



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

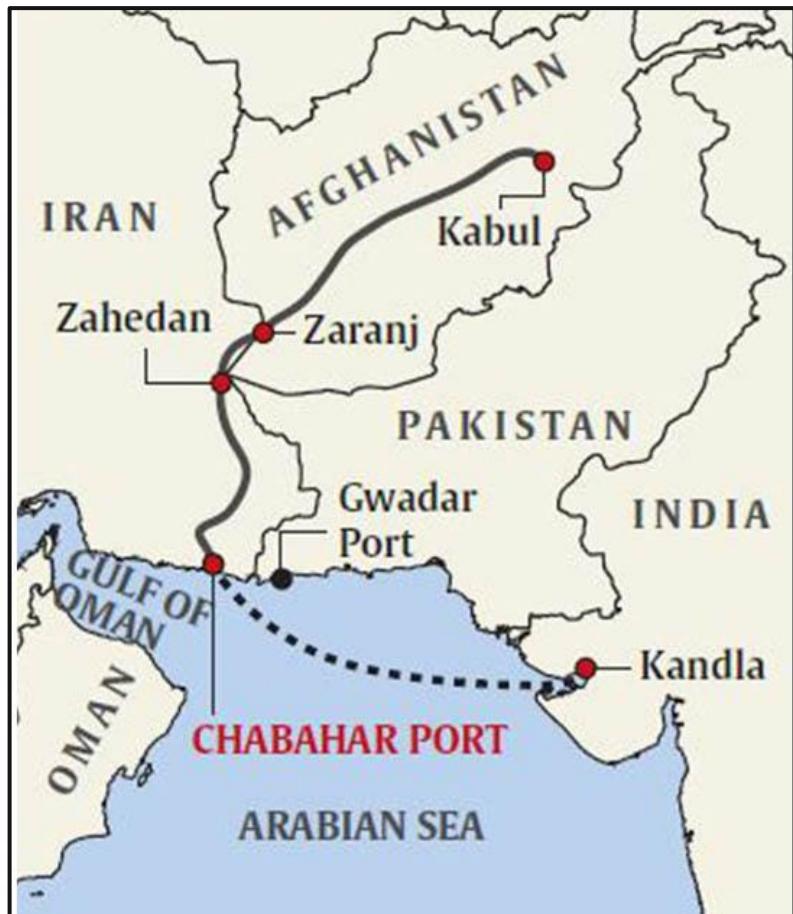
17th January 2026



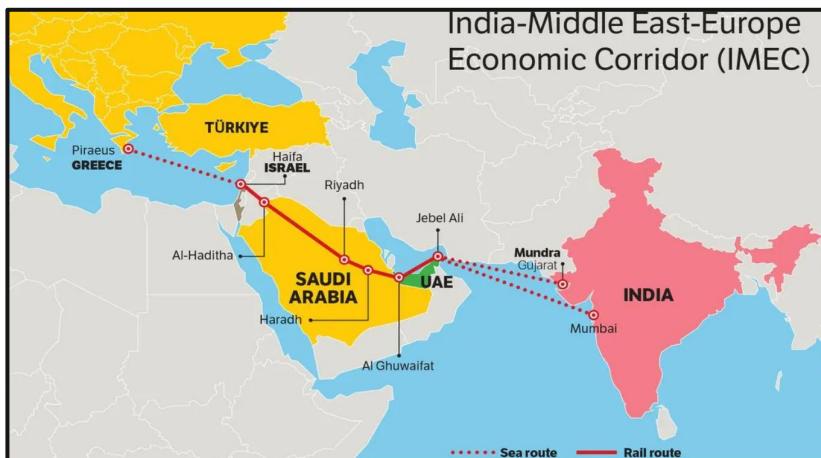
CONTEXT: Protests in Iran and US threats

India Iran: Significance:

- Historical
 - Silk Route
 - Cultural
 - Religious
- Geo Strategic
- Political
- Economic - \$2bn trade in FY24
- Energy Security
- Cultural
- **Chabahar: A Geopolitical Lever**
 - Lower Dependence on Suez canal
 - Bypassing Pakistan
 - Counter to China
 - Regional Trade
 - Energy Security
 - Regional Connectivity
 - i. INSTC
 - ii. Chabahar Zahedan Rail
 - Alternative to Bandar Abbas
- **Chabahar: Concerns**
 - US Sanction waiver
 - China Iran 25 year \$400bn agreement, 2021
 - \$120 million for port development, \$250 million credit facility
 - Regional Dynamics
 - Competition: IMEC
 - SLOC disruptions
- **Other Challenges**
 - Security concerns
 - Israel Factor



CONTEXT: Protests in Iran and US threats



JCPOA:

Iran's Nuclear Program: Background

- Post-1979 revolution
- Accusations: clandestine nuclear weapons despite NPT signatory
- 2011 IAEA report

Uranium Enrichment Process

- Natural uranium: 0.7% U-235 (fission-capable isotope)
- Enrichment levels:
 - LEU: < 20% (civilian reactors)
 - HEU: >20% (weapons-grade: $\geq 90\%$)
- Centrifuges Cascades: Thousands used to progressively enrich Ur hexafluoride (UF6)

JCPOA Goals

- Extend nuclear "breakout time" >1 year
- Prevent from developing nuclear weapons
- Avoid regional conflict - Israel and Saudi
- No preemptive strikes and arms race

Iran's Commitments

- Halt weapons-grade Ur, Pl
- Limit centrifuge numbers, enrichment levels
- Convert key facilities to civilian use
- Allow IAEA inspections

Other Signatories' Commitments

- Lift nuclear-related sanctions (US, EU, UN)
- Allow export of oil, access frozen assets
- Gradual lifting of arms and missile embargoes (after 5 years, with conditions)

Enforcement Mechanisms

- IAEA monitoring: Quarterly reports
- Joint Commission: Manages disputes and implementation
- UN Snapback Mechanism: Sanctions reinstate

US Iran:

- Trump's withdrawal from JCPOA in 2018
 - U.S. reimposed sanctions
→ Iran breached JCPOA limits
- Indirect talks in Vienna under Biden
- Iran's recent willingness**
 - Military pressure (losses in Syria, weakened "axis of resistance")
 - Economic crisis
 - U.S. threats of military action
 - Israeli Strikes



CONTEXT: Protests in Iran and US threats

Geopolitical Risks

- Historical precedent: weaponization research (1999–2003)
- Israel strikes facilities if needed
- U.S. stance
 - "If diplomacy fails, military action is on the table"
- IAEA monitoring gaps: Iran restricts access

Iran's Situation

- Communications blackout
- Reformists and conservatives aligned on crackdown
- Pro-regime demonstrations and highlighting of infrastructure attacks
- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps cohesion

Link Between US Action & Protests

- Catalyzing regime change via protests
- Assumptions
 - Protests against the system itself
 - aid by external military action
- Foreign conspiracy, Mossad penetration

US's Constraints: All options on table?

- Insufficient military preparedness in West Asia
- No coherent set of policy objectives
- No guarantee of a stable pro-US future govt
- No precedent
- Gulf Arab states support
- May trigger nationalism-fueled solidarity

Iran's Options

- Engagement inevitable
- Backchannel communications
- Likely de-escalatory, symbolic retaliation

Why Riyadh Opposes US Strike

- External military punishment for internal repression?
- Chaos due to external interventions
- Geopolitics
 - Israel's behaviour
 - Shift in Power if Iran falls

Way Forward for India Iran Ties

- Energy Security
- Trade PTAs
- Invest in Infrastructure
- Connectivity – INSTC
- Utilise Multilateral Fora

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION:

"Heightened US–Iran tension is affecting India's strategic choices in West Asia. Discuss the strategic significance of Iran for India, the concerns due to the current geopolitical scenario, and the realistic policy choices before India to safeguard its long-term interests."



A Decade of Startup India

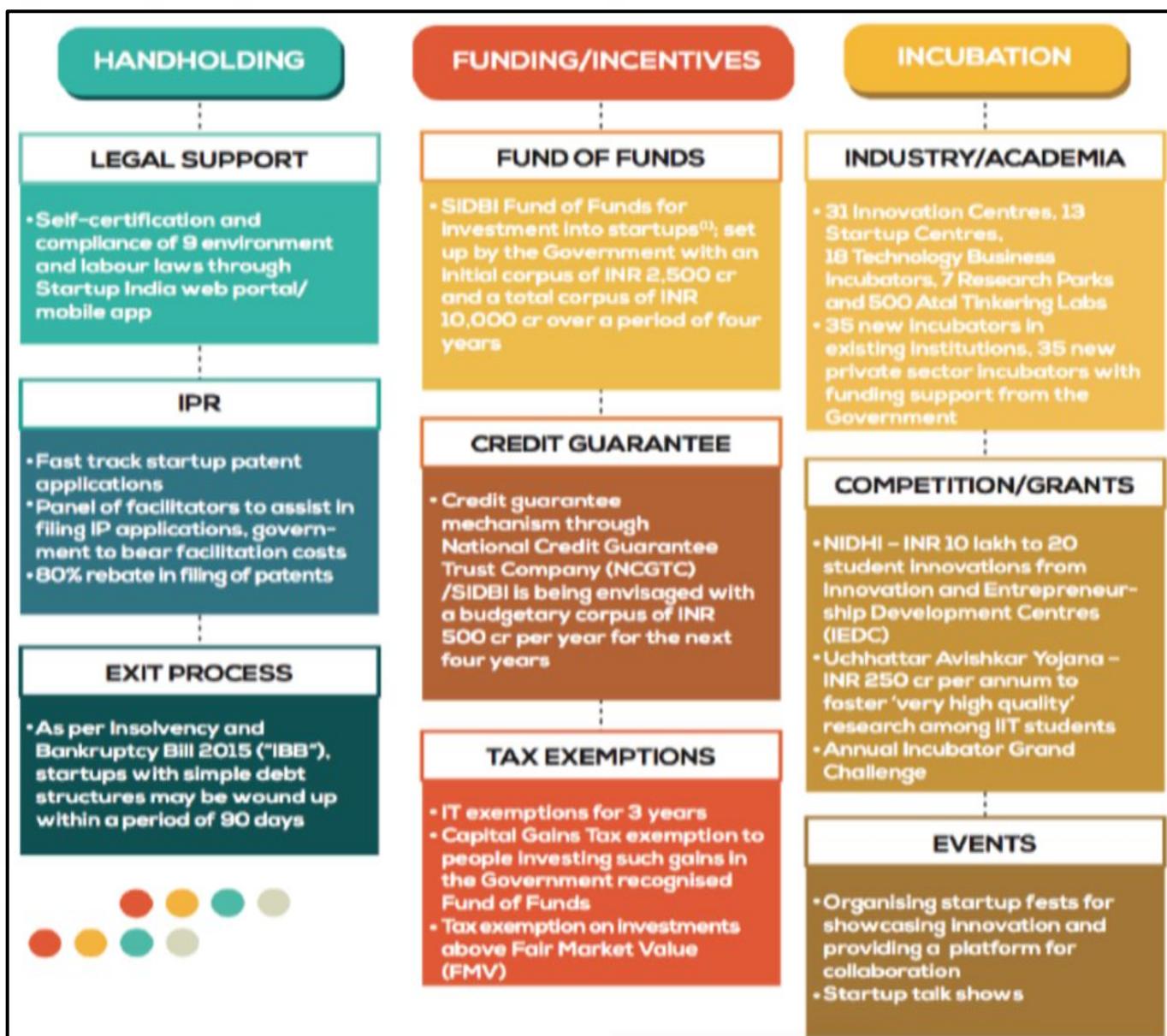


CONTEXT: Reviewing a decade of Startup India performance

Definition Criteria:

- <10 years
- Private Ltd Co, Registered Partnership Firm, or LLP.
- Annual turnover <INR 100 cr
- Not formed by splitting up or reconstructing
- Innovation/scalability

Startup India action plan layout at different stages of operation



A Decade of Startup India

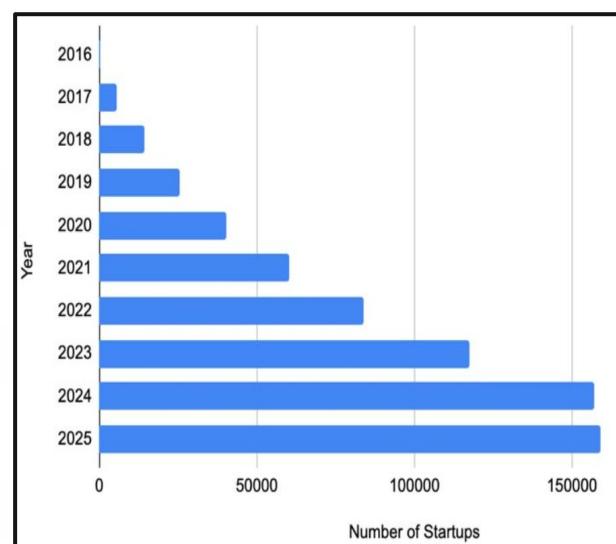
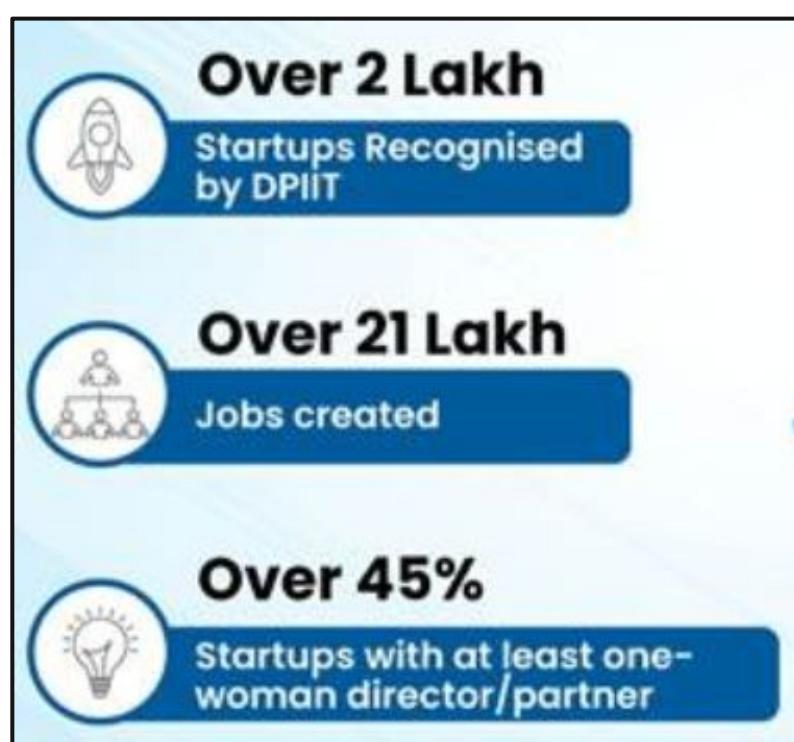


CONTEXT: Reviewing a decade of Startup India performance



Achievements

- Ecosystem Growth**
 - 3rd largest startup ecosystem globally
 - 3rd in unicorns
- Investment**
 - VC investment US\$13.7 billion in 2024
 - 2nd-largest VC destination in Asia-Pacific
- Job Creation & Economic Impact**
 - >2.1 million direct jobs
 - Leading sectors: IT, Healthcare
- Innovation**
 - >2k patents and 28k TMs
 - 10,000+ Atal Tinkering Labs
 - UPI ~80% of India's retail payments



CONTEXT: Reviewing a decade of Startup India performance

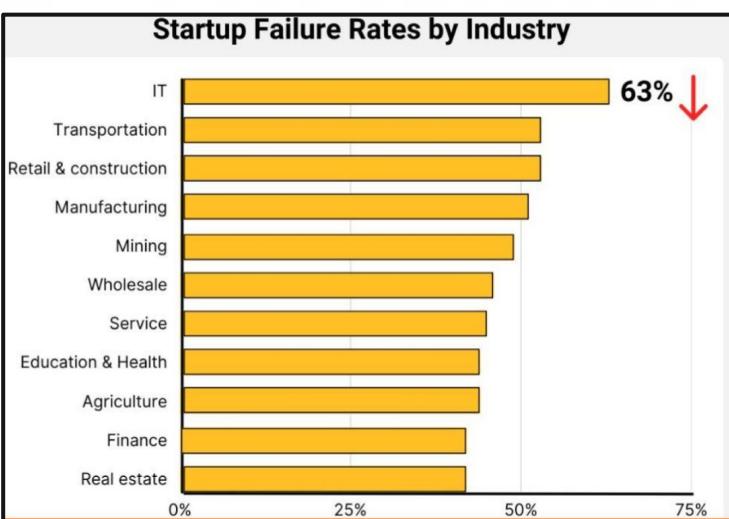
Challenges

- Startup Failures**
 - >5,000 (3.3%) DPIIT-recognised
- Policy Gaps & Early Implementation Issues**
 - Delayed disbursements of FoF
 - Startup India Hub low penetration in Tier 2/3 cities
 - 'Angel tax' (Section 56(2)(viib))
- Regulatory Hurdles**
 - EoDB
 - Application process & revenue criteria
 - Fragmented regulations across states
- Access to Funding**
 - Early-stage and in Tier 2/3 cities
 - Domestic lending rates
 - Risk-averse VCs
- Skill Gaps**
 - AI, ML, blockchain, data analytics
 - Unemployable graduates
 - Skill development schemes focus
- Infrastructure Weaknesses**
 - 38th in Logistics Performance Index 2023

Suggestions:

- Innovation Tech Bridges**
 - Connecting with leading hubs
 - Knowledge exchange, global market access, collaborative R&D
 - G2B collab, international incubators: Singapore model
- Skill Development with Industry-Driven Training**
 - AI, blockchain, data science
 - Germany model
- Regional Ecosystems in Tier 2 & Tier 3 Cities**
 - Digital infra, targeted financial incentives.
 - Co-working spaces, regional technology parks
 - South Korea model
- Periodic Review and Evaluation Framework**
 - Balance consumer-focused ventures and Deep Tech innovations
 - Analyze investment origins
- Address Policy Implementation Gaps**
 - Feedback loop
 - Simplify fund access mechanisms
 - Address fragmentation and delays
- Core Physical and Digital Infrastructure**
 - Logistical bottlenecks

Startup Failure Rates by Industry



A Decade of Startup India



CONTEXT: Reviewing a decade of Startup India performance

Scheme	Ministry	Objective
Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) (2016)	NITI Aayog	Foster nationwide innovation culture
GENESIS (Gen-Next Support for Innovative Startups) (2022)	Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)	Deep-tech startups in Tier II/III cities
Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE) 2.0 (2019)	Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)	ICT startup incubation & scale-up
MeitY Startup Hub (MSH) (2016)	Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)	Integrate tech startup ecosystem
NIDHI (National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations) (2016)	Department of Science & Technology (DST)	Support S&T startups from idea to market
Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) (2015)	Ministry of Rural Development (DAY- NRLM)	Promote rural entrepreneurship
ASPIRE (Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industries and Entrepreneurship) (2015)	Ministry of MSME	Strengthen rural enterprise incubators
Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) (2008)	Ministry of MSME (KVIC)	Subsidised credit for self-employment

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Examine the achievements of the Start-up India programme since its launch. Discuss the structural and operational challenges that continue to limit its impact, and suggest measures to strengthen India's start-up ecosystem for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.



SYLLABUS: G.S. 3 : Indian Economy: Agriculture

Newspaper: The Hindu **Page No :** 12

Seed Bill:

- Replace the outdated Seeds Act, 1966 and the Seeds (Control) Order, 1983
- Ensuring quality and affordability of seeds
 - Regulates sale, import, export, and distribution
 - Indian Minimum Seed Certification Standards
- Mandatory registration of seed varieties
 - Traceability and accountability
- Registration of dealers and distributors
- Liberalised seed imports
 - Unregistered varieties for research and trials
 - Promote innovation and access
- Decriminalisation of minor offences
- Penal provisions for major offences
 - sale of spurious seeds, non-registered varieties, operating without registration
- Institutional mechanisms
 - Central and State Seeds Committees
- Farmers' rights
 - protection from poor-quality
 - right to save, use, exchange and sell own varieties (not branded)

Challenges

- Farmer distrust and fear of corporate control
- Balancing regulation with innovation
 - Mandatory registration
- Implementation capacity
 - quality standards across States
 - Adequate testing labs, certification agencies

- Trade-off between decriminalisation and accountability
- Legal and federal challenges

Way Forward

- Transparent and inclusive consultations
- Testing and certification infrastructure
- Protecting farmers' traditional rights
 - No over-regulation of small traditional seed producers
- Public sector seed research
 - Investment in ICAR
- Awareness and capacity building

Indicating that the **draft Seeds Bill is likely to be tabled in Parliament during the coming Budget Session**, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said it was a **historic piece of legislation aimed at ensuring farmers' protection, seed quality, and transparency** across the system.

“We have tried to create a system through which it can be known where the seed was produced, which dealer supplied it and who sold it,” he told presspersons here. He said every seed packet would carry a QR code which, when scanned, would allow farmers to access complete information about its origin. “This will not only prevent the sale of fake or sub-standard seeds, but will



'Romeo-Juliet' Exception for POCSO



SYLLABUS: G.S. 2: Governance

Newspaper: Indian Express **Page No :** 17

What makes POCSO comprehensive?

- Confidentiality of Identity
- Burden of Proof – Section 29
- Gender Neutral
- No time limit for reporting
- Safeguards to victims – justice system 'child-friendly'
 - not see the accused at the time of testifying, trial in camera
 - evidence of a child recorded within 30 days of taking cognisance
 - complete trial, within 1 year from the date of cognisance
 - Special Courts
- Child Protection as a collective responsibility

22nd LCI Report No. 283

- **Govt should not reduce the age of consent**
 - direct and negative bearing on the fight against child marriage and child trafficking
- **Tacit approval of children in the 16-18 age bracket**

- advised courts to tread with caution even in cases related to adolescent love, where criminal intention may be missing
 - safeguarding the best interests of the child

WHAT IS POCSO?

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL OFFENCES

A law that came into enforcement in 2012
POCSO protects children - Boys & Girls below 18 years of age



From sexual offences that covers a range of sexual activities such as



POCSO CALLS FOR

Severe punishment if protectors are perpetrators of sexual offences



Mandatory reporting by all citizens of any case of sexual abuse to the nearest police station



Child friendly procedures to reduce trauma of the victims



aarambh

Supporting Communities to Safeguard Children



SYLLABUS: G.S. 2: Governance

Newspaper: Indian Express **Page No :** 17

Decoding the News

Supreme Court urged the Union Law Secretary to consider initiating steps to curb the misuse of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Specifically, the bench comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and N Kotiswar Singh recommended the introduction of a "Romeo-Juliet clause" to exempt genuine adolescent relationships from the law designed to punish child sexual abuse.

The clause, named after the young characters from the Shakespeare play of the same name, essentially protects consensual sexual activity among teens who are close to each other in age, exempting them from prosecution for statutory rape. It exists in different forms in countries such as the US.

matter, Senior Advocate Indira Jaising, assisting the court as amicus curiae, has advocated for reading down the age of consent or introducing exceptions.

In her written submissions filed last year, Jaising argued that blanket criminalisation violated the fundamental rights of adolescents under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Constitution. She contended that adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 possess the "evolving capacity" to make decisions regarding their sexual autonomy. Citing the "mature minor" doctrine from common law, she argued that treating all those under 18 as incapable of consent ignored scientific reality and the biological onset of puberty.

Jaising proposed a "close-in-age" exception. This mechanism would ensure that if both parties are adolescents — for example, a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old — and the act is consensual, it would not be treated as an offence. This would prevent the incarceration of young people for consensual sex.

Govt's stand for status quo

The Union government has opposed any reduction in the age of consent or the introduction of legislative exceptions. In its submissions before the court in the matter, the government argued that the age of 18 is a "deliberate, well-considered" legislative choice aimed at creating a non-negotiable "protective shield" for children.

The government contended that minors lack the legal and developmental capacity to give meaningful consent. A strict liability framework — where consent is irrelevant — was necessary, it argued, because children are vulnerable to manipulation and coercion by adults in positions of trust. The government expressed fear that introducing exceptions or lowering the age of consent could open loopholes for child abuse and trafficking under the guise of consensual relationships.

Since the Act was enacted to remedy the specific mischief of child abuse, diluting

solve. It submitted that judicial discretion should remain a case-by-case exercise rather than a statutory dilution.

What the data says

The judicial anxiety regarding the POCSO Act is backed by empirical data. A study by the Enfold Proactive Health Trust and UNICEF found that nearly 25% of POCSO cases in the states of Maharashtra, Assam and West Bengal between 2016 and 2020 were "romantic" in nature — in which the victim and the accused were in a consensual relationship.

The data reveals a pattern of families often misusing the Act to regulate the autonomy of their daughters. In such cases, parents file kidnapping and rape charges against a young boy their daughter may have eloped with — often due to it being an inter-caste or inter-religious relationship. The conviction rate in such cases is low because the "victims" often testify in favour of the accused.



SYLLABUS: G.S. 2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Newspaper: Indian Express **Page No:** 09

India offers Win-Win Opportunities for Reshoring Supply Chains for Japanese Companies

- **Large & Fast-Growing Domestic Market**
 - Projected to become 3rd largest economy by 2028 (surpassing Germany)
 - Largest global population with a sizable middle class
 - Market for vehicles, mobile phones, electronics, jet airliners, consumer goods
- **Demographic Dividend**
 - Median age ~ 28 years
 - Working-age population share to peak at 68.9% around 2030
 - Both unskilled/semi-skilled labour and high-skilled workers in AI, ML, data science for Industry 4.0.
- **Geopolitical Advantage**
 - Ideal for "China Plus One" and friend-shoring
 - CEPAs/FTAs with Japan, Korea, Australia, ASEAN, UAE, EFTA, UK
 - Potential as an alternative hub
- **Technological Prowess & ICT Capability**
 - 39th (2024) from 81st on the Global Innovation Index over a decade
- **Vibrant Start-up Ecosystem**
 - 3rd-largest start-up ecosystem
- **Improving Logistics Infrastructure & Industrial Corridors**
 - National Industrial Corridor Development Programme

- **Strengthened Logistics:** DFCs; 35 Multi-Modal Logistics Parks; PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan; National Logistics Policy (2022)
- **Technology Adoption:** RFID tags for tracking; e-waybill system for efficiency
- **Trade Facilitation:** ICEGATE
- **Cross-Border Economic Corridors & Trade Hub Potential**
 - **Western Side:** INSTC (via Chabahar port, Iran); IMEC
 - **Eastern Side:** IMT Highway
- **Revamped SEZ Programme**
 - 262 operational SEZs
- **Supportive Industrial Policy & Reforms**
 - **Make in India**
 - **Major Reforms:** IBC (2016); GST
 - **EoDB:** increased FDI caps, Invest India
 - **Competitive Taxation:** Corporate tax reduced to 22% (15% for new mfg. companies)
 - **PLI Scheme:** 4–6% incentive for local production/export in 14+ sectors
 - **Sectoral Missions:** \$10bn India Semiconductor Mission (2022); \$2.3bn National Green Hydrogen Mission
- **Strong FDI Appeal Validated by JETRO Survey**
 - 80% of Japanese firms in India plan to expand operations (2024) vs. 22% for China



SYLLABUS : G.S. 2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Newspaper : Indian Express **Page No :** 09

Decoding the News

nations decided to launch an AI Dialogue and a new joint working group on critical minerals this year.

After meeting Motegi, Jaishankar posted on X, "Pleased to co-chair the 18th India-Japan Strategic Dialogue alongside FM Toshimitsu Motegi in New Delhi today. Our Special Strategic and Global Partnership is on an upward trajectory and holds immense potential for shaping the world order and de-risking the international economy."

"Today's discussions on deeper economic, maritime, supply chain, critical mineral, technology, P2P and multilateral cooperation were reflective of our shared interests and mutual understanding. Also

kar said India's vision for the Indo-Pacific aligns closely with Japan's outlook for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific". "We are leading democracies, we are the major economies of the world, and we have today not just an opportunity, but also an obligation, a duty to shape the global order," he said.

economic security has become very important in the current global context. "I think both our countries attach enormous importance to it, and how to de-risk our own economies, and how to de-risk the international economy are both very important... So, we will be discussing resilient supply chains, critical minerals, how to address energy, health, and maritime security in our talks today."



Kaziranga National Park



SYLLABUS: G.S. 3: Environment: Conservation

Newspaper: The Indian Express **Page No : 09**

Kaziranga NP

- Assam
- Single largest undisturbed and representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain
- 1974: NP
- 1985: declared WHS
- Important Bird Area by BirdLife International
- Terrain: Sheer forest, elephant grass, rugged reeds, marshes, and shallow pools
- NH715: Southern boundary
- **Rivers:** Difflu, Moradiflu: southern boundary.
- Flora: dense and tall elephant grasses, small swamplands, water lilies, water hyacinths, lotus
- Fauna: Rhino, Tiger, Eastern swamp deer, Elephant, Buffalo, Hoolock gibbon, Capped langur, Gangetic River dolphin, World's largest population of one-horned rhinoceroses

Modi on Sunday is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of a 34.5-kilometre elevated corridor in Assam's Kaziranga, which, according to experts and forest officials, is expected to be a long-term solution to the increasing problem of animals being hit by heavy traffic in the national park.

Park, which has the world's largest population of the one-horned rhinoceros and is home to 37 species of mammals and nearly 500 species of birds, is located on the Brahmaputra floodplains in Central Assam's Nagaon and Eastern Assam's Golaghat districts. National

“The Kaziranga boundary is defined by humans, not animals. When floods submerge large parts of the national park, which is a natural phenomenon, animals move south to the highlands and later come back down when the floods recede. But now, because of development, we have the highway and human habitations in the area, which have disrupted this natural passage,” he said.



SYLLABUS: GS 2: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies

Newspaper: The Indian express **Page No :12**

About CVC:

- apex Integrity Institution
- set up through a Resolution on the reco of K. Santhanam committee
- statutory status: CVC Act 2003
- responsible to the Parliament

CVC Act, 2003

- **Composition:** Chair + 2 VCs
- **Organization:** own Secretariat, Chief Technical Examiners' Wing, wing of Commissioners for Departmental Inquiries
- **Appointment:** by President on reco of
 - Committee: PM (Chair), MHA, LoO in LS
- **Term:** 4 years or 65 years
- **Salary and Allowances:** ~UPSC
- **Removal: President:**
 - adjudged as insolvent
 - Central government holds responsible for an offense involving moral turpitude
 - paid employment outside the duties of his office
 - declared unfit by reason of infirmity of mind or body, by the President
 - proved misbehavior or incapacity: has to refer the matter to SC for an enquiry.

Powers of Civil Court

- proceedings have judicial character
- information or report from authorities to exercise its mandate relating to vigilance and anti-corruption work

Advisory nature

- not agree with advice: communicate the reasons to CVC

- **Investigations:** depend on CBI and Chief Vigilance Officers
- **Annual Report:** to the President, placed before the Parliament



Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Central Vigilance Commission:

1. It was established under the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.
2. The Central Vigilance Commissioner has a tenure of 4 years or until the age of 70, whichever is earlier.
3. The President appoints the Central Vigilance Commissioners on the recommendation of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Kaziranga National Park:

1. It is the largest undisturbed area of the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
2. Rivers Difflu and Moradiflu form its southern boundary.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the POCSO Act, 2012:

1. The Act defines a child as "any person" under the age of 18.
2. A victim must report the offence within one year of the occurrence of abuse.

3. It mandates recording of evidence within 30 days, completion of the trial within one year, and adjudication by Special Courts.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the definition criteria of a Startup in India:

1. A startup must be less than 10 years old and have an annual turnover below ₹1,000 crore.
2. It must be innovation-driven, scalable, and not formed by splitting up or reconstructing an existing business.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Q5. Which of the following countries is NOT part of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)?

- a) Saudi Arabia
- b) United Arab Emirates
- c) Greece
- d) Turkey

Answer: d





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