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The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

23rd November 2026



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23rd November 2026

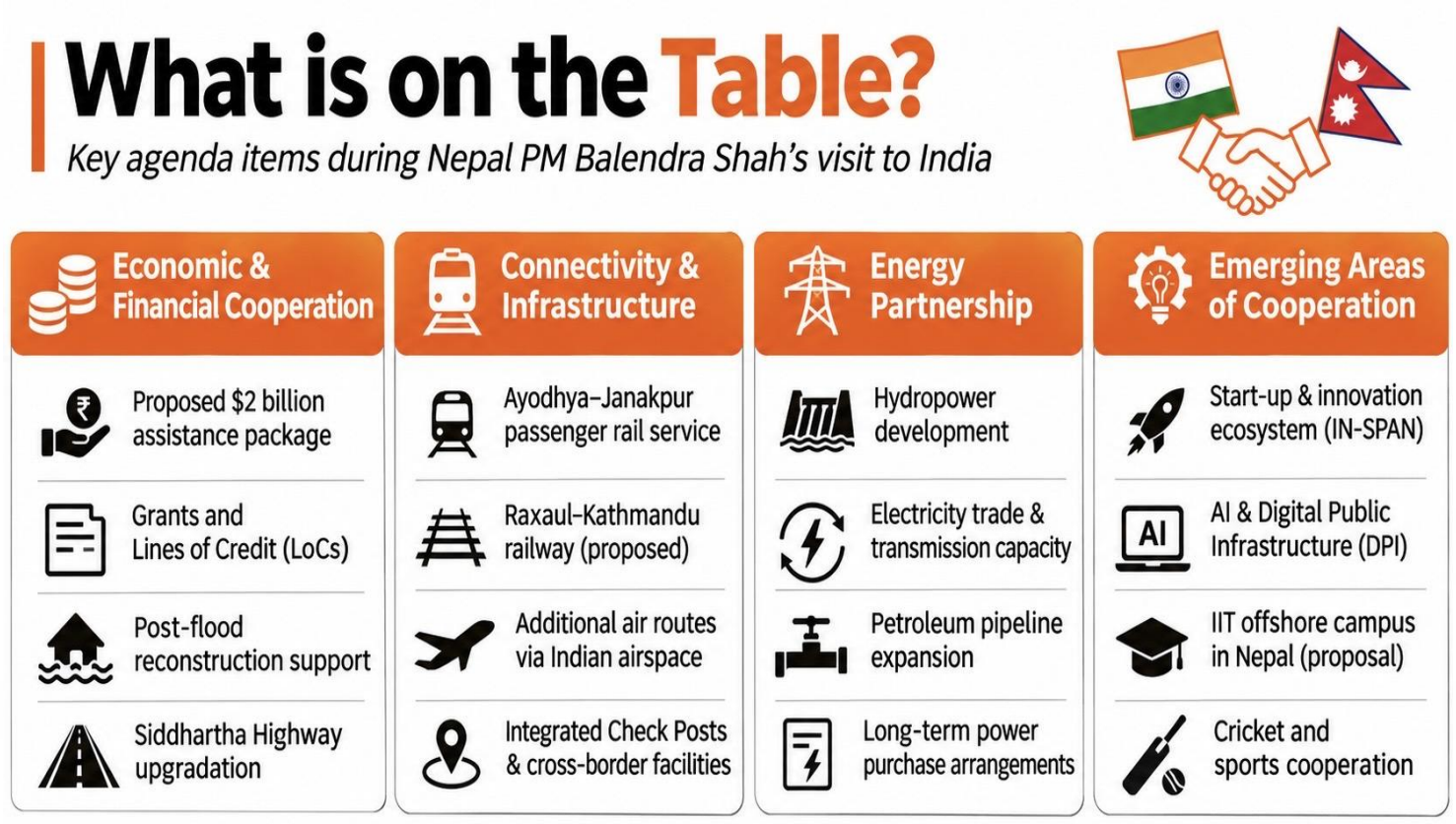
Nepal PM's First visit

CONTEXT: Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah's first state visit to India (22–23 November 2026).

A New Opportunity for Reset?

First state visit of Nepal PM Balendra Shah to India | 22–23 November 2026

- First bilateral foreign visit since assuming office (March 2026)
- Political reset after initial diplomatic hesitation
- Reaffirmation of neighbourhood-first engagement
- Shift towards economic diplomacy and development partnership
- Mutual emphasis: Respect, equality and national interests.



Why Does Nepal Matter to India?

Geographical and security

- 1,751 km open border
- Five Indian states share a border with Nepal
- Himalayan security and ecological interdependence
- Strategic buffer and regional stability
- Border management and cross-border crime

Economic and energy

- Nepal: Major hydropower potential
- India: Nepal's largest trade partner
- Electricity trade and regional energy integration
- Access to Indian ports and transit infrastructure

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23rd November 2026

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CONTEXT: Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah's first state visit to India (22–23 November 2026).

Cultural and people-to-people

- Civilisational links: Ramayana and Buddhist circuits
- Deep religious and cultural ties
- Open-border mobility and family connections
- Defence cooperation and Gorkha recruitment

Geopolitical

- Neighbourhood First policy
- China's growing economic and strategic footprint
- Himalayan regional cooperation

Major Challenges

1. Political and diplomatic trust deficit

- Perception of Indian interference in Nepal's domestic affairs
- Sovereignty and equality concerns
- Legacy of the 2015 blockade controversy
- Demand for revision of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship
- Pending Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report

2. Territorial disputes

- Kalapani–Lipulekh–Limpiyadhura
- Susta border dispute
- Competing historical maps and territorial claims
- Domestic political mobilisation around nationalism

3. Economic asymmetry

- Nepal's widening trade deficit with India
- Dependence on Indian transit routes
- Limited diversification of Nepal's export basket
- Delays in infrastructure project implementation

4. Geopolitical competition

- Growing Chinese economic and infrastructure footprint
- Nepal's strategic balancing between India and China
- Concerns over external strategic influence

5. Unresolved bilateral issues

- Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project delays
- Gorkha recruitment suspended since 2020
- Disagreements over air-entry routes
- Water-sharing and energy cooperation concerns

New Opportunities, New Risks

Emerging opportunities

- **Nepal's hydropower potential:** Regional energy hub
- Electricity trade: Bangladesh through Indian transmission infrastructure
- Cross-border railways, roads and petroleum pipelines
- Digital connectivity and DPI cooperation
- **Tourism**: Ramayana and Buddhist circuits
- Climate resilience and disaster management

Emerging risks

- China's expanding connectivity and investment footprint
- Nepal's domestic political instability
- Nationalist narratives and sovereignty sensitivities
- Climate-induced floods, landslides and glacial risks
- Strategic mistrust affecting economic cooperation

Way forward

Political and diplomatic

- Respect for sovereignty and non-interference
- Institutionalised high-level dialogue
- Revitalising EPG recommendations
- Dialogue-based resolution of territorial disputes
- Greater engagement with Nepal's political spectrum



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23rd November 2026

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Economic and developmental

- Timely implementation of development projects
- Review of trade and transit arrangements
- Greater market access for Nepali products
- Investment in Nepal's productive capacity
- People-centric, high-impact community projects

Energy and connectivity

- Operationalise long-term power trade agreements
- Expedite Pancheshwar project negotiations
- Expand cross-border transmission infrastructure
- Resolve air-route and transit bottlenecks
- Develop integrated regional transport corridors

Security and environmental

- Joint border management and intelligence sharing
- Cooperation against trafficking and organised crime
- Joint disaster early-warning mechanisms
- Himalayan ecosystem and river-basin cooperation

Mains Practise Question

"India–Nepal relations are characterised by deep historical and civilisational ties, yet remain constrained by political sensitivities and strategic challenges." Discuss in the context of Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah's recent visit to India. (150 words, 10 marks)



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23rd November 2026

Ethanol Blending vs Food Secuity

CONTEXT: India's push to achieve 20% ethanol blending in petrol has raised concerns over the diversion of foodgrain.

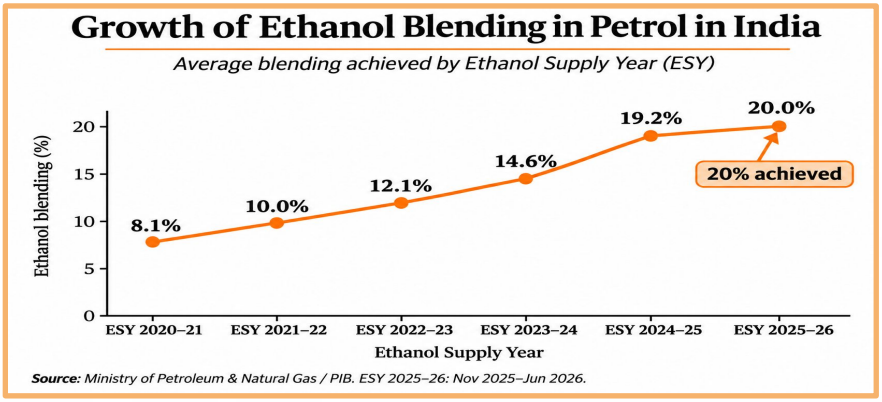
Ethanol Blending Programme

Policy evolution

- National Policy on Biofuels, 2018
- E20 target advanced: 2030 → 2025–26 (2022 amendment)
- EBP expansion: 1.5% (2013–14) → 20% (2025–26)
- 2G bioethanol promotion – agricultural residue utilisation

Major achievements

- 88.5% crude oil import dependence
- ₹1.90 lakh crore+ foreign exchange saved
- 310 lakh MT+ crude oil substituted
- ₹1.60 lakh crore+ additional farmer earnings
- 930 lakh MT estimated CO_2 emissions avoided (PIB, July 2026)



Economic and strategic significance

- Import substitution
- Reduced exposure to global oil-price volatility
- Additional agricultural market
- Rural employment and distillery investments
- Renewable fuel transition

The Feedstock Dilemma: Foodgrains vs Fuel

Major ethanol feedstocks

- Sugarcane juice / syrup
- B-heavy and C-heavy molasses
- Surplus FCI rice
- Damaged foodgrains
- Maize

Changing feedstock composition

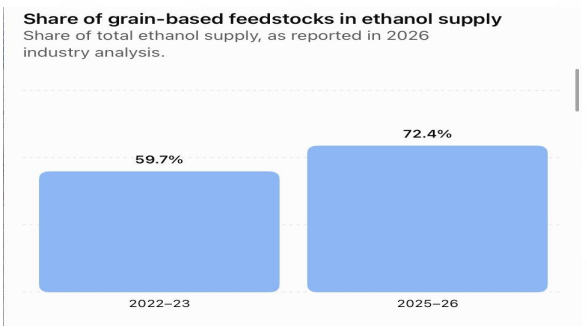
- Grain-based ethanol share: 59.7% (2022–23) → 72.4% (2025–26)
- Maize: 45.2% of total feedstock
- Rice: 27.2% of total feedstock

Economic distortions

- FCI rice economic cost: ₹43.91/kg
- Sale price to distilleries: ₹23.20/kg
- Implicit fiscal support through subsidised grain
- Higher maize procurement prices → competing demand from poultry and dairy sectors
- Rising public expenditure and opportunity costs

True cost of ethanol – CEEW assessment

- Rice-based: ₹126/litre
- Maize-based: ₹95/litre
- Sugarcane juice-based: ₹85.5/litre
- B-heavy molasses-based: ₹71.7/litre





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23rd November 2026

Ethanol Blending vs Food Secuity

CONTEXT: India's push to achieve 20% ethanol blending in petrol has raised concerns over the diversion of foodgrain.

Fuel vs Food vs Feed

1. Pressure on foodgrain availability

- 52 lakh metric tonnes of FCI surplus rice allocated for ethanol production
- Rice diversion despite its importance in PDS and household consumption
- 2.75 kg rice required per litre of ethanol (article estimate)
- Potential pressure on foodgrain prices and buffer stocks

2. Competition with livestock feed

- Maize – critical poultry and dairy feedstock
- Higher ethanol procurement prices → feedstock price escalation
- Rising input costs for poultry farmers and dairy producers
- Higher animal-feed and food prices

3. Crop diversification concerns

- Maize cultivation increased by ~9 lakh hectares in Kharif 2025–26
- Declining oilseed acreage
- Competition with pulses and oilseeds
- Potentially higher edible-oil and pulse import dependence

4. Distributional concerns

- Food affordability for low-income households
- Nutritional security
- Small livestock farmers
- Consumers facing food-price inflation

Environmental Sustainability

1. Water-intensive feedstocks

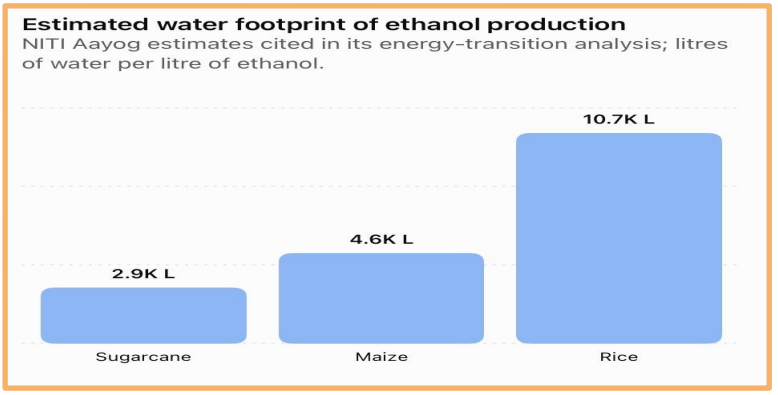
- Rice-based ethanol: ~10,700 litres water/litre ethanol
- Maize-based ethanol: ~4,600 litres/litre ethanol
- Sugarcane-based ethanol: ~2,860 litres/litre ethanol
- High agricultural water footprint

2. Regional environmental implications

- Punjab–Haryana: groundwater depletion
- Paddy cultivation: high irrigation dependence
- Sugarcane: competing demand for irrigation water
- Rice cultivation: methane emissions
- Climate vulnerability and declining groundwater tables

3. Ecological trade-offs

- Water–energy–food nexus
- Groundwater sustainability vs energy security
- Land-use pressure
- Fertiliser-intensive cultivation
- Lifecycle emissions vs direct combustion emissions



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Ethanol Blending vs Food Secuity

CONTEXT: India's push to achieve 20% ethanol blending in petrol has raised concerns over the diversion of foodgrain.

Way Forward

1. Feedstock diversification

- Agricultural residues and crop stubble
- 2G ethanol – lignocellulosic biomass
- 3G ethanol – algae-based feedstocks
- Industrial waste and other non-food biomass
- Reduced dependence on foodgrains

2. Flexible blending strategy

- Dynamic blending targets based on feedstock availability
- Foodgrain buffer-stock safeguards
- Feedstock-specific procurement incentives
- Periodic review of ethanol pricing
- Align capacity with actual petrol demand and EV adoption

3. Sustainable agricultural practices

- Crop diversification in water-stressed regions
- Incentivise pulses and oilseeds
- Micro-irrigation and water-use efficiency
- Discourage unsustainable paddy expansion
- Region-specific feedstock planning

4. Institutional and fiscal reforms

- Annual assessment of full fiscal costs
- Transparent feedstock allocation
- Inter-ministerial coordination: MoPNG, Agriculture, Food and Public Distribution, Environment
- Lifecycle assessment of emissions and water use
- Farmer-centric procurement and assured markets

5. Technology and infrastructure

- Strengthen 2G ethanol technology
- Biomass aggregation and supply chains
- Commercial viability of IOCL Panipat 2G plant
- Research and development in advanced biofuels
- Public–private partnerships

Mains Practise Question

"India's ethanol blending programme represents an important step towards energy security; however, its long-term sustainability requires balancing food security, farmers' interests and environmental concerns." Discuss.
(150 words, 10 marks)



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23rd November 2026

Mains Value Addition

Newspaper : Indian Express, **Page No : 1, 2**

Drought for many, but basmati growers reap a golden harvest

- **Regional contrast:** While El Niño-induced deficient rainfall has affected large parts of India, the Punjab–Haryana–Western UP basmati belt has witnessed higher yields and prices.
- **Yield improvement:** Pusa Basmati-1509 recorded 22–23 quintals/acre in Karnal against 18–20 quintals last year.
- **Climate resilience factors**: Assured irrigation, absence of prolonged inundation and favourable sunshine during flowering.
- **Regional example:** Basmati farmers in Haryana and Punjab benefited from better crop conditions despite wider agricultural distress.

• Basmati exports in April-March

	Quantity	Value	Rate per tonne
2021-22	39.44 LT	$3,537 mn	₹66,917
2022-23	45.61 LT	$4,788 mn	₹84,463
2023-24	52.42 LT	$5,843 mn	₹92,309
2024-25	60.65 LT	$5,944 mn	₹82,949
2025-26	65.21 LT	$5,673 mn	₹76,887
Apr-Sep 25	31.69 LT	$2,763 mn	₹75,284
Apr-Sep 26	30.51 LT	$2,927 mn	₹91,303

LT IS LAKH TONNE; SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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23rd November 2026

Mains Value Addition

Newspaper : Indian Express, **Page No : 1, 2**

- **Record exports:** India's basmati exports reached 65.21 lakh tonnes in 2025–26, compared to 39.44 lakh tonnes in 2021–22.
- **Export realisation:** Export value increased from $3.54 billion (2021–22) to $5.67 billion (2025–26).
- **Higher price realisation:** Average export realisation increased from ₹75,284/tonne (April–September 2025) to ₹91,303/tonne (April–September 2026).
- **Farmer-level impact:** Pusa Basmati-1509 fetched ₹3,800–4,300/quintal against ₹2,700–3,200 last year.
- **Underlying driver:** Sustained international demand coupled with lower carry-forward stocks following poor production in 2025.

Crop-specific climate vulnerability: Basmati requires open skies and bright sunshine during flowering for effective pollination and grain setting.

Climate-induced yield losses: Excessive rainfall during flowering can cause flower shedding, poor fertilisation and empty grains.

Agri-tech intervention: Remote sensing and ground-truthing can improve assessment of crop acreage, yield and production.

Production potential: India's total basmati paddy crop estimated at 110.04 lakh tonnes in 2026, up 12.2% from 99.01 lakh tonnes in 2025.

Policy takeaway: Strengthen irrigation infrastructure, climate-resilient agricultural practices, crop-specific advisories and export-oriented value chains.



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23rd November 2026

Indraprastha Communique

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Current Events
Newspaper : The Indian Express, **Page No : 7**

Indraprastha Communiqué: Core Principles

Equal Civilisational Voice: Every civilisation deserves equal respect, recognition and acknowledgement of its contribution to humanity.
Diversity as Strength: Guided by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (World is One Family).
Shared Cultural Heritage: Recognises common legacies in architecture, historical sites, traditional knowledge, music, cuisine and textiles.
Culture as a Bridge: An instrument of friendship, mutual trust and good-neighbourliness.
Broad Definition of Cultural Heritage: Includes monuments, manuscripts, literature, art, living traditions, cuisine, performing arts and knowledge systems.

Cultural Cooperation: Key Initiatives

Joint UNESCO Nominations: Identify shared tangible, intangible and documentary heritage for joint nominations under relevant UNESCO conventions and programmes.
Digital Heritage Repository: Cooperation in digitisation, cataloguing, preservation, translation and joint study of manuscripts.
AI in Heritage Conservation: Use Artificial Intelligence to improve accessibility and understanding of cultural heritage while maintaining accuracy and cultural context.
Institutional Collaboration: Cooperation among museums, libraries, archives, universities and research organisations.
People-to-People Exchanges: Joint exhibitions, cultural festivals, films, performing arts and exchanges of artists, scholars and students.
Spiritual Traditions: Promote respect for religious and philosophical traditions, pilgrimage sites and centres of learning.

- **Heritage Protection & Other Important Provisions**
- **Combating Illicit Trafficking:** Joint efforts to prevent illegal trafficking of cultural property.
- **Climate Resilience:** Protect heritage against environmental pressures and natural calamities; explore a platform for climate-related disaster resilience.
- **Good Practices:** Exchange best practices in heritage preservation, cultural education and public engagement.
- **Youth Engagement:** Recognises youth as flagbearers of shared civilisational and cultural heritage.
- **Biennial Dialogue:** India proposed holding the SCO Civilisational Dialogue once every two years, with the venue decided by member states at SCO Summits.



The Analyst Handout
23rd November 2026

Schenzhen Pledge

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Current Events
Newspaper : The Indian Express, **Page No : 10**

Shenzhen Pledge: The Strategic Trilateral

Background and key facts

- Date: 19 November 2026.
- Venue: Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.
- Participants: Donald Trump (US), Vladimir Putin (Russia), Xi Jinping (China).
- Outcome: Joint US-Russia-China Heads of State Declaration toward Peace.
- Core energy commitment: Increase production and supply of refined petroleum products.
- Objective: Promote stable energy flows and global energy security.

- All three countries are Permanent Members (P5) of the UN Security Council.
- They are among the world's major oil-producing and petroleum-refining powers.
- The declaration also covers UN reform, state sovereignty/immunities and nuclear-risk reduction.
- It is a trilateral declaration, not a new international organisation or an OPEC agreement.



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23rd November 2026

PM- GKAY

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Important Schemes
Newspaper : The Indian Express, **Page No : 1**

PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)

Background and key features

- Launched: April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
- Implementing Department: Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD).
- Objective: Ensure food security for vulnerable sections through free foodgrain distribution.
- Present framework: From 1 January 2023, free foodgrains under PMGKAY are provided to NFSA beneficiaries.
- Extension: Free foodgrains continued for five years from 1 January 2024.
- Coverage: Approximately 81.35 crore beneficiaries.
- Distribution: Through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

NFSA, 2013: Institutional framework

National Food Security Act, 2013

- Enacted to provide a rights-based approach to food security.
- Came into force on 5 July 2013.
- Covers up to:
- 75% of the rural population.
- 50% of the urban population.
- Overall intended coverage: approximately 81.35 crore persons (based on Census 2011).

Important provisions

- Coverage under PDS is delinked from erstwhile poverty estimates.
- Eldest woman of the household (18 years or above) is designated as head of the household for ration-card purposes.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to nutritional support and maternity benefits.
- Children aged 6 months–6 years receive nutritional support through Anganwadi centres.
- Children aged 6–14 years receive meals under the school meal framework.

PMGKAY evaluation: 13.2% inclusion error

- What did the evaluation study find?
- Commissioned by the Department of Food and Public Distribution.
- Conducted during FY 2025–26.
- Surveyed 51,303 beneficiary households across all 36 States/UTs.
- Minimum sample of 550 beneficiaries per State/UT.
- Overall inclusion error: 13.2%.



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23rd November 2026

PM- GKAY

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Important Schemes
Newspaper : The Indian Express, **Page No : 1**

PMGKAY Evaluation Study (FY 2025–26)

Four Major Findings

1 Overall Inclusion Error

13.2%

of beneficiaries are ineligible but continue to receive free foodgrains.



2 Rural–Urban Variation

Urban areas **15.6%**

Rural areas **12.5%**

3 Across Beneficiary Categories

PHH households (Priority HouseHolds) **13.4%**

AAY households (Antyodaya Anna Yojana) **12.2%**

4 Key Reasons for Ineligibility (Examples)

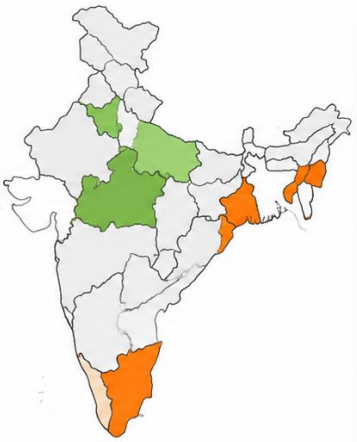
- Ownership of cars / motor vehicles
- Possession of air conditioners
- Pucca houses with three or more rooms
- Family members employed in government jobs

State-wise Inclusion Error in PMGKAY

(Evaluation Study, FY 2025–26)

States with Higher Inclusion Error

West Bengal	39.5%
Tripura	39.2%
Tamil Nadu	38.7%
Meghalaya	28.5%
Bihar	25.5%
Odisha	22.9%
Punjab	20.6%
Maharashtra	20.3%



States with Lower Inclusion Error

Jammu & Kashmir	0.3%
Madhya Pradesh	0.5%
Haryana	1.0%
Delhi	1.0%
Rajasthan	1.8%
Uttar Pradesh	6.0%

Overall (All India): 13.2% | Urban: 15.6% | Rural: 12.5%



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23rd November 2026

Portable Ultrasound

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Science and Technology
Newspaper : The Indian Express, **Page No : 12**

Hand-held Portable Ultrasound (PUD)

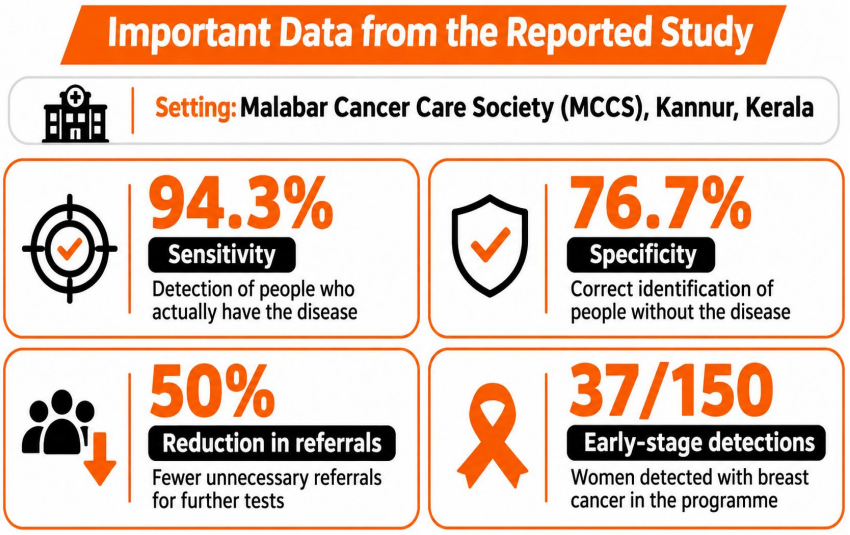
- Technology: Compact medical imaging device using high-frequency sound waves to generate images of internal body tissues.
- Portability: Lightweight, often battery-powered; can connect to tablets or smartphones.
- Point-of-care application: Enables imaging outside conventional hospitals and diagnostic centres.
- Breast cancer screening: Helps identify suspicious abnormalities in underlying breast tissue.
- Non-radiologist usability: Trained healthcare workers can use it for focused clinical assessment and triage.
- Advantage: Particularly useful in rural, remote and resource-constrained areas.

Three important screening and diagnostic approaches:

- **Clinical Breast Examination (CBE):** Physical examination by a trained healthcare professional to identify lumps or abnormalities.
- **Portable Ultrasound**: Provides imaging of underlying breast tissue to assess suspicious findings.
- **Mammography**: X-ray-based breast imaging used for further investigation and screening.

Institutional linkage

- The portable ultrasound programme described in the article involved clinicians trained by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).
- IARC is a specialised cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Headquarters: Lyon, France.
- Focus: Cancer research, causes, prevention and global cancer surveillance.



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23rd November 2026

Daily Quiz

Q1. Arrange the following ethanol feedstocks in descending order of water intensity (litres of water consumed per litre of ethanol produced):

1. Rice
2. Maize
3. Sugarcane

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

a) 3 – 2 – 1
b) 1 – 2 – 3
c) 2 – 1 – 3
d) 1 – 3 – 2

Answer: b

Q2. With reference to the Shenzhen Pledge, consider the following statements:

1. It resulted from a trilateral summit involving the United States, Russia and China.
2. The declaration deals exclusively with energy cooperation and does not address issues concerning the United Nations or nuclear security.
3. It establishes a new international organisation similar to OPEC.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) Only One
b) Only Two
c) All Three
d) None

Answer: a

Q3. With reference to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), consider the following statements:

1. It was launched in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. It provides 5 kg of free food grains per month in addition to subsidised ration under the PDS.
3. It replaces the Public Distribution System (PDS) for eligible households.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Q4. With reference to the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, consider the following statements:

1. The Act legally entitles up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidised foodgrains.
2. The eldest woman of a household, who is 18 years of age or above, is designated as the head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
3. Under the Act, every eligible household is entitled to 35 kg of foodgrains per month, irrespective of its category.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: c

Q5. With reference to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, consider the following statements:

1. It is a specialised cancer agency of the World Health Organisation.
2. Its headquarters is located in Geneva, Switzerland.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a





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