



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

3rd September 2026



Maternity Benefits & Women's Career Security

3rd September 2026

CONTEXT: The Delhi High Court has ruled that a woman returning from maternity leave cannot be placed at a professional disadvantage by reducing her responsibilities, managerial authority, status or career prospects.

Maternity Protection: More Than Just Leave

- Maternity benefits aim to protect women from the economic and professional disadvantages associated with pregnancy and childbirth.
- **It includes:**
 - Paid maternity leave
 - Job security
 - Protection from discriminatory treatment
 - Continuity of service
 - Safe working conditions
 - Nursing and childcare support
 - Career progression
- **The key issue**
 - A woman should not be worse off because she exercised her legal right to maternity leave.
- **Example**
 - **Rakhi Bisht Case** — Delhi HC, 2026
 - Same salary and designation alone may not be sufficient if the actual role has been downgraded.

Why is Maternity Protection Important?

Women's Workforce Participation

- Fear of career disruption can discourage women from:
 - Joining formal employment
 - Returning after childbirth
 - Seeking leadership positions

Gender Equality

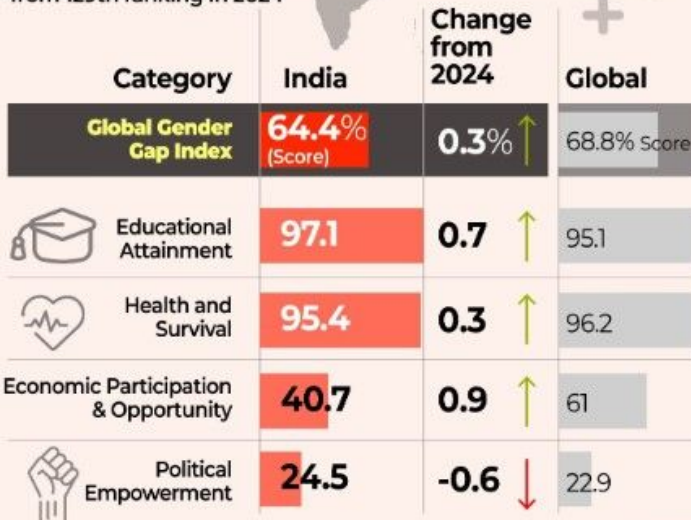
- Pregnancy and motherhood should not become grounds for unequal professional treatment.

Economic Growth

- Greater female workforce participation can improve:
 - Household incomes
 - Human capital utilisation
 - Productivity & Economic growth

Women in India: Educated, But Excluded

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025 ranks India at 131st out of 148 countries, a decline from 129th ranking in 2024



Category	India	Change from 2024	Global
Global Gender Gap Index	64.4% (Score)	0.3% ↑	68.8% Score
 Educational Attainment	97.1	0.7 ↑	95.1
 Health and Survival	95.4	0.3 ↑	96.2
 Economic Participation & Opportunity	40.7	0.9 ↑	61
 Political Empowerment	24.5	-0.6 ↓	22.9

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2025, WEF | Graphic: Piyush Aggarwal, Sarfaraz

Constitutional Dignity

- Maternity protection connects with:
 - Article 14 — Equality
 - Article 15 — Non-discrimination
 - Article 21 — Dignity and personal liberty
 - Article 42 — Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief

Maternity Benefits & Women's Career Security

Legal & Institutional Framework

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**
 - The Act provides maternity-related employment protection.



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Maternity Benefits & Women's Career Security

CONTEXT: The Delhi High Court has ruled that a woman returning from maternity leave cannot be placed at a professional disadvantage by reducing her responsibilities, managerial authority, status or career prospects.

• 2017 Amendment

- 26 weeks maternity leave for women with fewer than 2 surviving children
- 12 weeks for women with 2 or more surviving children
- 12 weeks for adopting mothers
- 12 weeks for commissioning mothers
- Work-from-home provision where feasible
- Crèche facility in establishments with 50+ employees

• Section 12 — Protection Against Disadvantage

- It prevents employers from:
 - Dismissing a woman because of maternity absence
 - Varying conditions of service to her disadvantage because of maternity absence
- Delhi HC Interpretation
 - The Court gave Section 12 a broader interpretation.
- "Conditions of service" can include:
 - Duties, Status, Authority
 - Reporting structure
 - Promotion prospects

Major Challenges with Maternity Benefits

A Motherhood Penalty

Women may experience:

-  Slower promotions
-  Lower wages
-  Reduced responsibilities
-  Career breaks
-  Fewer leadership opportunities



This is commonly described as the **"motherhood penalty."**

Example

A woman may return from maternity leave at the same salary but receive fewer high-value assignments, ultimately affecting her promotion prospects.

B Workplace Discrimination

Employers may perceive mothers as:

-  Less flexible
-  Less available
-  More likely to take leave



This can influence:

-  Recruitment
-  Appraisal
-  Promotion
-  Leadership assignments

C Unequal Care Responsibilities

Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of:

-  Childcare
-  Household work
-  Elderly care



This creates a **double burden**.

D Informal Employment

Maternity protection is particularly difficult for women in the informal sector.

Challenges include:

-  Lack of paid leave
-  Weak job security
-  Limited social protection
-  Poor enforcement



Example

Domestic workers, agricultural workers and many casual workers may not enjoy maternity protection comparable to formal-sector employees.



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Maternity Benefits & Women's Career Security

Government Initiatives

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and 2017 Amendment**
 - Statutory maternity protection.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**
 - Provides maternity-related financial support to eligible women.
- **POSH Act, 2013**
 - Provides a framework for prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Code on Social Security, 2020**
 - Provides a broader social-security framework, including maternity-related provisions.

• **Other steps:**

- Workplace crèche requirements
- WFH provision where feasible
- Various social-security programmes for women

Mains Practice Question

"Maternity protection is not merely a labour welfare measure but an instrument of gender equality." Discuss the challenges faced by women in balancing motherhood and career in India.

(15 Marks, 250 words)

WAY FORWARD



- Ensure career continuity and progression after maternity leave.



- Expand workplace and community-based crèches.



- Promote greater participation of fathers in childcare.



- Use:
 - Hybrid work
 - Flexible hours
 - Part-time options where feasible.



- Provide accessible mechanisms for complaints against maternity discrimination.



- Reduce the disproportionate financial burden of maternity benefits on small employers.



- Shift organisational culture from "motherhood as a liability" to "parenthood as a shared responsibility."

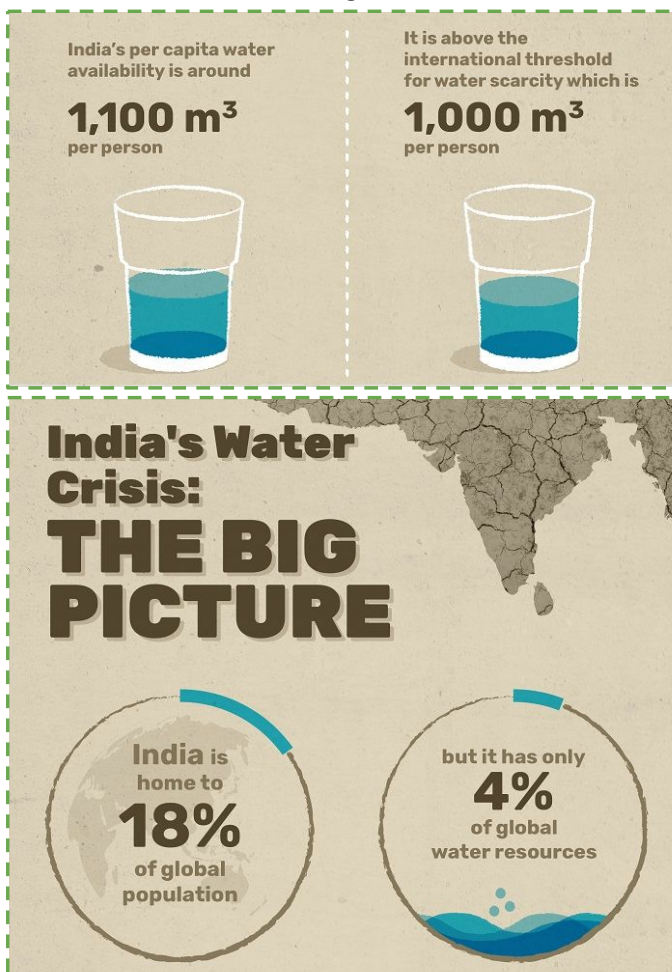
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River-Linking is not the solution

CONTEXT: In a recent speech at the Southern Zonal Council, Union Home Minister highlighted river-linking as a possible way to address India's long-term water shortages.

What is Water Crisis?

- Water Crisis refers to:
 - A situation where the **availability, accessibility, quality, or management** of water is insufficient to meet human, agricultural, industrial, and ecological needs.



What is River Interlinking?

- River interlinking involves transferring water from a relatively water-surplus basin to a water-deficit basin through:
 - Canals
 - Reservoirs
 - Dams
 - Tunnels
 - Pumping systems

Why Does India Consider River Linking?

- **Uneven Distribution of Water**
 - India experiences enormous spatial and temporal variations in rainfall.
 - Northeast → Very high rainfall
 - Western India → Low rainfall
 - Monsoon → Heavy concentration
 - Summer → Water scarcity
- **Drought & Irrigation**
 - Expand irrigation
 - Stabilise agricultural production
 - Reduce dependence on monsoon rainfall
- **Flood Management**
 - Flood-prone basin → Storage/transfer → Water-deficit basin
- **Hydropower & Regional Development**
- Large reservoirs and canals can potentially support:
 - Hydropower
 - Irrigation
 - Drinking water
 - Industrial development



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River-Linking is not the solution

CONTEXT: In a recent speech at the Southern Zonal Council, Union Home Minister highlighted river-linking as a possible way to address India's long-term water shortages.

Why is River Linking Not a Simple Solution?

A "Surplus" and "Deficit" Are Not Permanent

A river basin may appear surplus in one year and face scarcity in another.

Climate change is further increasing uncertainty in:



Example

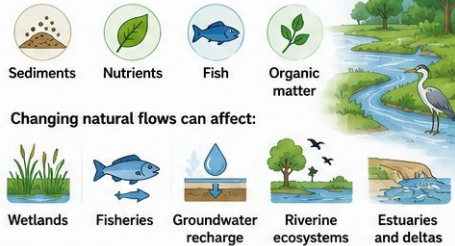
A basin classified as "surplus" based on historical averages may experience severe water stress during a prolonged drought.

Therefore:

Water surplus must be assessed dynamically, not assumed permanently.

B Ecological Consequences

Rivers are not merely channels carrying water. They transport:



Example

Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar Link

Kerala has opposed the proposal over concerns regarding its potential impact on the **Vembanad** wetland system and the Pamba and Achankovil rivers.

C Inter-State Water Conflicts

Water is a State subject, but inter-state rivers create a major federal challenge.

River linking can affect:



Example

Pennaiyar River Dispute

Tamil Nadu sought constitution of a tribunal over its dispute with Karnataka. The article highlights the difficulty of resolving existing inter-state water disputes even before embarking on additional large-scale transfers.

D Environmental & Social Costs

Large river-linking projects may require:



Potential consequences:



Example

Ken-Betwa Project

The project has generated concerns relating to the ecological consequences in the Panna landscape and displacement/rehabilitation issues.

E High Financial & Infrastructure Costs

River interlinking requires massive investments in:



Moreover, transferring water over long distances can require substantial energy inputs.

Hence:

The economic viability of every individual link needs independent assessment.

The Federalism Challenge Constitutional Framework

- Entry 17, State List
 - Water, subject to Union intervention in certain circumstances.
- Entry 56, Union List
 - Regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys in the public interest.
- Article 262
 - Parliament can provide for adjudication of inter-state river-water disputes.
- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956**
 - Provides a mechanism for adjudicating disputes between States regarding inter-state rivers.

- The core problem
- A State may ask:
 - Why should we give our water to another State when our own future requirements are uncertain?



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River-Linking is not the solution

CONTEXT: In a recent speech at the Southern Zonal Council, Union Home Minister highlighted river-linking as a possible way to address India's long-term water shortages.

WAY FORWARD

A Basin-Level Water Planning

Move from isolated projects to Integrated River Basin Management.

Consider:



Entire river basin



Upstream-downstream relationships



Groundwater



Ecology



Agriculture



Urban demand

B Scientific Identification of "Surplus"

Before any transfer:



Assess long-term hydrology



Account for climate change



Calculate ecological flow requirements



Consider future population and agricultural demand

C Strengthen Cooperative Federalism

Create stronger coordination among:



Centre



States



River Basin Organisations



Local governments



Farmers



Civil society

Example:

Existing inter-state disputes such as **Cauvery, Krishna and Pennaiyar** show that water governance requires sustained political and institutional cooperation.

D Prioritise Demand Management

Focus on:



"More crop per drop"



Groundwater conservation



Efficient irrigation



Wastewater reuse



Rainwater harvesting



Water-sensitive urban planning

E Selective River Linking

River linking should not be rejected universally.

Instead:



Project-specific assessment

+



Ecological safeguards

+



State consent

+



Social impact assessment



should determine whether a particular link is justified.

Mains Practice Question

"River interlinking can redistribute water, but cannot by itself solve India's water crisis." Examine the geographical, ecological and socio-economic dimensions of the statement.

(10 marks, 150 words)



Newspaper: The Hindu , Page No. 7

Decoding Russia's reliance on Indian petroleum products

Ukraine's recent relentless attacks on Russia's oil refineries has led the country to rely on India for petroleum imports

Mains Value Addition

- Russia accounted for **31.6%** of India's crude imports in June 2026.
 - ₹/Value: \$531 million.
- **Refining advantage:**
 - India is a major global refining hub, enabling it to convert imported crude into higher-value petroleum products.
 - Geopolitical opportunity: Disruptions to Russian refineries.
- India's large refining capacity can act as a strategic buffer during global energy disruptions.
- **Energy diplomacy:**
 - Petroleum trade can deepen India–Russia strategic ties while creating economic leverage.
- **Strategic autonomy:**
 - Diversified crude sourcing + domestic refining capacity strengthens India's energy security and geopolitical autonomy.
- **Risk:**
- Excessive dependence on any single supplier creates:
 - Vulnerability to sanctions,
 - Geopolitical conflicts and
 - Supply disruptions.

CHART 4: The seven countries with the highest oil refining capacity in the world. Values in million barrels per day

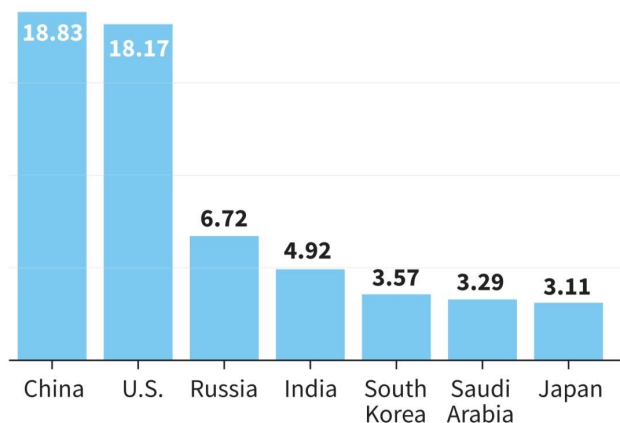
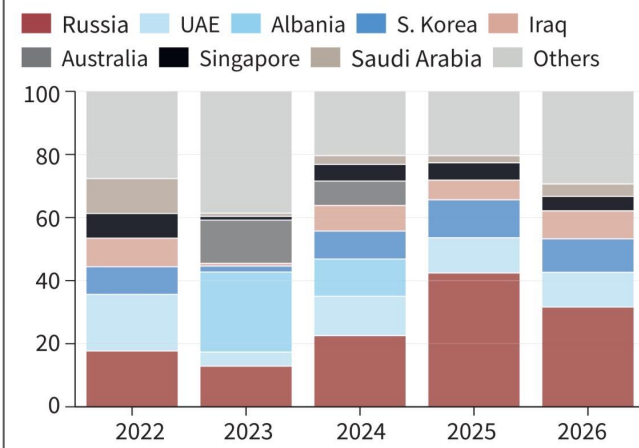


CHART 2: Russia accounted for more than one-fourth of India's total crude imports since January 2022



Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)



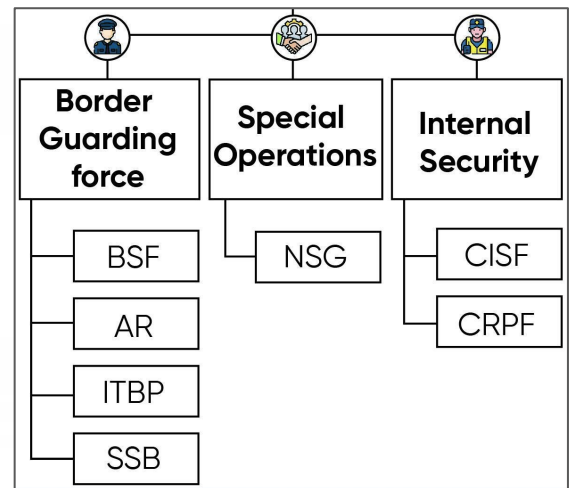
Syllabus: Prelims: Internal Security
Newspaper: The Hindu, **Page No.** 12

Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)

- The CAPFs are **paramilitary forces** under the Union Government
 - Responsible for internal security, border guarding, and maintaining law and order.
- They function under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- Leadership: Each force is headed by a **Director General (DG)**, who is an **IPS Officer**.
- CAPFs are not part of the Indian Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force).
- Assam Rifles** (Dual Control): It is the oldest paramilitary force.
 - While it falls under the MHA for administration, its operational control lies with the Indian Army (Ministry of Defence).

Exam Traps

- CAPFs are controlled by the Ministry of Defence → **WRONG**
- CAPFs include the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force → **WRONG**
- BSF guards the India–China border → **WRONG**
- SSB guards only the India–Nepal borders → **WRONG**
- Assam Rifles is under the operational control of MHA → **WRONG**



Group	Force	Primary Mandate
Border Guarding	BSF (Border Security Force)	Guards borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh .
	ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police)	Guards the China border (High-altitude Himalayan terrain).
	SSB (Sashastra Seema Bal)	Guards the Nepal and Bhutan borders.
	AS (Assam Rifles)	Guards the Myanmar border; North-East counter-insurgency .
Internal Security	CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force)	Handles Anti-Naxal (LWE) ops, riot control (RAF) , and elections.
	CISF (Central Industrial Security Force)	Protects PSUs, Airports, Metros, and nuclear installations.
Special Task Force	NSG (National Security Guard)	Elite counter-terrorism and hostage rescue (The "Black Cats").



National Security Act, 1980

Syllabus: Prelims: Internal Security
Newspaper: The Hindu, **Page No.** 10

National Security Act (NSA), 1980

- **Nature: Preventive detention law**
 - To prevent a person from committing certain acts.
- **Purpose:** To prevent threats to national security, public order, defence of India, security of the State, foreign relations, etc.
- **Maximum detention:** Up to 12 months under the Act.
 - Subject to review by the Advisory Board and other safeguards.
- **Grounds:** Authorities must communicate the grounds of detention to the detainee.
 - Subject to withholding facts considered against public interest.
- **Advisory Board:** Detention beyond 3 months generally requires consideration by an Advisory Board.

National Security Act (NSA), 1980

- **Constitutional basis:** Preventive detention is permitted under **Article 22(3)–(7)** of the Constitution.
- **Important distinction:** NSA is not an anti-terror law like UAPA; its core mechanism is preventive detention.

Exam Traps

- NSA is a constitutional law → **WRONG**
- NSA provides for punitive detention → **WRONG**
- Only the Central Government can order detention under NSA → **WRONG**
- NSA and UAPA are the same law → **WRONG**
- Preventive detention is prohibited under Article 22 → **WRONG**
- A person detained under NSA cannot approach the courts → **WRONG**

National Security Act

Key facts at a glance



Syllabus: Prelims: IR

Newspaper: Indian Express, Page No. 1

18th BRICS Summit — 2026

- Host Country: India
- Venue: **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**
- Dates:
 - 12–13 September 2026
- BRICS Chairship:
 - India assumed the chair on 1 Jan 2026
- **4th Indian Chairship**
 - Previous: 2012, 2016, 2021
- Theme:
 - **“Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability”**
- Current Members:
 - **11 countries**
 - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia

18th BRICS Summit — 2026

- **Three Pillars:**
 - Political & Security
 - Economic & Financial
 - Cultural & People-to-People Exchanges

- **Nature:**
 - Intergovernmental grouping
 - Not a military alliance
- **Headquarters:**
 - No permanent headquarters or secretariat
- **New Development Bank (NDB):**
 - Established in 2015
 - Headquarters: Shanghai, China
- **Previous Summit:**
 - 17th BRICS Summit (2025) → Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Exam Traps

- 18th BRICS Summit will be held in Brazil → **WRONG**
- India assumed BRICS Chairship on 1 January 2025 → **WRONG**
- India has held the BRICS Chairship only twice before 2026 → **WRONG**
- BRICS currently has 5 members → **WRONG**
- BRICS is a military alliance → **WRONG**
- NDB is headquartered in New Delhi → **WRONG**

THE BRICS NATIONS: ORIGINAL MEMBERS & 2024 EXPANSION



Caste Census

Syllabus: Prelims: Polity

Newspaper: Indian Express, Page No. 1

Caste Census

- Collection of caste-wise population data during the Census.
- **Caste Enumeration in India:**
 - 1931 Census is the last complete caste census conducted in British India.
- **Post-Independence Census:**
 - Since 1951, Census has enumerated SCs and STs.
 - Caste details of other communities were generally not collected in the Census.
- **Socio-Economic and Caste Census conducted in 2011:**
 - Included caste-related data.
 - Not part of the regular Census.
 - Conducted by different government agencies for different components.
- **2027 Census:**
 - It will be the first caste census since Independence to enumerate castes beyond SCs and STs.

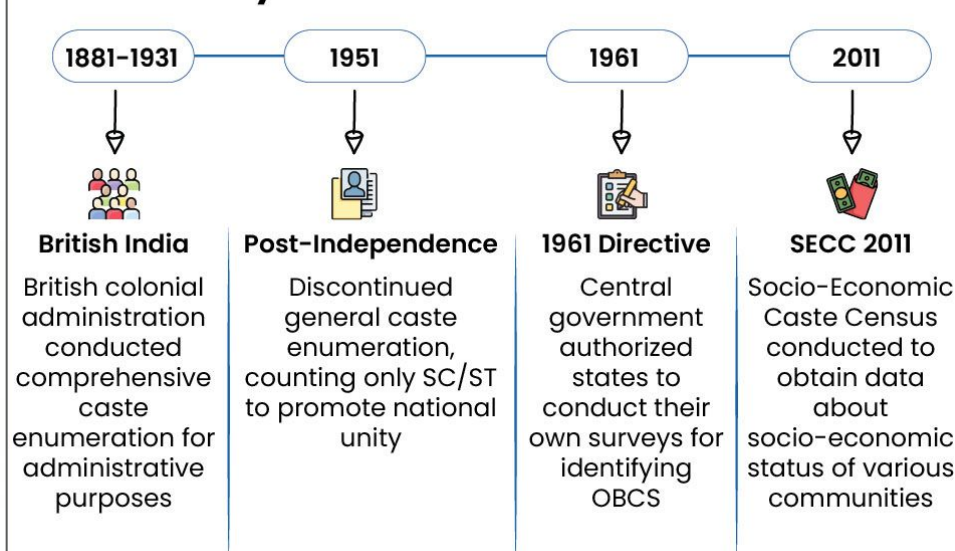
• **Constitutional Basis:**

- Census is a **Union subject** (7th Schedule)
- Census conducted under the **Census Act, 1948.**
- Importance:
 - Helps in designing targeted welfare and affirmative-action policies.
 - Can inform debates on reservation and social justice.

Exam Traps

- Caste-wise data for all communities has been collected in every Census since 1951 → **WRONG**
- 1951 Census was the last comprehensive caste census in India → **CORRECT**
- SECC 2011 was the regular decennial Census → **WRONG**
- Census is a State List subject → **WRONG**
- 2021 Census included complete caste enumeration → **WRONG**

History of Caste Enumeration in India



Daily Quiz

Q1. Regarding the provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, as amended in 2017, consider the following statements:

1. A woman with fewer than two surviving children is entitled to 26 weeks of maternity leave.
2. A woman with two or more surviving children is entitled to 12 weeks of maternity leave.
3. An adopting mother and a commissioning mother are entitled to 12 weeks of maternity leave.
4. Every establishment employing 50 or more employees is required to provide a crèche facility.

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

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) Only Three
- d) All Four

Answer: d

Q2. With reference to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in India, consider the following statements:

1. The CRPF is primarily responsible for assisting States and Union Territories in maintaining public order and internal security.
2. The BSF is responsible for guarding India's international borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh.
3. The CISF is mandated to provide security to important industrial installations and other critical infrastructure.
4. The Assam Rifles functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Q3. With reference to the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, consider the following statements:

1. The National Security Act is a law providing for preventive detention to prevent certain acts that may pose a threat to national security or public order.
2. A person detained under the Act can be detained for a maximum period of 12 months, subject to the provisions and safeguards under the Act.
3. In every case, the grounds of detention must be communicated to the detainee without any exception.
4. Detention for a period exceeding three months generally requires consideration by an Advisory Board.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: b

Q4. With reference to the BRICS Summit 2026, consider the following statements:

1. India assumed the BRICS Chairship for 2026 on 1 January 2026.
2. The 18th BRICS Summit is scheduled to be held in New Delhi under India's Chairship.
3. Indonesia is among the countries that became members of BRICS as part of its recent expansion.
4. The theme of India's BRICS Chairship in 2026 is "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability."

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

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) Only Three
- d) All Four

Answer: d

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding caste enumeration in India:

1. The 1931 Census was the last Census conducted in British India to comprehensively enumerate caste-wise population across communities.
2. Since the 1951 Census, caste-wise enumeration has continued for SCs and STs.
3. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011 was part of the regular decennial Census of India and was conducted entirely by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.
4. The caste-related component of the SECC 2011 was handled separately from the regular Census operations.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: b





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