of investments from countries sharing a land border with India, the government has introduced a beneficial ownership test aligned with anti-money laundering rules. Investments where entities from these countries hold non-controlling beneficial ownership of up to 10% in the investor company can proceed through the automatic route in specified sectors, subject to sectoral caps and reporting requirements to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. This mechanism allows limited capital inflows while ensuring transparency and preventing indirect control by foreign entities.

Major Takeaway

The move aims to revive foreign direct investment inflows, strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity, and improve technology access. By permitting minority, non-controlling investments while ensuring majority ownership remains with Indian entities, the policy attempts to balance economic openness with national security concerns.

The reform is expected to support initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat by supplementing domestic capital, enhancing domestic value addition, and integrating Indian firms more deeply into global supply chains, thereby strengthening India's long-term growth trajectory and export competitiveness.



Background of Press Note 3 (2020)

Press Note 3 of 2020 was introduced by the Government of India in April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent opportunistic takeovers of Indian companies by investors from neighbouring countries when market valuations were depressed. The policy mandated that any investment from countries sharing a land border with India—including China, Bangladesh, and others—must obtain prior government approval, replacing the earlier automatic route. The restrictions remained particularly significant for Chinese investors and continued amid heightened strategic concerns following the Galwan Valley clash. The recent easing represents a calibrated adjustment, retaining security safeguards while enabling limited investment in select non-strategic manufacturing sectors.

Reevaluating the office of the Speaker

A recent no-confidence motion against Om Birla, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, has revived debate over the constitutional position, neutrality, and accountability of the Speaker's office in India's parliamentary system. Although such motions are rare and rarely succeed, they often trigger broader discussions about parliamentary conventions and the expectations of impartiality from the presiding officer.

Constitutional Authority of the Speaker

The Speaker occupies a pivotal role in India's parliamentary democracy. As the presiding officer of the Lok Sabha, the Speaker regulates debates, enforces procedural rules, protects members' rights, and ensures a balance between the government and the Opposition. The office is constitutionally expected to function above party politics, with significant powers including recognition of members, disciplinary authority, interpretation of rules, and certification of Money Bills—powers that can influence legislative outcomes.

Removal Procedure

The Constitution provides strong safeguards to protect the stability of the office. Under Article 94(c) of the Constitution of India, the Speaker can be removed only through a resolution supported by a majority of the total membership of the Lok Sabha. The process requires prior notice and procedural compliance under the Rules of Procedure. Historically, attempts to remove Speakers—such as those against G. V. Mavalankar, Hukam Singh, and Balram Jakhar—have failed, reflecting the high threshold for removal.

Emerging Concerns About Perceived Politicisation

The current controversy highlights the need to reinforce parliamentary conventions, transparency, and dialogue within the legislative process. Reaffirming the tradition of Speaker neutrality, providing clearer reasoning for procedural decisions, and encouraging structured consultation between political parties could help restore confidence in parliamentary functioning. Strengthening these norms is essential for preserving the credibility of institutions like the Lok Sabha and ensuring effective democratic governance.

Independence and Impartiality of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha

The Constitution provides several safeguards to ensure the Speaker functions with independence and neutrality.

Key safeguards:

- *Security of Tenure: Removal only by a majority of the total membership of the Lok Sabha, with support of at least 50 members to move the motion.*
- *Financial Independence: Salary and allowances are charged on the Consolidated Fund of India, not subject to annual parliamentary vote.*
- *Protection from Criticism: Conduct can be discussed only through a substantive motion.*
- *Judicial Immunity: Decisions on procedure, business, and order in the House are not subject to court jurisdiction.*
- *Neutral Voting: Does not vote in the first instance; exercises only a casting vote in case of a tie.*
- *High Constitutional Status: Ranks 7th in the order of precedence, alongside the Chief Justice of India.*

Emerging Concerns About Perceived Politicisation

Despite constitutional safeguards, recent years have witnessed growing concerns about the perceived politicisation of the Speaker's office. Decisions on matters like disqualification under the anti-defection law and certification of Money Bills have increasingly been interpreted through a partisan lens. Such perceptions risk weakening trust between the ruling party and the Opposition and can contribute to legislative deadlock.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Indian Sites added to UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage

India has added seven new natural heritage sites and one cultural site to the UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, increasing the country's total entries on the list from 62 to 70 properties. With this addition, India now has 70 sites on the Tentative List, comprising 50 cultural sites, 17 natural sites, and 3 mixed heritage sites. The Tentative List is an important step in the heritage recognition process. According to UNESCO guidelines, a site must first be included in this list before it can be formally nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Newly Added Sites

Natural Sites

1. **Deccan Traps at Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra**: Home to some of the best-preserved and studied lava flows in the world, these sites form part of the massive Deccan Traps and are located within the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary—already a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

2. **Geological Heritage of St. Mary's Island Cluster, Karnataka**: Known for its rare columnar basaltic rock formations, this island cluster dates back to the Late Cretaceous period, offering a geological snapshot from around 85 million years ago.

3. **Meghalayan Age Caves, Meghalaya**: The stunning cave systems of Meghalaya, particularly the Mawmluh Cave, serve as the global reference point for the Meghalayan Age in the Holocene Epoch, reflecting significant climate and geological transitions.

4. **Naga Hill Ophiolite, Nagaland**: A rare exposure of ophiolite rocks, these hills represent oceanic crust uplifted onto continental plates—offering deep insights into tectonic processes and mid-ocean ridge dynamics.



Deccan Traps

5. **Erra Matti Dibbalu (Red Sand Hills), Andhra Pradesh**: These visually striking red sand formations near Visakhapatnam showcase unique paleoclimatic and coastal geomorphological features that reveal Earth's climatic history and dynamic evolution.

6. **Natural Heritage of Tirumala Hills, Andhra Pradesh**: Featuring the Eparchaeon Unconformity and the iconic Silathoranam (Natural Arch), this site holds immense geological significance, representing over 1.5 billion years of Earth's history.

7. **Varkala Cliffs, Kerala**: The scenic cliffs along Kerala's coastline expose the Warkalli Formation of the Mio-Pliocene age, along with natural springs and striking erosional landforms, offering both scientific and touristic value.



St. Mary's Island



Varkala Cliffs

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Cultural Site - Buddhist Triangle Sites of Odisha

The Buddhist complexes of Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, and Ratnagiri, located in the Assia Hills between the Brahmani and Birupa rivers, form a serial group of monastic centres that illustrate the evolution of Buddhism from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE, covering Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. These sites served as important centres of learning, art, and monastic life, and are notable for their large Buddha and Bodhisattva sculptures as well as numerous votive stupas.

1. Lalitgiri (Cuttack district)

Key Features

- Located on Nandapahad hill in the Birupa river valley.
- Continuous occupation from 2nd–3rd century BCE to 13th century CE.
- Excavations by Archaeological Survey of India revealed:
 - Chaityagriha (apsidal)
 - Four monasteries
 - Large stupa with relic caskets (stone, silver, gold).
- Evidence of multiple Buddhist traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana.
- Notable finds: Avalokiteswara, Manjusri, Tara, Vajrapani images and terracotta sealings.

2. Udayagiri (Jajpur district)

Key Features

- Crescent-shaped hill on the right bank of the Birupa River.
- Important monasteries discovered:
 - Madhavapura Mahavihara
 - Simhaprastha Mahavihara.
- Major remains include:
 - Mahastupa with Dhyani Buddha images in cardinal directions
 - Double-storied monastic complex with shrine chamber
 - Large chaityagriha showing architectural evolution (circular → apsidal → rectangular).
- Rich sculptures of Avalokiteswara, Maitreya, Tara, Manjusri, Vasudhara etc.
- Dates from 1st century CE to 13th century CE.

3. Ratnagiri (Jajpur district)

Key Features

- Located on the left bank of the Kelua River, a tributary of the Brahmani River.
- Flourished between 4th–12th century CE, especially under the Bhaumakara Dynasty.
- Major remains:
 - Mahastupa and chaityagriha
 - Large monasteries and shrine clusters
 - Numerous votive stupas and sculptures.
- Known as a major centre of Vajrayana Buddhism.
- Evidence of Buddhist–Brahmanical artistic fusion in architectural designs.

Prelims model questions

1. Consider the following pairs:

Site	State
1. St Mary's Islands	Karnataka
2. Varkala Cliff	Tamil Nadu
3. Erra Matti Dibbalu	Andhra Pradesh

How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?

- (a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Answer: (b)

2. Which of the following sites is known for rare columnar basalt formations dating to the Late Cretaceous period?

- (a) Deccan Traps at Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar
(b) St. Mary's Islands
(c) Tirumala Hills
(d) Varkala Cliffs

Answer: (b)

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) In which one of the following regions was Dhanyakataka, which flourished as a prominent Buddhist centre under the Mahasanghikas, located? (2023)

- (a) Andhra
- (b) Gandhara
- (c) Kalinga
- (d) Magadha

2) Which one of the following explains the practice of Vattakirutal' as mentioned in Sangam poems? (2023)

- (a) Kings employing women bodyguards
- (b) Learned persons assembling in royal courts to discuss religious and philosophical matters
- (c) Young girls keeping watch over agricultural fields and driving away birds and animals
- (d) A king defeated in a battle committing ritual suicide by starving himself to death

“

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” –
 Benjamin Franklin

Prelims 2026 countdown

74 days to go

Growing Concern Over Excessive Screen Time Among Students



A survey conducted by the National Council of CBSE Schools based on 6.3 lakh responses from educators, parents, and school leaders revealed widespread concern over excessive digital and social media use among students below 18 years. Around 88% of respondents supported national guidelines to regulate unsupervised digital usage by minors. The findings indicate that 74% of students spend over two hours daily on screens beyond academic purposes, while 21% exceed four hours on mobile phones, gaming, or social media. Educators reported several adverse impacts, including reduced classroom attention (69%), behavioural and emotional changes such as anxiety and irritability (63%), and declining participation in outdoor activities (66%). In response, the council proposed a National Child Digital Safety Framework, advocating regulated digital use in schools, improved age-verification mechanisms on online platforms, and collaboration between government, technology companies, and educational institutions. The recommendations emphasise gradual and balanced regulation to ensure child safety while supporting the educational goals envisioned under the National Education Policy.

UPSC GS I PYQ 2023 : Child cuddling is now being replaced by mobile phones. Discuss its impact on the socialization of children.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option A

Dhanyakataka: Dhanyakataka (modern-day Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh) was a significant Buddhist center during ancient times.

It flourished as an important site for the Mahasanghika sect of Buddhism.

The site is renowned for its Amaravati Stupa, an iconic Buddhist monument.



Amaravathi Stupa is the largest Buddhist stupa in South Asia. (Wikimedia Commons)

Amaravati emerged as one of the most significant centres of Buddhism in peninsular India, particularly in the Krishna River Valley. Buddhism reached the region early through trade networks and gained momentum after the patronage of Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. Unlike North India, where rulers played a dominant role, Buddhism in Andhra was largely supported by merchants, craftsmen, and monks, reflecting the close link between trade and the religion's spread. Amaravati became especially important as a centre of Mahayana Buddhism. The philosopher Nagarjuna is believed to have lived here and developed the Madhyamika philosophy that shaped Mahayana thought.

From Amaravati, this tradition spread across South and East Asia. The site is also renowned for the Amaravati School of Art, considered one of the three major traditions of ancient Indian art alongside Mathura and Gandhara. Its sculptural style and the great stupa made Amaravati a major centre of Buddhist art, architecture, and religious influence.

2) Answer is option D

Vattakirutal in Sangam Literature: Vattakirutal was a ritualistic practice mentioned in Sangam literature where a king, upon being defeated in battle or facing dishonor, committed suicide by fasting unto death. It was considered an honorable way for a defeated ruler to accept failure and maintain dignity.



The act involved deliberate starvation or extreme self-denial as a vow, symbolising the ruler's commitment to uphold honour and the warrior's code even in defeat. By embracing death through fasting rather than accepting humiliation, the king was believed to preserve dignity and bravery, making the act a culturally respected expression of valor and personal resolve.



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