

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



Civil Service Institute | Pala | Thiruvananthapuram | South India's Premier Civil Service Coaching Institute | [www.civilservicepala.org](http://www.civilservicepala.org)



**Puzzle of missing urgency around learning**

THE HINDU :  
21-04-2026 : Page 11



**U.S. power, Latin American resistance**

THE HINDU :  
21-04-2026 : Page 12



**Core sector activity contracts 0.4% in March on war impact**

THE HINDU  
21-04-2026 : Page 17

## SCIENCE Page 6



**India's forests could nearly double carbon storage by 2100, study finds**

THE HINDU  
21-04-2026 : Page 16



**“Serving with purpose, leading with heart” — celebrating the spirit of Civil Service**

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions will observe 18th Civil Services Day on Tuesday, April 21, 2026. The Civil Services Day is observed annually as an occasion for the Civil Servants across India to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizens and renew their commitment to public service and excellence in their work. On this day in 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the probationers of the All India Administrative Service where he described civil servants as the steel frame of India. The occasion provides an opportunity for civil servants to renew their commitment to citizen-centric administration. The theme for the Civil Services Day 2026 is “Viksit Bharat: Citizen-Centric Governance and Development at the Last Mile”. It is aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

## PRELIMS CORNER

Page 8



**World Geography**

UPSC PYQ analysis -  
Geography

## EDITORIALS DECODED

Page 5



**The price of negligence**

*Human involvement in hazardous industries must be minima*



**Reform agenda matters more than ranking**



**Snooping around**

*CCTVs with Chinese spyware must be weeded out*

## Puzzle of missing urgency around learning

India continues to face a severe learning crisis, as highlighted by **Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER)**, despite improvements in enrolment and infrastructure. The core concern is the weak attainment of **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)**, where many students fail to achieve basic reading and comprehension skills even after several years of schooling. Although policies like the National Education Policy 2020 and the **NIPUN Bharat Mission** emphasise FLN, the crisis persists due to lack of ground-level urgency.



### Concept of Salience in Public Policy

The key explanatory concept is salience, which refers to the extent to which a problem is widely recognised as important and demands action. Policy success depends not only on design and funding but also on collective acknowledgment. The example of Vietnam shows that strong learning outcomes can be achieved when stakeholders prioritise education outcomes, even without superior resources.

### Reasons for Low Salience in India

The absence of urgency arises from multiple structural factors. First, learning outcomes are intangible and difficult to observe, often masked by superficial classroom activities. Second, power asymmetry weakens accountability, as children and parents lack the tools to assess learning while authority rests with institutions. Third, the scale of the crisis is under-recognised, leading to complacency. Fourth, there is a misplaced perception of responsibility, where schooling is seen as the State's duty but learning as the child's burden. Finally, institutional inertia and political hesitancy discourage acknowledgment of systemic failure.

### Systemic and Social Implications

This disconnect results in a system where infrastructure receives more attention than outcomes, weakening human capital formation. It undermines long-term productivity, equity, and demographic dividend potential, as large sections of the population remain under-skilled despite formal education.

Children under 6 years: All India (rural) figures show that preschool enrollment is rising

% Children age 3-5 enrolled in any type of pre-school  
All India (rural) ASER 2018-2024

% Children enrolled in any type of preschool	2018	2022	2024
Age 3	68.1	75.8	77.4
Age 4	76.0	82.0	83.3
Age 5	58.5	62.2	71.4

Increase in preschool enrollment over time is a function of the fall in the proportion of children not enrolled anywhere, as well as a drop in the percentage of "under age" (less than 6 years) enrolled in primary grades.

In 2024, nationally, 67% of children age 3 and 58% of children age 4 are enrolled in anganwadis in rural India.

% Children age 3-5 not enrolled anywhere  
All India (rural) ASER 2018-2024



Note: Young children can be in preschool, primary school or not enrolled anywhere. Preschool coverage = children can be enrolled in anganwadis, pre-primary classes in school or in private LKG/UKG.

More children entering Std I at the "right" age (age 6 or more)

At the level of both policy and practice, age of entry into formal schooling (Std I) is an important structural issue for the education system.



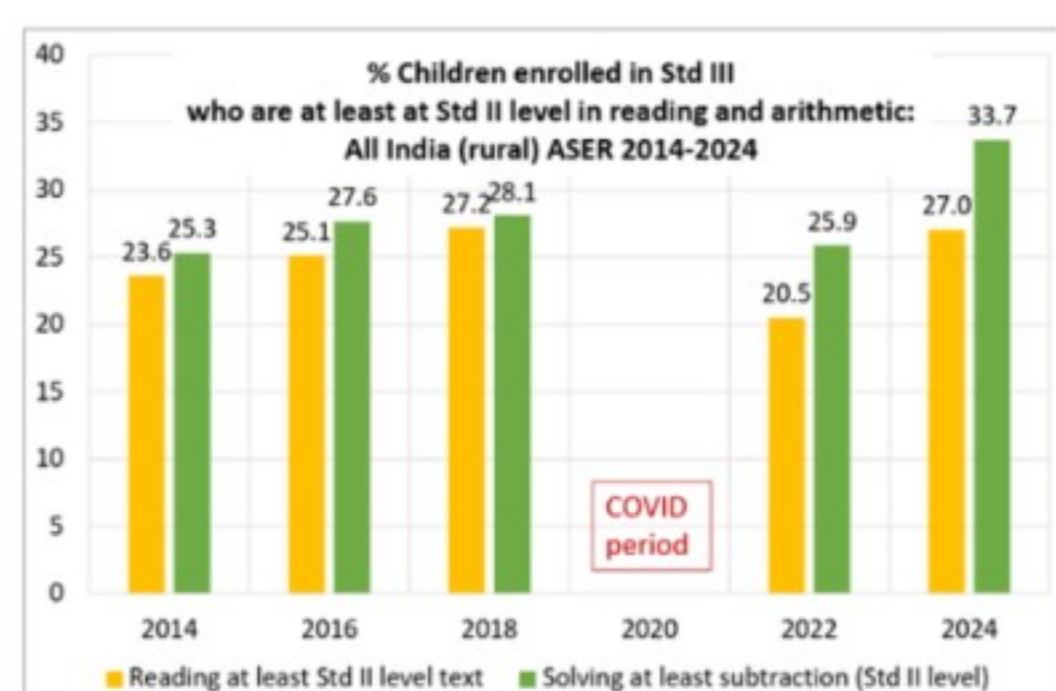
India is moving towards ensuring that children enter Std I at age 6.

Enrolled in Std I  
In different types of schools:

% Children who are age 5 or under	Year	All	Govt	Pvt
2018	25.6	28.5	20.5	
2022	22.7	24.2	18.7	
2024	16.7	17.7	15.0	

Data on age in Std I over time shows that "underage" enrollment has dropped sharply between 2022 and 2024, especially in government schools.

Std III: Nationally, big improvement in foundational literacy and numeracy levels



ASER data from 2014 to 2024 shows three trends:

- Incremental increase in basic reading and arithmetic between 2014 and 2018
- Drop between 2018 and 2022 due to the pandemic
- Sharp increase (highest in last 10 years) between 2022 and 2024

Percentage point learning gain between 2022 & 2024 for children enrolled in different types of schools	
Reading gain: Govt schools	7.1
Reading gain: Private schools	2.4
Arithmetic gain: Govt schools	7.4
Arithmetic gain: Private schools	4.4

For Std III, learning "recovery" is visible between 2022 & 2024. In the case of arithmetic, the gain between 2022 & 2024 is substantially more than recovery.

### Way Forward

The solution lies in increasing salience by making learning outcomes visible and measurable. Approaches like Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) and structured pedagogy have demonstrated effectiveness. Local-level assessments and community engagement can convert abstract data into tangible realities, compelling stakeholders to act. Strengthening accountability, decentralising decision-making, and aligning incentives with learning outcomes are essential to transform policy intent into real educational gains.

## U.S. power, Latin American resistance

The second administration of Donald Trump has adopted a more coercive approach towards Latin America, including military actions, economic pressure, and strategic threats. This shift has revived debates on the historical continuity of U.S. interventionism in the region.



### Historical Parallels: Beyond the Cold War Lens

While recent actions draw comparisons with Cold War interventions—such as U.S. involvement in the 1973 Chile coup against Salvador Allende and the 1954 removal of Jacobo Árbenz—the current strategy more closely resembles early 20th-century interventionism rooted in the Roosevelt Corollary, which justified U.S. intervention as an “international police power.”



### Era of Gunboat Diplomacy and Direct Interventions

Between 1900 and the 1930s, the U.S. frequently deployed military force across Latin America, occupying countries such as Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. These actions were undertaken with limited regard for sovereignty, reflecting a pattern of unilateral assertion of power in the hemisphere.

### Rise of Anti-Imperialist Movements

U.S. interventions triggered widespread resistance and the emergence of anti-imperialist ideologies. Movements led by students, labour groups, and leftist parties across cities like Mexico City and Buenos Aires framed local struggles within a global context, identifying U.S. dominance as a central threat.

### Intellectual Foundations of Anti-Imperialism

Thinkers and activists redefined imperialism in the Latin American context. Figures like Julio Antonio Mella argued that U.S. power operated through economic and financial dominance rather than direct colonial rule, while others described Latin American nations as “dependent countries” — politically sovereign but economically subordinated.

### Mexico City as a Hub of Resistance

Mexico City emerged as a focal point for anti-imperialist coordination, especially with the formation of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas. These networks sought to unify regional resistance against U.S. influence, blending ideas from the Mexican and Russian Revolutions.

### Contemporary Implications: History Repeating Itself?

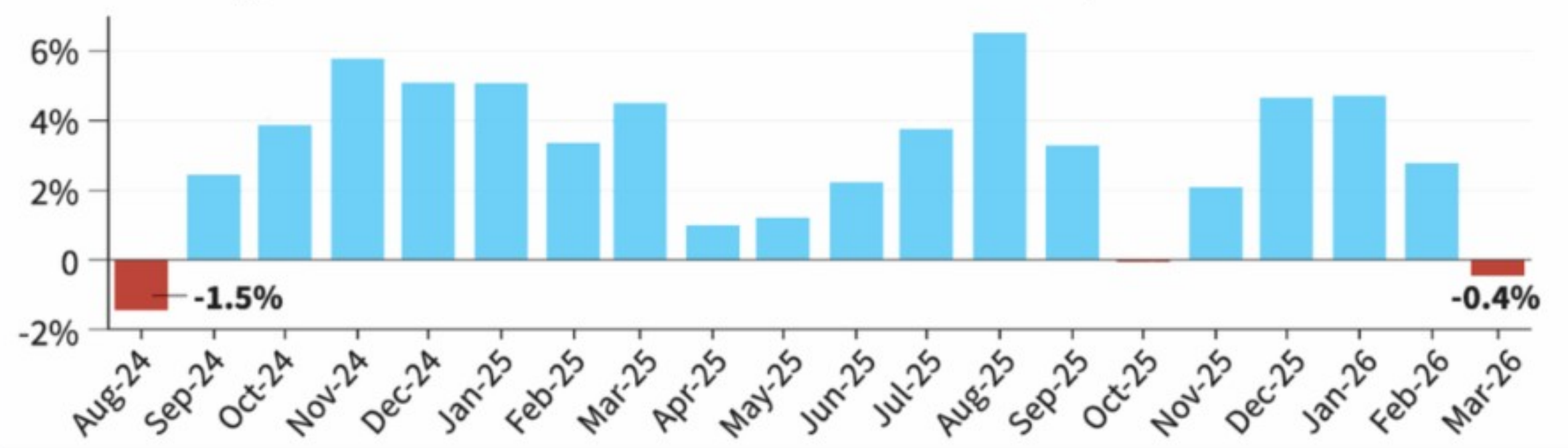
The anti-imperialist movements of the 1920s–30s shaped future political trajectories in Latin America, influencing later leaders and revolutionary movements during the Cold War era. They laid the ideological groundwork for resistance to external dominance. The current U.S. approach may similarly provoke a resurgence of anti-imperialist sentiment in Latin America. While outcomes remain uncertain, historical patterns suggest that coercive external policies often catalyse political mobilisation and resistance within the region.

## Core sector activity contracts 0.4% in March on war impact

The contraction of India's core industrial sectors by 0.4% in March 2026 marks a significant reversal, coinciding with the outbreak of the West Asia conflict.

### Core contraction

The Index of Eight Core Industries contracted in March 2026 on the impact of the West Asia crisis



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

The external shock caused by the U.S-Israel-Iran war disrupted critical supply chains, particularly for energy-linked inputs, underscoring the vulnerability of domestic industry to global geopolitical tensions. The annual growth of the Index of Eight Core Industries also slowed to **2.6% in 2025-26**, the weakest since the pandemic period, indicating a broader deceleration trend.

### Sector-wise Performance Divergence

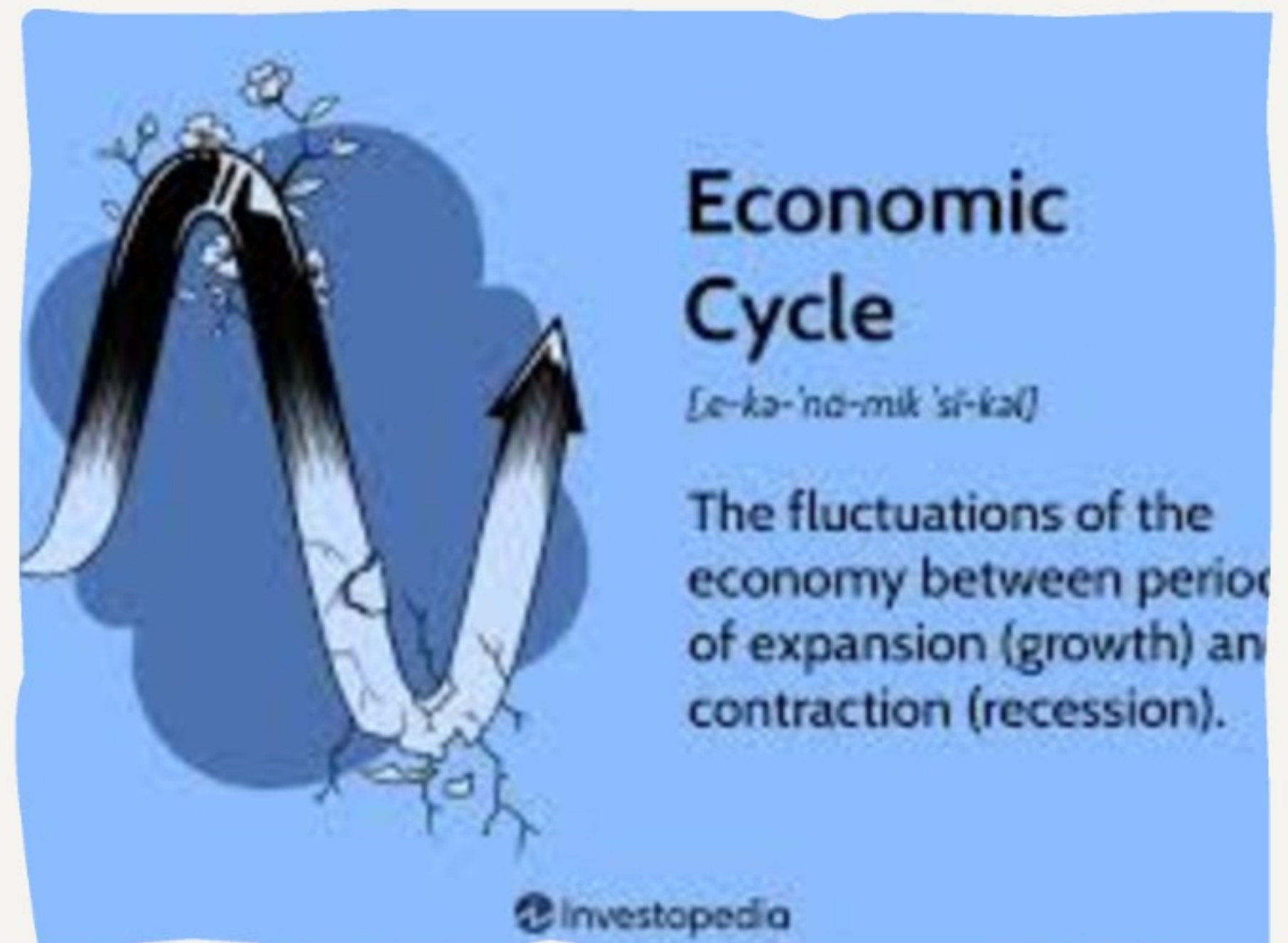
Performance across sectors remained uneven, with four of the eight core industries registering contraction. Fertiliser output saw a sharp decline of 24.6%, reflecting acute input shortages, while crude oil and coal sectors continued their downward trend. Electricity generation declined marginally due to a high base effect. Natural gas was the only sector that performed relatively well, growing by 6.4%, mainly because the government pushed for higher production. Steel and cement sectors exhibited slowing growth, indicating weakening momentum in construction activity.

### Demand-Supply Constraints and Structural Pressures

The data reveals a combination of supply-side disruptions and softening demand conditions. Input shortages, especially in fertilisers, highlight dependence on external sources, while slowing steel and cement output suggests reduced infrastructure and real estate activity. These trends point to a cyclical slowdown compounded by structural bottlenecks in energy and raw material availability.

### Economic Implications

The slowdown in core sectors—key indicators of industrial health—signals potential spillover effects on overall economic growth. Persistent geopolitical instability, coupled with supply constraints, may dampen industrial output and investment sentiment. Sustained recovery would depend on stabilising global supply chains, strengthening domestic production capacity, and mitigating external vulnerabilities.



To counter industrial contraction amid West Asia conflict, India must diversify energy imports via strategic stockpiling and LNG deals with Russia/Australia. Bolster domestic fertiliser/crude oil production through PLI schemes and Atmanirbhar initiatives, reducing external dependencies. Fiscal measures like accelerated infra spending (Gati Shakti) can revive steel/cement demand. Diplomatic hedging in West Asia, alongside green energy transition, ensures resilience. Long-term: Enhance supply chain mapping and multilateral forums (QUAD, I2U2) for risk mitigation, targeting 5%+ core sector growth.

**The Indian EXPRESS**

## Reform agenda matters more than ranking

India has slipped to sixth place in global GDP rankings as per the IMF's World Economic Outlook, primarily due to methodological revisions in GDP estimation and the depreciation of the rupee against the U.S. dollar. The updated GDP series, with a new base year, revised earlier estimates downward, while the rupee's nearly 10% decline further reduced India's GDP in dollar terms. Since global comparisons are made in nominal dollar values, exchange rate movements significantly influenced India's relative position, allowing Japan and the UK to move ahead despite India's continued economic growth.

Despite this setback, projections indicate that India is likely to regain momentum and surpass these economies in the coming years. However, the development highlights the importance of sustained domestic reforms, particularly in structurally sensitive sectors such as power and fertilisers. It also underscores the need for policymakers to account for external shocks and global uncertainties, ensuring resilience in growth strategies while maintaining macroeconomic stability.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*"India's position in global GDP rankings is influenced not only by economic growth but also by methodological and external factors." Examine in the context of recent IMF estimates, and discuss the implications for India's economic policy.*



## The price of negligence

Recurring explosions in Virudhunagar's firecracker industry, underlines systemic safety failures rather than isolated accidents. The April 19 blast killed 25 workers and injured several others, adding to a toll of 134 deaths and 89 injuries in the past four years. Despite the inherently hazardous nature of the industry, weak enforcement of safety norms, routine violations such as operating on holidays, and overcrowding at worksites persist. Regulatory inspections appear superficial, and authorities have largely limited their response to compensation rather than preventive measures.

The issue reflects deeper governance and socio-economic challenges. Lax monitoring, manpower shortages, and poor compliance mechanisms have allowed unsafe practices to continue. At the same time, the industry sustains livelihoods in an economically vulnerable, rain-fed region, complicating strict enforcement. A balanced approach involving stricter supervision, accountability for violations, and technological shifts such as automation to reduce human risk is the need of the hour.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*"Repeated industrial accidents in India reflect systemic governance and regulatory failures rather than isolated incidents." Examine this statement in the context of the firecracker industry, and suggest measures to ensure worker safety without undermining livelihoods.*

thehindu **businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

## Snooping around

Security vulnerabilities in India's surveillance infrastructure revealed by reports of hostile access to CCTV networks via platforms like EseeCloud need due recognition. India's heavy reliance on Chinese-origin components exposes critical defence and police installations to espionage risks. Although recent regulations mandating testing and certification of CCTV equipment by agencies such as **Standardisation Testing and Quality Certification Directorate** mark progress, concerns remain about hidden hardware implants, insecure cloud storage, and risks from third-party service providers. The issue reflects broader gaps in supply chain security and regulatory oversight.

The situation underscores the need for structural reforms as Indian firms remain dependent on Chinese supply chains despite growing market presence. Separation of corporate and surveillance networks, stronger cybersecurity practices, and stricter vendor accountability are the key steps needed here. Developing indigenous capabilities through a time-bound roadmap shall help reduce strategic vulnerabilities and ensure long-term technological sovereignty.

**Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial**

*technology in critical security infrastructure poses significant national security risks." Discuss this statement in the context of India's CCTV surveillance ecosystem, and suggest measures to strengthen technological self-reliance and cybersecurity.*

# SCIENCE

## India's forests could nearly double carbon storage by 2100, study finds

A recent study published in *Environmental Research: Climate projects* that India's forests could store nearly twice their current carbon stock by 2100 under prevailing greenhouse gas emission trends. Using advanced modelling, the study estimates biomass growth of about **35%** under low-emission scenarios, **62%** under medium emissions, and up to **97%** under high-emission pathways. Importantly, these projections diverge from official estimates by the Forest Survey of India, indicating the need for reassessment of long-term forest carbon potential.

### Understanding Carbon Storage in Forest Ecosystems

Carbon storage refers to the process by which carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is absorbed and retained in natural ecosystems through photosynthesis and biological activity. Forests act as major carbon sinks, storing carbon in vegetation biomass, soils, and organic matter, thereby playing a critical role in climate regulation and mitigation.

### Drivers of Increased Biomass: Rainfall and Elevated CO<sub>2</sub>

The projected rise in forest carbon is driven primarily by two interrelated factors: increased precipitation and higher atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Enhanced rainfall improves soil moisture availability, facilitating plant growth, while elevated CO<sub>2</sub> boosts photosynthesis and water-use efficiency. However, these effects are not immediate—there is a lag of about 2–4 years due to the gradual accumulation of woody biomass.

### Temporal Divergence in Growth Trends

Up to around 2030, all emission scenarios show similar biomass levels. However, a sharp divergence emerges thereafter, particularly post-2050, when high-emission scenarios exhibit accelerated growth. This reflects the compounding impact of climatic factors over time, highlighting long-term structural changes in forest ecosystems.



### Regional Patterns of Carbon Increase

The study reveals that the **highest relative gains** in carbon storage are expected in **India's drier regions**, including **Rajasthan, Gujarat, western Madhya Pradesh, and semi-arid interiors**. Moderate increases are projected in the Trans-Himalayas, Gangetic plains, and Deccan Plateau. In contrast, ecologically rich regions like the Western Ghats and the Himalayas may witness limited gains due to ecological saturation and climate-related constraints.

### Ecological Risks and Limitations

Despite the apparent increase in carbon storage, the study cautions against viewing climate change as beneficial. It does not fully account for destabilising factors such as deforestation, land-use change, wildfires, pest outbreaks, and extreme weather events. These risks could undermine forest stability and even trigger the release of stored carbon, reversing gains.

### Environmental and Policy Implications

The findings underscore the dual role of forests as both climate mitigators and vulnerable ecosystems. They highlight the importance of sustainable forest management, protection against anthropogenic pressures, and integration of climate resilience into conservation strategies. For policymaking, this calls for aligning carbon sequestration goals with biodiversity conservation and ecosystem stability.

### CSIP SCHOLARSHIP GUIDE

*This is your chance to turn preparation into opportunity—attempt these questions seriously and prepare for exciting scholarships that can support your civil service journey.*

#### 10 Days to go - 10 model questions

1. The Saddle Peak, the highest point in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is located in which island?
2. The “Doctrine of Lapse” was most actively implemented under which Governor-General?
3. The Kolleru Lake, one of the largest freshwater lakes in India, is located between the deltas of which two rivers?
4. The “Anandmath” novel, associated with the song Vande Mataram, was written by which author?
5. The “Blue Revolution” in India is associated with the development of which sector?
6. The Ghadar Party was founded in which country?
7. The “Zero Hour” in the Indian Parliament was first introduced in which decade?
8. The Sariska Tiger Reserve is located in which state?
9. The “Treaty of Salbai” (1782) ended which Anglo-Maratha War?
10. The Brahmagiri Hills, the source of the river Kaveri, are located in which state?

#### Answers to the Previous Day's Questions

1. 8 states
2. B. R. Ambedkar
3. 1757
4. 42nd Amendment
5. Arabian Sea
6. Lord William Bentinck
7. 1942
8. 26 November 1949
9. Ashoka
10. Ireland
11. Maharashtra

## PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Consider the following countries:

- I. Bolivia
- II. Brazil
- III. Colombia
- IV. Ecuador
- V. Paraguay
- VI. Venezuela

Andes mountains pass through how many of the above countries?

- (a) Only two
- (b) Only three
- (c) Only four
- (d) Only five

2) Consider the following water bodies:

- I. Lake Tanganyika
- II. Lake Tonlé Sap
- III. Patos Lagoon

Through how many of them does the equator pass?

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

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.”

- Audrey Hepburn

**PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN**

**33 DAYS TO GO**

## CIVIL SERVICES DAY 2026

Ground-level development in India often finds its strongest expression through committed civil servants who translate policy into meaningful change. Across districts, efforts to strengthen early childhood centres into community hubs, improve learning outcomes through technology-driven solutions, and address deep-rooted social challenges like child marriage show how governance becomes impactful when it is people-centric. Initiatives in sanitation, disaster response, and rural infrastructure further underline that responsive administration is essential for improving everyday life. These examples highlight that development is not merely about schemes, but about effective implementation tailored to local needs.

Civil servants play a vital role in mobilising natural, human, and financial resources, ensuring their efficient use for inclusive growth. Whether creating barrier-free environments for persons with disabilities or strengthening public service delivery systems, their interventions directly shape quality of life. At the same time, they act as a bridge between the government and citizens—building trust, encouraging participation, and fostering collective ownership of development initiatives. Campaigns that actively involve communities in infrastructure creation reflect how participatory governance can overcome resource constraints.



