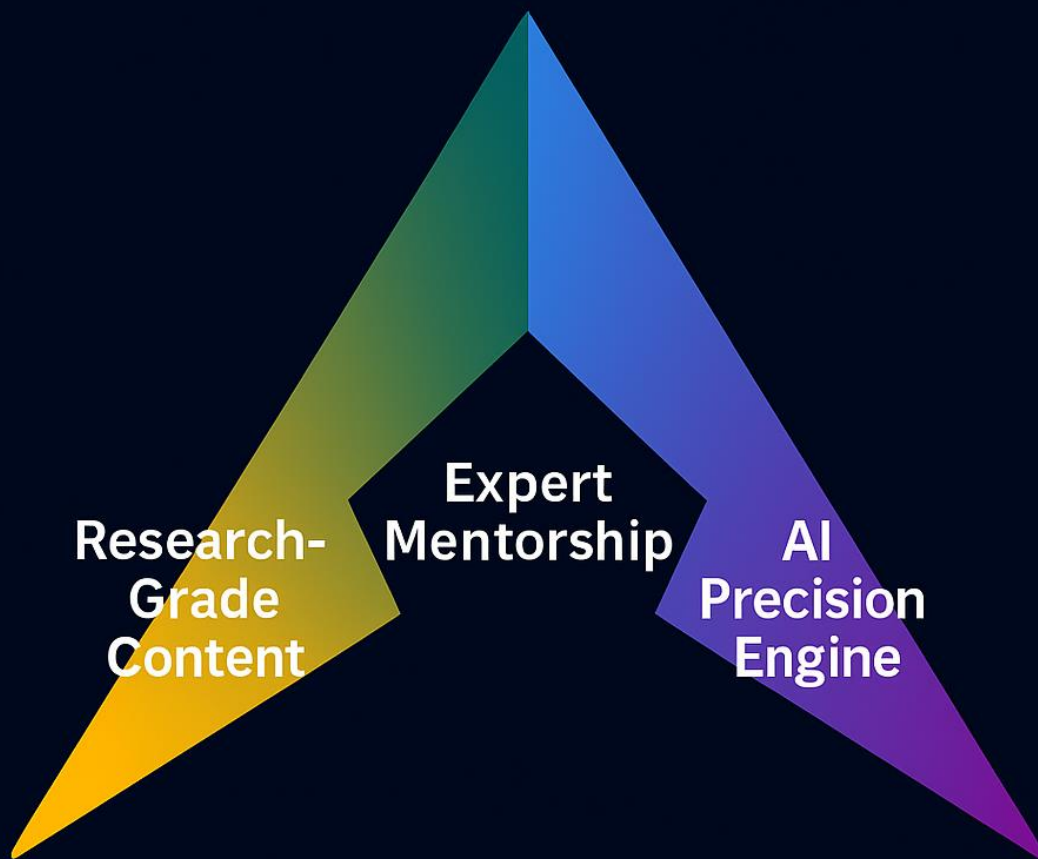


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First Edition: November 2025

Printed and published by PrepAlpine

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GS Paper I: Society

1. Legal Hoodwinking of Adivasis in Hasdeo Arand

a. Introduction

The Hasdeo Arand forests in Chhattisgarh are among India's richest ecological landscapes and home to long-settled Adivasi communities. A recent High Court judgment cancelled the Community Forest Rights (CFRs) of Ghatbarra village—rights that had already been recognised under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.

The case illustrates how legal and procedural manoeuvres can be used to dilute Adivasi rights, particularly when forest lands are required for mining and infrastructure projects.

b. What Community Forest Rights (CFRs) Are

CFRs under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 empower Gram Sabhas to:

i. Access and Use Forest Resources

- Collect minor forest produce.
- Use forests for livelihood needs.

ii. Protect and Conserve Forests

- Plan and manage forest resources.
- Safeguard biodiversity and cultural sites.

iii. Decide on Forest Diversion

- Gram Sabha consent is mandatory before forests can be diverted for mining or development.
- CFRs protect both livelihood and community identity.



c. What Happened in Hasdeo Arand: A Clear Sequence

i. Mining Project Proposed

- Government proposed coal mining in Hasdeo.
- Forest Advisory Committee initially rejected clearance due to ecological sensitivity and unsettled rights.

ii. Clearance Granted Despite Objections (2012)

- Mining clearance was approved even though rights settlement was incomplete.

iii. NGT Cancelled Clearance (2014)

- However, mining operations continued because Supreme Court orders allowed activity while reconsideration was pending.

iv. CFRs Recognised for Ghatbarra (2013)

- Gram Sabha formally received Community Forest Rights.

v. CFRs Cancelled by District Committee (2016)

- Cancellation occurred soon after the village resisted mining.
- No proper reasoning or due process was provided.

vi. High Court Judgment (2025)

- Court held that CFRs were “void from the beginning” since the land had already been diverted.
- Suggested monetary compensation for communities.

This created a situation where rights were recognised, ignored, and then revoked when they obstructed mining operations.

d. Why the Judgment Is Problematic

i. Violates the Forest Rights Act

- FRA requires rights to be fully settled before forest diversion.
- Gram Sabha consent is mandatory—and was never properly taken.

ii. Faulty Legal Reasoning

- Court held that CFRs were invalid because mining existed earlier.
- But FRA recognises rights “free of all encumbrances,” meaning mining leases cannot override CFRs.

iii. Administrative Errors by District Committee

- Rule 12(B) requires verification and written reasons for denial.
- These procedures were ignored.

iv. Community’s Right to Challenge Ignored

- CFRs belong to the entire Gram Sabha, giving villagers full standing to challenge cancellation.

v. “Fait Accompli” Approach

- Court accepted that since forests were already damaged, reversal was impractical.
- This rewards procedural violations by treating destruction as irreversible.

vi. Ignores Adivasi Cultural and Ecological Ties

- Forests are not merely economic assets—they represent culture, identity, and survival.
- Monetary compensation cannot replace these relationships.

e. Larger Governance Issues Revealed

i. Weak Enforcement of FRA

- Although FRA empowers Gram Sabhas, implementation frequently favours extractive interests.

ii. Administrative Manipulation

- Authorities delayed, ignored, or revoked rights to suit project timelines.

iii. Judicial Tilt Toward “Development”

- Courts sometimes prioritise economic projects over traditional rights.

iv. Erosion of the Niyamgiri Principle

- The 2013 Supreme Court ruling in Niyamgiri upheld Gram Sabha autonomy.
- Hasdeo signals a weakening of that community-driven model.

f. Implications

i. For Adivasi Communities

- Loss of livelihood and cultural landscapes.
- Increased risk of displacement.
- Deepening mistrust of institutions.

ii. For Forest Governance

- Legal provisions become symbolic rather than enforceable.
- Administrative discretion overrides community rights.

iii. For Environmental Justice

- Ecologically fragile zones become vulnerable to mining.
- Community-led conservation efforts weaken.

g. Way Forward

i. Enforce FRA in Its True Spirit

- Recognise rights before forest diversion.
- Cancel forest clearances that violate FRA.
- Penalise wrongful cancellations.

ii. Strengthen Gram Sabha Autonomy

- Independent verification of consent.
- Ban coercive or fabricated consent processes.

iii. Transparent Forest Diversion Processes

- Public online platforms for rights verification.
- Open access to Gram Sabha resolutions and objections.

iv. Avoid the “Fait Accompli” Strategy

- Courts must halt operations during disputes.
- Prevent project proponents from creating irreversible damage.

v. Declare “No-Go Zones”

- Protect ecologically sensitive landscapes like Hasdeo from mining.

vi. Integrate Adivasis in Planning and Conservation

- Recognise forests as socio-cultural ecosystems, not just land banks.

Conclusion

The Hasdeo case demonstrates how the law can be manoeuvred to dispossess rather than protect Adivasi communities. Cancelling Community Forest Rights after diverting forests undermines the core purpose of the Forest Rights Act. Real justice requires strengthening Gram Sabha authority, enforcing CFRs rigorously, and preventing ecological destruction rather than validating procedural violations. Unless FRA is implemented honestly, Adivasi rights will remain symbolic, and forest governance will continue to privilege extraction over equity and sustainability.

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

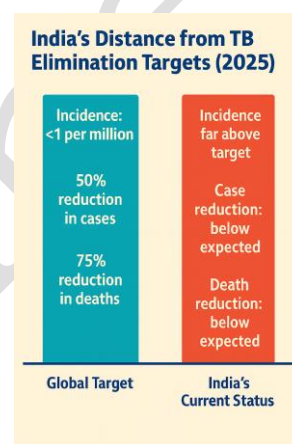
2. India's Fight Against Tuberculosis: Why Elimination Remains Difficult

a. Introduction

Tuberculosis remains one of India's most persistent public health challenges. Over the past decade, the country has expanded diagnostic networks, advanced treatment protocols, and strengthened surveillance systems. However, the goal of eliminating tuberculosis by 2025 remains distant. The World Health Organization's Global TB Report 2025 notes that although India is progressing, the pace is insufficient to meet the ambitious target.

b. The Scale of the Problem

India currently carries the world's highest tuberculosis burden. In 2024, the country recorded nearly twenty-seven lakh cases and close to three lakh deaths. This means more than a quarter of global TB patients reside in India. The situation is further complicated by a significant number of drug-resistant cases, which are harder to detect, treat, and cure.



c. What "Elimination" Really Means

Elimination does not imply the total absence of tuberculosis. It refers to reducing the incidence to fewer than one case per million population. As per global goals, countries were expected to cut TB cases by half and deaths by three-quarters by 2025. India has seen progress since 2015, but the reduction remains far short of these targets.

d. Why India Is Struggling to Eliminate TB

i. Setbacks During the COVID-19 Years

- TB diagnostic and treatment services were disrupted.
- Patients missed follow-ups or abandoned treatment due to lockdowns.
- Health systems diverted personnel and resources to COVID-19, delaying TB management.

ii. Difficulty Completing Long Treatment Courses

- TB treatment lasts several months, making adherence difficult.
- Side effects, stigma, and migration lead to treatment interruptions.
- Incomplete treatment increases the risk of drug-resistant TB.

iii. Growing Burden of Drug-Resistant TB

- India reports over one lakh drug-resistant cases annually.
- Treatment is longer, costlier, and more toxic than standard regimens.
- Paediatric formulations remain unavailable in some districts.

iv. Social and Environmental Determinants

- Malnutrition reduces immunity and increases susceptibility.
- Diabetes slows recovery and complicates treatment.
- Smoking, alcohol use, overcrowding, and air pollution contribute to spread.

v. Occasional Shortages of Medicines

- Supply chain disruptions in some states led to stock-outs.

- Even short treatment gaps can trigger drug resistance.

vi. Slow Expansion of Preventive Treatment

- Household contacts should receive preventive therapy.
- In many districts, preventive coverage remains low.
- This allows silent transmission within families.

vii. Uneven State-Level Capacity

- States vary widely in health infrastructure and TB surveillance.
- Weak reporting from private clinics undermines accurate estimates.
- Patient support systems remain inadequate in poorer districts.

e. Areas Where India Has Improved

i. Better Treatment Coverage

- Treatment coverage has risen from around fifty per cent in 2015 to over ninety per cent today.
- Early detection and outreach programmes have played a major role.

ii. Shorter and Improved Drug Regimens

- All-oral, six-month regimens for drug-resistant TB have replaced older two-year courses.
- Better tolerability increases treatment completion rates.

iii. Use of Technology for Diagnosis

- Portable digital X-ray units with AI-based interpretation are widely deployed.
- A hundred-day national campaign screened nearly nineteen crore people.
- Early detection reduces transmission and treatment delays.

iv. Stronger Community Support Systems

- Financial aid under Nikshay Poshan Yojana has been enhanced.
- Nikshay Mitra volunteers support nutrition and caregiving needs.
- Community engagement reduces stigma and improves adherence.

v. Innovative State-Level Approaches

- Tamil Nadu's triage-based system identifies vulnerable patients early.
- States are increasingly adopting data-driven interventions.
- Tailored strategies improve local outcomes.

f. What India Needs to Do Next

i. Strengthen Early Detection

- Expand door-to-door screening for high-risk households.
- Scale up portable X-ray deployment across districts.

ii. Guarantee Uninterrupted Drug Supply

- Strengthen procurement systems to avoid stock-outs.
- Introduce real-time district-level inventory monitoring.

iii. Expand Preventive Treatment Coverage

- Provide preventive therapy to all high-risk contacts.
- Integrate screening with community health worker visits.

iv. Improve Treatment Completion

- Offer counselling, home delivery of medicines, and digital reminders.
- Reduce stigma through community engagement and IEC campaigns.

v. Address Deep-Rooted Social Determinants

- Tackle malnutrition and air pollution through inter-sectoral coordination.
- Strengthen diabetes management and tobacco-control measures.

vi. Improve Private Sector Reporting

- Enforce mandatory notification of TB cases.
- Incentivise private hospitals and clinics to collaborate actively.

vii. District-Specific Action Plans

- High-burden districts should adopt customised micro-plans.
- Use local data to identify vulnerable clusters and target interventions.

Conclusion

India has made clear and measurable progress in expanding diagnostics, modernising treatment, and mobilising community support. However, structural challenges—malnutrition, drug resistance, pollution, stigma, and uneven state capacity—continue to slow momentum. While eliminating tuberculosis by 2025 appears unrealistic, India can still meet the global target of 2030 by sustaining investments, scaling preventive strategies, and integrating technology with strong social support systems. Steady, district-level planning and a whole-of-society approach will be key to transforming the fight against tuberculosis into a long-term public health success.

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

3. Digital Personal Data Protection Rules (DPDP Rules) and the RTI Amendment

a. Introduction

India's new digital privacy framework and the amendment to the Right to Information Act shape two core democratic values: privacy and transparency. The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules operationalise India's first comprehensive data protection law, while the amendment to the RTI Act raises questions about whether citizens' right to know will weaken. Understanding both together is essential to see how India will balance these two principles in the coming years.

b. What the DPDP Rules Are

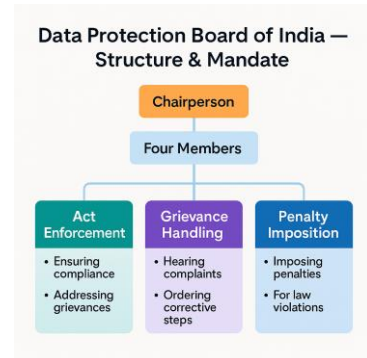
The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 lays down the broad principles for handling personal data in India. The DPDP Rules, 2025 operationalise these principles. They specify how consent must be taken, how data can be stored, how it must be deleted, what happens during a data breach, and how complaints are processed.

In simple terms, the Rules are the instruction manual that ensures companies, platforms, and government bodies follow the law correctly.

c. Formation of the Data Protection Board of India

i. Role and Structure

- The Board consists of a chairperson and four members.
- It functions under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- It enforces the Act, ensures compliance, and addresses grievances.



ii. Key Responsibilities

- Hearing complaints related to misuse or mishandling of data.
- Ordering corrective steps for companies and government departments.
- Imposing penalties for violations.

The Board acts both as a watchdog and a problem-solver, ensuring responsible data practices.

d. Understanding Data Principals and Data Fiduciaries

i. Data Principals

- These are ordinary individuals whose personal information is collected.
- They have rights to give or withdraw consent, seek correction, and request deletion.
- They can demand to know how their data is being used.
- Parents or guardians exercise these rights for children.

ii. Data Fiduciaries

- These are organisations that collect and process personal data—such as banks, hospitals, e-commerce platforms, schools, and telecom companies.
- Large platforms handling vast or sensitive information are called Significant Data Fiduciaries.
- They must appoint Data Protection Officers and conduct periodic audits.

e. How the DPDP Act Protects Children

i. Parental Consent and Limited Collection

- Verifiable parental consent is mandatory before processing a child's data.
- Companies may collect only the minimum data necessary.

ii. Restrictions on Harmful Practices

- Behavioural profiling of children is prohibited.
- Targeted advertising directed at minors is not allowed.
- Data must be deleted when no longer required.

These protections aim to create a safer, less manipulative digital environment for children, similar to global best practices.

f. How the DPDP Act Amended the RTI Act

Before the amendment, Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act allowed personal information to be disclosed if there was a larger public interest, such as exposing irregularities in ration distribution, muster rolls, or beneficiary databases.

The amendment removes this public-interest window.

Now, departments can deny information simply by classifying it as “personal”, even if disclosure would have served accountability.

In effect, privacy has been given stronger weight, and the space for public interest transparency has narrowed.

g. Why the Amendment Is Considered Controversial

i. Greater Scope for Withholding Information

- Beneficiary lists of welfare schemes may now be denied.
- Salary details, transfer files, and inspection notes may be withheld.
- Documents revealing misuse of public funds could be blocked.

ii. Weakening of Social Audits

- Social audit groups rely on access to records to uncover leakages.
- Without the public-interest clause, their work becomes harder.

iii. Imbalance Between Privacy and Transparency

- Privacy is essential, but cannot become an excuse for secrecy.
- Critics argue the amendment disturbs the earlier balance created by the RTI Act.

h. The View of MKSS

i. Concerns Raised

- MKSS believes the amendment weakens accountability.
- It argues that information vital for social audits may now be blocked.
- The organisation says privacy is being used as a shield to hide misuse of power or public funds.

ii. Call for Restoring Balance

- MKSS advocates restoring the earlier formulation where public interest could override personal privacy.
- They emphasise that democracy requires both transparency and privacy to coexist without undermining each other.

Conclusion

The DPDP Rules are a major advancement in safeguarding citizens' personal information in an increasingly digital world. They create stronger rights, impose clear obligations, and aim to reduce misuse of data. However, the amendment to the RTI Act raises important concerns: in prioritising privacy, India may unintentionally weaken transparency, which is central to public accountability.

A modern democracy needs both pillars—robust privacy protections and a strong right to information. The challenge ahead will be to rebuild an equilibrium where one does not override the other, ensuring that India's digital future remains both secure and accountable.

GS Paper III: Economics

4. Why FDI and Trade Diversification Are Needed Where QCOs Failed

a. Introduction

India expanded the use of Quality Control Orders (QCOs) to improve product standards and reduce dependence on low-quality imports. While the intention was to strengthen manufacturing capability,

the results have been uneven. Larger industries adapted, but many MSMEs faced higher compliance costs, disrupted supplies, and difficulty accessing essential raw materials.

This experience has created a broader realisation: long-term competitiveness cannot rely on QCOs alone. India needs deeper foreign investment, diversified trade partners, and stronger integration into global value chains.

b. What QCOs Are and Why They Expanded

Quality Control Orders make it compulsory for domestic and imported goods to meet standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standards. Since 2016, products under QCOs have increased sharply—from fewer than seventy to almost eight hundred. The aim was to curb substandard imports, protect Indian makers, and reduce overdependence on specific countries, especially China.

However, India's laboratory capacity, certification processes, and global alignment of standards did not expand at the same pace. This mismatch created friction and bottlenecks rather than smooth quality upgrading.

Underlying Systemic Weaknesses Exposed by QCO Experience



c. Why QCOs Ended Up Hurting Competitiveness

i. Standards Applied to Raw Materials Instead of Finished Goods

- Most countries apply strict standards mainly to finished products.
- India extended QCOs to raw materials like copper, aluminium, polyester, chemicals, and steel inputs.
- Export-oriented sectors—textiles, footwear, electronics—depend heavily on these imports.
- Restrictions caused shortages and higher input costs, reducing global competitiveness.

ii. MSMEs Could Not Absorb the Compliance Burden

- Smaller firms faced testing delays, higher import prices, and limited domestic alternatives.
- Laboratory capacity was insufficient to handle sudden demand.
- MSMEs saw costs rise by fifteen to thirty per cent, weakening their ability to fulfil export orders.

iii. Supply Chains Became Unstable

- Foreign suppliers found certification unpredictable and withdrew from the Indian market.
- Indian manufacturers struggled to secure basic inputs on time.
- Exporters became less reliable partners in global supply chains.

iv. Rising Market Concentration

- Large firms handled compliance more easily, while smaller players exited.
- This reduced competition and pushed domestic prices higher.
- Key sectors like synthetic fibres and steel inputs saw significant price divergence from global markets.

v. Export Sectors Lost Their Competitive Edge

- Garments, footwear, and electronics rely on competitively priced imported intermediates.
- Even small increases in input prices hurt their export margins.
- This partly explains India's stagnant share in global labour-intensive exports.

d. Why FDI and Trade Diversification Offer a Better Strategy

i. Technology and Quality Improvement Through FDI

- Foreign investment brings modern machinery, global standards, and advanced testing capabilities.
- It naturally upgrades quality across supply chains.
- MSMEs benefit indirectly without bearing heavy compliance burdens.

ii. Trade Openness Encourages Quality Upgrading

- Global research shows firms improve quality when exposed to global competition.
- Market incentives push manufacturers to meet higher standards voluntarily.
- This approach is often more sustainable than blanket regulation.

iii. Reducing Overdependence on a Single Source

- India's reliance on China for key raw materials created major vulnerabilities.
- When QCOs limited Chinese imports, no immediate alternatives existed.
- Diversifying sourcing across East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and other partners reduces risk.

iv. Combining FTAs With a Strong Quality Ecosystem

- New FTAs with the EU, UK, Australia, and EFTA open major export opportunities.
- But exporters need stable access to affordable raw materials.
- QCO-driven disruptions weaken the very gains FTAs are meant to deliver.

e. Structural Issues Highlighted by the QCO Experience

i. Weak Inter-Ministerial Coordination

- Policies of commerce, industry, and standards bodies often moved in silos.

ii. Limited Laboratory and Certification Capacity

- Facilities were inadequate for the rapid expansion of QCO-covered products.

iii. Poor Alignment With Global Standards

- Indian norms often differed from ISO and IEC benchmarks.

iv. Insufficient Support to MSMEs

- Small firms lacked training, financial assistance, and guidance.

f. What India Should Do Next

i. Rationalise QCO Coverage

- Apply QCOs mainly to safety-critical products.
- Avoid placing restrictions on crucial raw materials for export sectors.

ii. Expand and Modernise Standards Infrastructure

- Build more accredited laboratories.
- Introduce faster and digital certification systems.

iii. Support MSMEs in Quality Upgradation

- Provide subsidised testing, training, and cluster-based facilities.
- Offer clear, simplified compliance guidance.

iv. Use FDI to Strengthen Supply Chains

- Attract global firms in electronics, technical textiles, specialty chemicals, and advanced metals.
- Expand local capacity and reduce import dependence.

v. Diversify Trade Partners

- Increase sourcing from ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and the EU.
- Stabilise supply chains and prevent sudden disruptions.

vi. Align Indian Standards With International Norms

- Move closer to ISO and IEC standards.
- Make Indian goods naturally export-compatible.

Conclusion

QCOs were introduced with the right intention: improving the quality of goods in India. But without adequate institutional capacity, modern testing systems, strong supply chains, and MSME support, the policy ended up raising costs, disrupting inputs, and weakening export-oriented sectors. A stronger and more sustainable path lies in attracting foreign investment, diversifying trade partnerships, modernising the standards ecosystem, and applying QCOs selectively rather than extensively.

Such a calibrated approach will help India build a globally competitive manufacturing base and integrate more confidently into modern value chains.

GS Paper III: Environment

5. Delhi's Air Pollution Crisis

a. Introduction

Delhi's air pollution is no longer a short-lived winter phenomenon; it has evolved into a chronic public health emergency. Geography, rapid urbanisation, seasonal practices, behavioural patterns, and fragmented governance interact in complicated ways. Because each solution addresses only one piece while aggravating another, Delhi's crisis is best described as a wicked problem—a challenge with no single cause and no simple cure.

b. Why Delhi's Pollution Is a Wicked Problem

Delhi's air quality is shaped by overlapping natural, economic, cultural, and governance-related factors. These influences reinforce one another, making the problem resistant to isolated or short-term solutions.

i. Geographical Disadvantages

- Delhi lies in a natural depression bordered by the Himalayas and the Aravallis.
- During winter, cold air gets trapped under warm air (temperature inversion), preventing pollutants from dispersing.
- Low wind speeds create a "closed bowl," allowing pollutants to accumulate for days.

ii. Urban Emission Sources



- Over three crore vehicles operate in the NCR, with diesel trucks, old buses, and two-wheelers contributing continuously.
- Construction dust remains high because debris covers and sprinklers are inconsistently implemented.
- Industrial zones and brick kilns often rely on outdated technologies, leaking emissions into residential areas.

iii. Seasonal and Cultural Contributors

- Stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana adds enormous smoke loads in October–November.
- Firecrackers during festivals worsen short-term spikes.
- Open waste burning increases in winter due to slower decomposition and weak waste infrastructure.

iv. Fragmented Governance

- Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan share one airshed, but policies differ sharply across these states.
- Pollution moves freely across borders, but governance remains state-bound.
- A positive step in one region can be cancelled out by inaction in another.

v. Behavioural Challenges

- Citizens prefer private vehicles due to weak last-mile connectivity.
- Household waste burning continues despite regulations.
- Behaviour change remains slow, keeping emissions high even as mitigation efforts increase.

c. Health and Economic Burden

i. Public Health Impact

- Fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) affects the lungs, heart, and even the brain.
- Respiratory diseases such as asthma and COPD are increasingly common.
- Cardiovascular risks—heart attacks, strokes, hypertension—rise sharply.
- Children suffer reduced lung function and developmental issues.
- Life expectancy in severely polluted regions may fall by eight to ten years.

ii. Economic Costs

- Pollution reduces worker productivity due to illness.
- Healthcare expenditure rises for families and the government.
- Tourism declines, and investor confidence weakens.
- Estimates suggest losses exceeding one percent of India's GDP annually.

d. What Global Experiences Teach Us

Lessons from Other Cities

- London introduced low-emission zones and expanded electric mobility.
- Los Angeles applied strict vehicular standards and promoted clean fuels.
- Beijing cut coal use, upgraded industries, and built dense monitoring systems—reducing PM_{2.5} by over one-third in five years.

Across these examples, three principles stand out: long-term planning, strict enforcement, and unified political support.

e. What Delhi Needs: A Science-Led Strategy

i. A Unified Plan for the Entire NCR

- All NCR states share one airshed and therefore need a single, coordinated plan.
- Harmonised laws and joint enforcement can produce far greater impact than fragmented state-level actions.

ii. Transport Reform

- Expand electric buses and metro connectivity.
- Make last-mile networks seamless to reduce private vehicle use.
- Introduce congestion pricing and phase out older diesel vehicles.
- Improve freight management to reduce truck congestion.

iii. Management of Construction Dust

- Strict dust-control measures such as site covers, sprinklers, and barricades must be mandatory.
- Heavy penalties are needed for violations.
- Digital monitoring can help enforce compliance.

iv. Industrial Emission Controls

- Industries must adopt cleaner fuels and upgraded filtration systems.
- Third-party audits and real-time emission monitoring are essential.

v. Addressing Stubble Burning

- Promote alternatives like Happy Seeders, residue recycling, and bio-decomposers.
- Provide financial incentives rather than punitive approaches.
- Align procurement policies to support non-burning practices.

vi. Citizen Engagement

- School-based programmes can teach children early about clean air.
- Community monitoring networks empower citizens to report violations.
- Behavioural campaigns promote responsible mobility and waste practices.

vii. Long-Term Planning Instead of Emergency Measures

- Smog towers, cloud-seeding, and sudden school closures offer short-lived relief.
- Delhi needs a decade-long Clean Air Mission with measurable milestones and predictable funding.

f. Way Forward

i. Build a Unified NCR Clean Air Authority

- Enable coordinated governance across Delhi, Haryana, UP, and Rajasthan.

ii. Strengthen Air Quality Data Systems

- Expand and upgrade real-time monitoring networks.

iii. Promote Clean Mobility and Fuels

- Accelerate electric mobility and cleaner logistics movement.

iv. Enforce Dust-Control Norms Strictly

- Make compliance non-negotiable for all construction sites.

v. Provide Farmers Viable Alternatives to Burning

- Scale residue management technologies and incentive systems.

vi. Increase Industrial Inspections

- Ensure strong, consistent monitoring across NCR.

vii. Deepen Citizen Participation

- Encourage school programmes, public campaigns, and community-led initiatives.

Conclusion

Delhi's air pollution crisis reflects deep structural challenges in planning, technology, governance, and behaviour. Yet global experience shows that sustained, coordinated, and science-driven action can achieve remarkable improvement. Delhi does not lack ideas—what it needs is unified governance, long-term commitment, and shared responsibility among states, industries, and citizens. With consistent effort, the city can move from crisis management to a future where clean air becomes the norm rather than the exception.

GS Paper III: Security

6. Cryptocurrency as the New Hawala System

a. Introduction

For decades, traditional hawala operated as an informal, trust-based network for moving money secretly across borders. It left little documentation, relied on intermediaries, and bypassed formal banking channels. In recent years, cryptocurrency has begun to serve the same purpose—but with far greater speed, reach, and anonymity. Digital currencies allow funds to travel worldwide within minutes, hide the identities of users, and create multiple layers of obfuscation that often surpass the secrecy of classic hawala.

Today, criminal syndicates, cyber-fraud networks, and international laundering groups increasingly treat cryptocurrency as the new global hawala, enabling rapid and discreet movement of illicit funds.

b. Why Cryptocurrency Is Replacing Traditional Hawala

Cryptocurrency offers several advantages to illegal networks:

i. Instant, Borderless Transfers

- Transactions settle within minutes regardless of country.
- Funds bypass banking controls, SWIFT checks, and regulatory scrutiny.

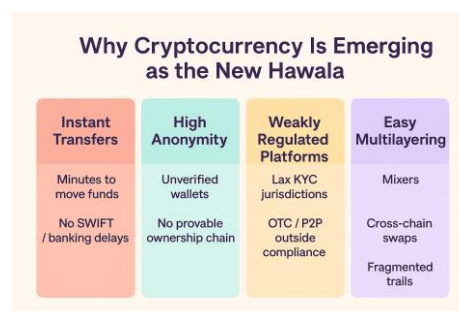
ii. High Degree of Anonymity

- Users can create wallets without revealing identity.
- Transactions can be routed through chains where ownership cannot be easily proven.

iii. Weakly Regulated Platforms

- Many exchanges operate in jurisdictions with lax KYC rules.
- Peer-to-peer and over-the-counter markets function outside standard compliance systems.

iv. Easy Layering of Transactions



- Criminals can move funds across blockchains.
- Mixers and tumblers fragment the trail, making tracing harder.

c. How the Crypto-Hawala System Functions

i. From Cyber Fraud to Digital Currency

- Money usually originates from cybercrimes—investment scams, job frauds, loan app frauds, and online cheating.
- It first enters mule bank accounts or shell-company accounts.
- Criminals convert these proceeds into cryptocurrency such as Tether or Bitcoin through Indian exchanges, peer-to-peer dealers, OTC traders, or crypto ATMs.

ii. Hiding the Digital Trail

- Crypto is routed through pooled accounts, mixing it with thousands of unrelated transactions.
- Transfers move to unhosted wallets that have no link to any exchange.
- Mixing services break the transaction into fragments and reroute them through multiple channels.
- Cross-chain transfers add another layer of complexity.

Each step acts like a hawala intermediary, multiplying anonymity.

iii. Moving Money Abroad

- “Cleaned” crypto is sent to exchanges in regions such as Dubai, China, or Cambodia, where identity checks are weak.
- There, it is converted into local currency or withdrawn as cash.
- Funds may be reinvested in illegal businesses, gambling networks, or underground markets.

d. Why Tracking Crypto-Hawala Is Difficult for Enforcement Agencies

i. Long and Complex Transaction Chains

- A single laundering cycle may pass through exchanges, unhosted wallets, mixers, and foreign platforms.
- Each stage separates the money further from the original crime.

ii. Peer-to-Peer and OTC Trading

- These trades bypass banking channels entirely.
- They rarely generate verifiable records.

iii. Fake Documentation and Shell Firms

- False imports, fake invoices, and dummy companies disguise illicit flows.
- Real-world identities become difficult to link to digital trails.

iv. Weak International Coordination

- Regulations differ across countries.
- Some jurisdictions are slow or unwilling to share data with India.

e. Why India Is Particularly Vulnerable

i. High Volume of Cyber Frauds

- India records one of the largest numbers of online scam victims globally.
- Massive digital payment adoption exposes users to fraud schemes.

ii. Gaps in Crypto Verification Norms

- Fraudsters quickly convert stolen money into crypto before detection.
- Weak verification allows anonymous wallet creation.

iii. Large Outflow of Illicit Funds

- Investigations suggest that over a thousand crore rupees have been routed abroad through crypto channels in recent years.

f. Risks Emerging from the Rise of Crypto-Hawala

i. Support to Criminal and Extremist Activities

- Funds may support drug trafficking, gambling syndicates, organised crime, and extremist entities.

ii. Weakening of Financial Oversight

- Regulators struggle to detect suspicious patterns.
- Non-compliance undermines India's position in global AML standards.

iii. Rapid Technological Evolution

- Criminals update tools faster than enforcement agencies.
- New privacy coins and decentralised platforms increase opacity.

g. What India Must Do

i. Strengthen Regulatory Controls

- Mandatory KYC for all crypto transactions.
- Licensing of exchanges, P2P operators, and OTC traders.
- Strict reporting of suspicious activity to financial intelligence units.

ii. Upgrade Enforcement Capacity

- Use advanced blockchain analytics to track movement of funds.
- Train cybercrime units in crypto forensics and seizure procedures.
- Establish crypto-tracking cells at state and central levels.

iii. Enhance International Cooperation

- Strengthen data-sharing with Dubai, Cambodia, China, and other key jurisdictions.
- Adopt the global "Travel Rule" to identify senders and receivers.
- Participate actively in international AML frameworks.

iv. Regulate High-Risk Channels

- Tighten rules on peer-to-peer marketplaces.
- Monitor unusual spikes in Tether purchases and OTC activity.

v. Improve Citizen Awareness

- Public campaigns on fake trading apps and online scam patterns.
- Encourage reporting and early red-flag identification.

Conclusion

Cryptocurrency has not merely replaced traditional hawala; it has transformed underground money movement into a faster, borderless, and highly anonymous digital network. As cybercrime, laundering, and cross-border cash flows increasingly shift to the blockchain ecosystem, India faces a new generation of financial threats. A combination of stronger regulation, advanced technology, skilled investigators, and deeper global cooperation is now essential for protecting the country's financial integrity. The challenge is complex, but with sustained effort, India can significantly curb the rise of crypto-based hawala systems.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

5. Join the PrepAlpine Discord Community

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If you feel any important theme is missing or under-covered, simply post it in the “Suggestions” channel on our Discord server.

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