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GS Paper II: Current Affairs

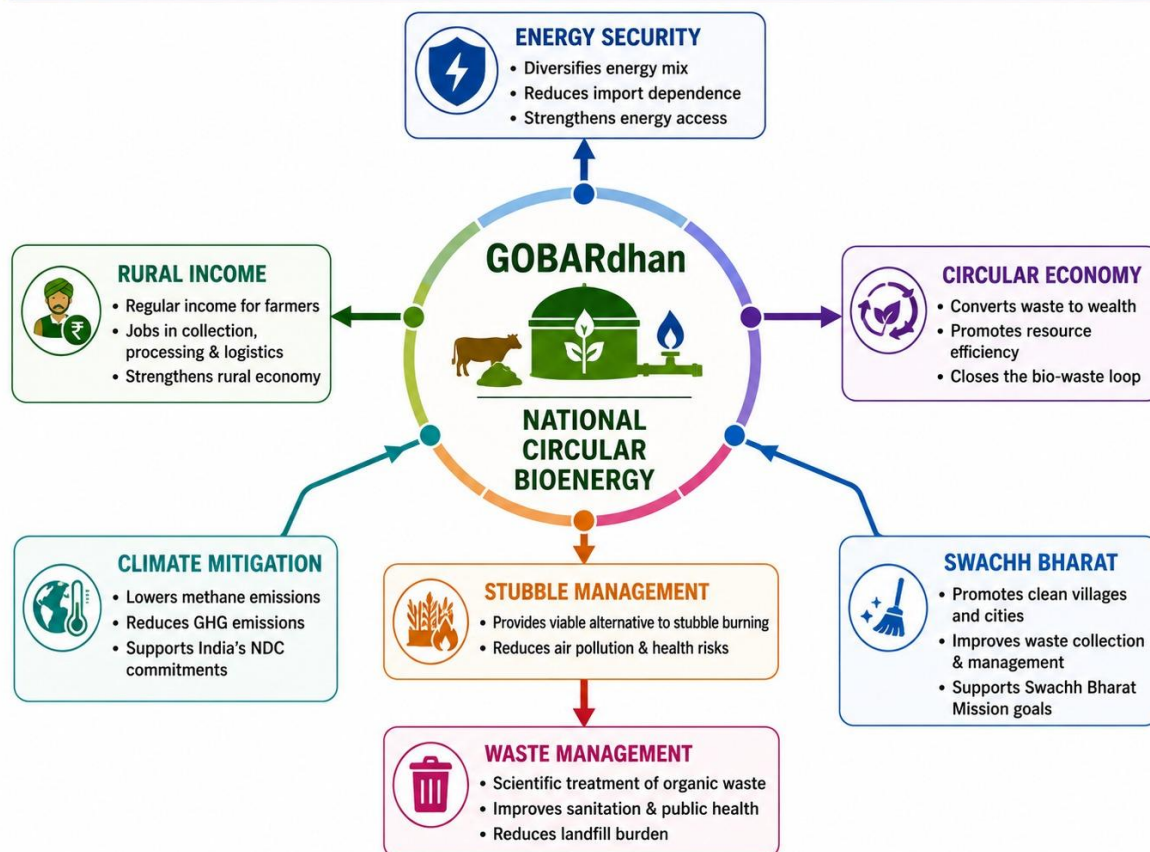
1. GOBARdhan: National Circular Bioenergy Scheme

a. Introduction

The Union Cabinet has approved the ₹23,731-crore GOBARdhan (National Circular Bioenergy Scheme) for 2026-27 to 2035-36. It seeks to increase India's Compressed Biogas (CBG) production nearly ten-fold, reduce natural-gas imports and build an integrated waste-to-energy ecosystem.

India imports around half of its natural-gas requirement, exposing it to geopolitical and price shocks. CBG is purified and compressed biogas with properties similar to CNG and can substitute/blend with natural gas. Feedstocks include crop residue, cattle dung, press mud and municipal organic waste. The scheme builds upon SATAT, National Bioenergy Programme and existing support for biomass aggregation, manure and CBG infrastructure.

GOBARdhan: One Scheme, Multiple National Priorities



b. Key Features

Intervention	Purpose
Assured offtake	City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities to procure CBG
CBG blending obligation	3% (2026-27) → 4% (2027-28) → 5% from 2028-29
Administered price	₹2,110/MMBTU with long-term pricing framework
Capital assistance	Up to ₹2 crore per tonne/day of installed capacity

Intervention	Purpose
Pipeline support	Connect plants with CGD/trunk pipeline networks
Credit guarantee	Easier institutional finance, especially for MSMEs
Value-chain support	Feedstock aggregation and organic-manure processing

The scheme attempts to address the entire chain:

Biomass/Waste → Aggregation → CBG Production → Pipeline/Distribution → Assured Market

c. Analysis/ Observations

Strengthening energy security

CBG substitutes domestically produced renewable gas for imported natural gas. Scaling production can:

- reduce exposure to international gas-price volatility;
- improve resilience against geopolitical supply disruptions;
- reduce the import bill; and
- diversify India's energy basket.

Unlike many alternative fuels, CBG can also leverage India's existing CNG and PNG infrastructure, lowering transition costs.

Circular economy: turning waste into economic value

GOBARdhan exemplifies the circular-economy model:

Agricultural/animal/municipal waste → Clean fuel + Organic manure + Rural income

This can simultaneously address multiple externalities:

- crop-residue burning;
- unmanaged cattle dung;
- municipal organic waste;
- methane emissions from decomposition; and
- excessive dependence on chemical fertilisers.

Thus, waste changes from an environmental liability into an economic resource.

Creating rural green value chains

A large CBG industry can generate decentralised demand for agricultural residues and animal waste, creating supplementary income for farmers.

Feedstock collection, transportation, processing and manure marketing can also generate non-farm rural employment and opportunities for cooperatives, MSMEs and rural entrepreneurs.

Correcting the 'missing market' problem

Earlier CBG projects faced a combination of:

Uncertain feedstock + High capital cost + Weak financing + Uncertain buyers + Poor connectivity

GOBARdhan attempts to address these simultaneously through capital subsidy + credit guarantee + assured offtake + administered pricing + pipeline infrastructure.

The important policy innovation is therefore not merely subsidising production, but improving the bankability of the entire CBG ecosystem.

d. Key Challenges

- **Feedstock security:** Agricultural residues are seasonal, geographically dispersed and have competing uses, making reliable long-term supply difficult.
- **Logistics costs:** Low-density biomass can be expensive to collect, store and transport, affecting project economics.
- **Fiscal and market dependence:** Long-term administered prices and capital support may create subsidy dependence unless the industry progressively becomes commercially viable.
- **Local environmental management:** Poorly operated plants can generate odour, wastewater and digestate-management problems.
- **Scale versus decentralisation:** Large plants offer economies of scale, while smaller decentralised plants may reduce feedstock transportation costs. Appropriate models will vary geographically.

e. Wider Significance

GOBARDhan creates potential convergence between several national priorities:

Energy security + Swachh Bharat + Circular economy + Stubble management + Rural incomes + Climate mitigation

Its success therefore depends on coordination among petroleum agencies, municipalities, agriculture departments, CGD companies, farmers and private developers.

f. Way Forward

- Develop local feedstock maps and long-term aggregation contracts with farmers, FPOs and municipalities.
- Promote decentralised/cluster-based plants according to local biomass availability.
- Establish quality standards and markets for bio-manure, improving the economics beyond fuel sales.
- Integrate CBG plants efficiently with existing CGD and gas-pipeline infrastructure.
- Gradually shift from subsidy-driven expansion towards competitive and commercially sustainable production.
- Develop robust measurement of lifecycle emissions to ensure genuine climate benefits.

Conclusion:

GOBARDhan represents more than a biofuel programme: it seeks to create a circular bioeconomy connecting waste management, rural development and energy security. Its success will depend on whether policy support can transform a fragmented waste-to-energy sector into a commercially viable value chain while delivering measurable environmental and livelihood gains.

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.

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4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

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