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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 01.04.2026

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. India's Maternal Mortality Challenge and the 2030 SDG Target

a. Introduction

Maternal mortality is one of the most sensitive indicators of a country's development. It reflects not only the strength of the healthcare system but also the social position of women and the effectiveness of governance. India's journey since 1990 has been marked by significant success, with a sharp decline in maternal deaths.

However, the present phase presents a more complex challenge. The pace of improvement has slowed, and deep regional inequalities persist. As a result, achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of reducing maternal mortality to below 70 deaths per one lakh live births by 2030 is increasingly demanding.

b. Understanding Maternal Mortality

Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) refers to the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births. A maternal death is defined as the death of a woman due to complications related to pregnancy or childbirth, including conditions aggravated by pregnancy, occurring up to one year after the end of pregnancy.

This indicator goes beyond being a simple health statistic. It reflects multiple interconnected factors:

- Access to healthcare services
- Nutritional status of women
- Awareness and health-seeking behaviour
- Gender relations within society
- Administrative and governance efficiency

In simple terms, MMR acts as a mirror of overall social and developmental conditions, not just medical care.

c. India's Progress: A Story of Substantial Gains

India's achievements over the last three decades are significant and deserve recognition.

i. Key Achievements

Decline in Maternal Mortality

- MMR reduced from 508 (1990) to around 116 (2023)
- One of the fastest declines globally in absolute terms

Reduction in Absolute Deaths

- Maternal deaths declined from over 1 lakh to less than 25,000

Rise in Institutional Deliveries

- Boosted by schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana
- More women now deliver in healthcare facilities

Expansion of Maternal Healthcare

- Improved antenatal and postnatal care

- Early detection of complications

Improved Awareness

- Greater community awareness
- Better utilisation of health services

ii. Broader Impact

- Improved child survival rates
- Greater family stability
- Enhanced economic productivity

India's experience shows that sustained policy interventions combined with grassroots implementation — ASHA workers, ANMs can bring transformative results.

However, despite this success, the next phase of reduction is proving far more difficult, leading to a classic “last-mile problem.”

d. The Emerging Challenge: Why the 2030 Target Is Difficult

India now faces a situation where further improvements require deeper, more complex interventions.

i. Slowing Rate of Decline

- Earlier gains came from expanding basic services
- Now the challenge is improving quality of care and emergency response
- Result: slower rate of improvement

ii. Interstate Inequality

High-performing States

- Kerala and Tamil Nadu are near or have achieved the target

Low-performing States

- Assam and Uttar Pradesh still have high MMR

Reflects disparities in:

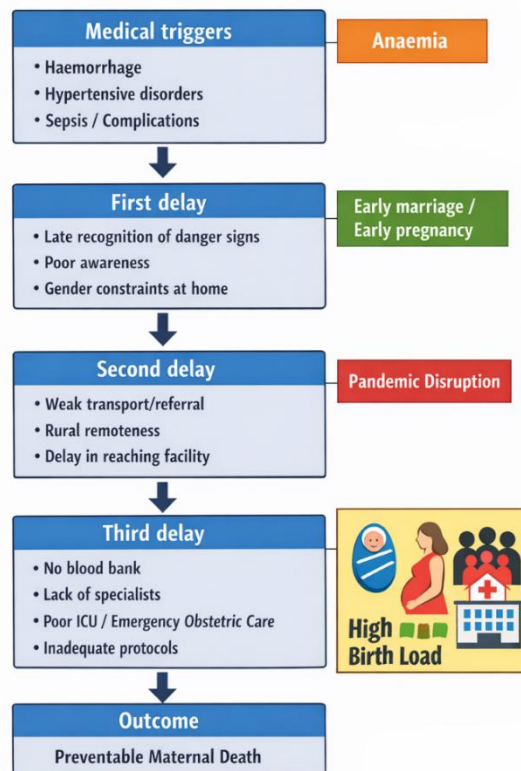
- Healthcare infrastructure
- Skilled manpower
- Female literacy and nutrition

iii. Persistence of Preventable Causes

- Haemorrhage — excessive bleeding
- Hypertensive disorders — high blood pressure in pregnancy

These are medically manageable but persist due to:

Why Preventable Maternal Deaths Persist



- Delayed diagnosis
- Weak referral systems
- Lack of blood availability
- Poor emergency care

iv. Impact of the Pandemic

- Disruption of routine healthcare services
- Reduced access to antenatal and delivery care
- Highlighted fragility of health systems

v. Large Population and Birth Load

- High number of annual births
- Even with better ratios, absolute deaths remain high
- Heavy burden on healthcare infrastructure

These challenges indicate that the issue is not just medical but deeply structural.

e. Structural Challenges Underlying Maternal Mortality

Health System Limitations

- Inadequate primary healthcare in rural/remote areas
- Shortage of skilled birth attendants and specialists
- Weak referral systems causing delays
- Limited availability of blood banks and ICU facilities

Social Determinants

- Early marriage and early pregnancy increase risks
- High prevalence of anaemia among women
- Lack of awareness about pregnancy complications
- Gender inequality limiting access to healthcare

Data and Measurement Concerns

- Differences between international and national estimates
- Challenges in accurate measurement
- Misleading comparisons due to population size differences

f. Comparative Perspective

India's progress is comparable to countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Rwanda, which have also achieved significant reductions.

Smaller countries:

- Can achieve faster improvements
- Easier to implement targeted interventions

India's uniqueness:

- Large population
- Regional diversity
- Administrative complexity

Thus, global lessons cannot be directly copied; they must be adapted to Indian realities. This understanding naturally leads to the need for a more refined and targeted strategy going forward.

g. Way Forward: Towards a Targeted and Equitable Strategy

The next phase requires a shift from expansion to quality, equity, and precision-based interventions.

i. Strengthening Primary Healthcare

- Early registration of pregnancies
- Regular antenatal check-ups
- Identification of high-risk cases

ii. Improving Quality of Care

- Focus on safe deliveries, not just institutional deliveries
- Trained personnel and standard protocols
- Availability of emergency obstetric care

iii. Strengthening Emergency Response Systems

- Efficient referral transport
- Well-equipped district hospitals
- Functional blood banks

iv. Targeted Intervention in High-Burden States

- District-level planning
- Resource prioritisation
- Continuous monitoring

v. Addressing Social Determinants

- Improving female education
- Delaying age at marriage
- Enhancing nutrition
- Promoting awareness

vi. Building Resilient Health Systems

- Preparedness for pandemics and crises
- Continuity of essential services

vii. Data Integration and Evidence-Based Policy

- Convergence of multiple data systems
- Real-time monitoring
- Better targeting and accountability

These measures collectively aim to transform maternal health from a service-delivery issue into a comprehensive development priority.

Conclusion

India stands at a critical juncture in its maternal health journey. The country has successfully reduced maternal mortality from very high to moderate levels, but the final stretch towards the SDG target demands a more refined approach.

The challenge is no longer just expansion of services but ensuring equity, quality, and responsiveness. Achieving further reduction will require not only medical interventions but also broader social transformation and administrative accountability.

Ultimately, the goal is not merely to meet a numerical target, but to ensure that every woman experiences pregnancy and childbirth with dignity, safety, and care.

GS Paper II: International Relations

2. Global Tensions, Energy Shocks and India's Economy

a. Introduction: The Interconnected Economic Reality

In today's globalised world, economies are closely linked. Even a country like India, with a large domestic market, cannot remain insulated from global developments. Among external factors, geopolitical tensions—especially in oil-rich regions like West Asia—have a particularly strong impact on India.

This is because India depends heavily on imported crude oil. Any disruption in global supply or rise in oil prices quickly affects inflation, government finances, and economic growth within the country.



b. The Chain of Impact: From Conflict to Economic Stress

Global tensions affect India's economy through a clear cause-and-effect chain:

Conflict in oil-producing regions

- Rise in global crude oil prices
- Increase in India's import bill
- Rise in inflation and fiscal pressure
- Slowdown in economic growth

This chain highlights a key structural reality: India's dependence on external energy sources makes it vulnerable to global shocks.

c. Structural Vulnerability: Why India Is Highly Exposed

i. High Dependence on Imported Oil

- India imports nearly 89% of its crude oil needs
- Even small price increases lead to large increases in import expenditure
- This creates immediate pressure on the economy

ii. Oil as a Universal Input

- Transport — fuel
- Agriculture — fertilisers, diesel pumps
- Industry — energy and production inputs
- Logistics — movement of goods

Therefore, a rise in oil prices leads to economy-wide inflation, not just sector-specific effects. This widespread role of oil explains how price shocks get transmitted across the entire economy.

d. Transmission Mechanism: Step-by-Step Economic Impact

i. Inflationary Pressures

- Increase in fuel prices raises transportation costs
- Cost of goods and services rises across sectors
- Cooking fuel, electricity, and agricultural inputs become expensive

This is called imported inflation i.e., inflation coming from global price rise

ii. Widening of the Current Account Deficit (CAD)

- Higher oil prices increase import expenditure
- More foreign currency (dollars) is required
- Imports exceed exports

Leads to widening CAD. Causes pressure on rupee, leading to depreciation

iii. Fiscal Stress on Government

Government may:

- Reduce fuel taxes
- Increase subsidies — LPG, fertilisers

Result:

- Lower revenue
- Higher expenditure
- Leads to higher fiscal deficit

iv. Impact on Household Consumption

- Prices rise but incomes often remain stagnant
- More income spent on essentials — food, fuel
- Less spending on discretionary items

Affects sectors like retail, tourism, consumer goods

v. Slowdown in Economic Growth

- Reduced demand, leading to lower production
- Businesses delay investment
- Overall GDP growth slows

At the core of this transmission lies household behaviour, making consumption a critical factor in economic stability.

e. Central Role of Households in Economic Stability

- Private consumption contributes ~60% of India's GDP
- It is the main driver of economic growth

Emerging Concerns

- Rising household debt
- Declining or unstable savings
- Consumption increasingly driven by borrowing

Makes households more vulnerable to inflation shocks. Thus, when energy prices rise, households reduce spending sharply, amplifying economic slowdown. This also directly affects government finances, as India's fiscal structure is closely tied to consumption.

f. Fiscal Structure and Its Limitations

i. Dependence on Transaction-Based Revenue

- GST forms a major part of government revenue
- GST depends on economic activity

When consumption falls, tax collections fall

ii. Shift Toward Capital Expenditure

- **Government focus:** Infrastructure — roads, railways, logistics
- **Benefits:** Supports long-term growth
- **Limitation:** Less flexibility for short-term welfare spending during crises

This creates a situation where economic stress is unevenly distributed across sectors, leading to structural imbalances.

g. The Emergence of a Two-Speed Economy

India's economy is increasingly showing uneven growth patterns.

Fast-Growing Sectors

- Infrastructure
- Capital-intensive industries
- High-technology sectors

Lagging Sectors

- MSMEs (small businesses)
- Informal services
- Labour-intensive industries

Consequence

- Growth without adequate job creation
- Rising inequality
- Weak income growth

This is often termed jobless or uneven growth. Such structural imbalance makes the economy more vulnerable to external shocks like energy price increases.

h. Structural Nature of the Challenge

India's economic model currently has three key features:

- Dependence on government-led capital expenditure
- Heavy reliance on consumption-based taxes (GST)
- Weak household income growth

Implication

- Works well in stable global conditions
- Becomes fragile during external shocks

i. The Concept of Fiscal Squeeze

Fiscal squeeze occurs when:

- Government revenue declines, due to low economic activity
- Government expenditure rises, due to subsidies and welfare

Result

- Pressure on budget
- Limited policy options
- Difficulty in managing economic crises

To overcome such vulnerabilities, India must focus on building long-term economic resilience.

j. Way Forward: Building Economic Resilience

i. Strengthening Income-Led Growth

- Focus on employment generation
- Increase wages and productivity
- Stronger incomes, results in stable consumption

ii. Reducing Dependence on Oil Imports

- Expand renewable energy — solar, wind
- Promote electric vehicles
- Develop biofuels
- Diversify import sources

iii. Enhancing Fiscal Stability

- Broaden tax base especially direct taxes
- Reduce over-dependence on GST
- Maintain fiscal buffers

iv. Protecting Households

- Targeted subsidies
- Social safety nets
- Inflation control measures

v. Revitalising Labour-Intensive Sectors

- Support MSMEs
- Improve credit access
- Focus on employment-rich growth

These steps aim to create an economy that is less vulnerable to external shocks and more balanced internally.

Conclusion

India's economic performance is deeply influenced by global developments. Energy shocks arising from geopolitical tensions expose underlying structural vulnerabilities, particularly dependence on oil imports, weak household income growth, and fiscal constraints.

The real challenge is not just achieving high growth, but ensuring that growth is resilient, inclusive, and shock-resistant. A balanced strategy—focused on strengthening household incomes, diversifying energy sources, and stabilising public finances—will be essential for navigating an increasingly uncertain global environment.

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.

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