

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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**Will increasing the strength of the SC solve the pendency problem?**

THE HINDU : 29-05-2026

## INTERNATIONAL Page 3



**Making progress on normal ties after border peace: India, China**

THE HINDU:  
29-05-2026

## EDITORIALS DECODED FOR UPSC



### Quantum-safe thinking

India must be alive to challenges posed by advanced encryption algorithms



### EC must answer but SC gives it free pass & more



### Fund of options

Third-party MF payments fine, not salary deductions

## Snapshot

In today's edition of *The Pala Civil Times*, readers will find detailed articles analysing the far-reaching implications of the recent ordinance increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court. The international section examines India's evolving relations with the two major global powers : the United States and China, focusing on themes such as border management, migration policies, cultural exchanges, and economic ties.

In the *Decoded Editorial* section, special attention has been given to India's growing need to adapt to the emerging domain of quantum encryption and post-quantum security. Readers will also find a refresher article revisiting the key constitutional and electoral issues surrounding the recent *SIR* ruling. Another important feature discusses SEBI's proposal to permit limited third-party engagement in mutual fund transactions and the wider regulatory and financial implications of the move.

The economy section analyses India's renewed focus on key sectors affected by the ongoing West Asia conflict, particularly fuel, fertilisers, and foreign exchange pressures. Meanwhile, the highlight of today's edition is the explainer on the *SARTHAK* PDS programme, a major initiative aimed at modernising and strengthening one of the world's largest public distribution systems through technology-driven reforms and improved welfare delivery.

Readers are encouraged to engage with these topics carefully and develop a deeper analytical understanding of the issues shaping contemporary affairs.

## ECONOMICS Page 9



**₹25530 cr allotted for PDS overhaul**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS :  
28-05-2026

## Will increasing the strength of the SC solve the pendency problem?

On 17 May 2026, the President promulgated an ordinance increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court from **34 to 38 judges**. The move followed Union Cabinet approval of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026. The government stated that the increase aims to improve judicial efficiency and ensure speedier justice. On 27 May 2026, the Supreme Court Collegium recommended the elevation of four High Court Chief Justices and senior advocate V. Mohana to the Supreme Court. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), pendency before the Supreme Court currently stands at about **93,966 cases**. The recent development also brings several institutional questions into focus :

### Special Leave Petitions and Pendency

A major reason for rising Supreme Court pendency is the large number of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) under Article 136. Originally intended as an exceptional remedy, SLPs now form a substantial part of the Court's docket. The absence of clear guidelines on when Article 136 should be invoked has increased case inflow and contributed to delays and inconsistency in judicial outcomes.

### Should the Supreme Court Hear Only Constitutional Cases?

The Supreme Court was designed both as a constitutional court and the country's final appellate court. Therefore, it cannot limit itself only to constitutional matters. However, routine appeals should be filtered more carefully, while cases involving substantial questions of law or wider public importance should receive priority attention before larger Benches to ensure doctrinal consistency.

Reducing pendency requires stronger institutional filtering mechanisms, especially against frivolous litigation and misuse of Public Interest Litigations (PILs). Greater reliance on written submissions, stricter time limits for oral arguments, and better case management systems have been suggested. The expansion of Supreme Court strength has also revived discussions on greater inclusion of women judges which would strengthen institutional legitimacy and broaden perspectives within the judiciary.

### Impact of Increasing the Number of Judges

Increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court may help distribute workload, but it can also create greater **doctrinal inconsistency**. A larger number of Division Benches could produce **conflicting judgments** by coordinate Benches, leading to more references to larger Benches and additional delays.

### Need for a Consistent Government Litigation Policy

Government litigation forms a major share of pending cases before courts. Experts argue that the absence of a coherent National Litigation Policy has encouraged excessive and repetitive appeals by government departments. Frequent changes in legal strategy, transfer petitions, and continuation of weak cases up to the Supreme Court increase judicial burden and delay final relief for ordinary litigants.

#### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



PYQ  
COMPASS

Q.) Explain the reasons for the growth of public interest litigation in India. As a result, has the Indian Supreme Court emerged as the world's most powerful judiciary? (GS II – Indian constitution-2024)

#### Practice questions

Q.) With reference to the debate on reducing pendency in the Supreme Court of India, consider the following measures:

1. Limiting Supreme Court intervention mainly to cases involving substantial constitutional or legal questions.
2. Continuing unrestricted admission of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) without evolving clearer institutional filters or guidelines.
3. Formulating a coherent National Litigation Policy to reduce repetitive government appeals.
4. Increasing the number of Division Benches without strengthening mechanisms for doctrinal consistency among coordinate Benches.

Which of the above measures are likely to aggravate institutional inconsistency or judicial pendency if pursued without adequate safeguards?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 2, 3 and 4 only

#### RELEVANCE

GS II : Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

## Making progress on normal ties after border peace: India, China

The 35th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was held in Beijing on 27 May 2026. The talks were led by senior diplomatic officials from both countries and focused on reviewing the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The meeting reflected ongoing efforts by India and China to gradually stabilise bilateral relations after years of military tensions in eastern Ladakh.

### Key Outcomes of the WMCC Meeting

Both sides expressed satisfaction over the maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas, which has supported gradual normalisation of ties. The discussions covered **border delimitation, border management, institutional coordination mechanisms, and cross-border cooperation**. India also stressed the need for an early meeting of the **Expert Level Mechanism on trans-border rivers**. The two countries agreed to continue diplomatic and military-level communication and prepare for the next Special Representatives (SR) meeting in China.

### Developments on Trans-Border River Cooperation

An important recent development in India-China relations has been the revival of cooperation on trans-border rivers. During Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to China in January 2025, both countries agreed to restart discussions under the **Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) on hydrological data sharing and river-related cooperation**. This issue is strategically significant because major river systems such as the Brahmaputra and Indus originate in the Tibetan Plateau before flowing into India.

### Resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra

The resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra after the October 2024 Kazan summit has emerged as another important sign of improving bilateral ties. The pilgrimage holds deep religious and cultural significance for Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Bon traditions and is often viewed as a symbol of long-standing civilisational links between India and China. Its revival reflects efforts by both countries to restore people-to-people and cultural engagement alongside diplomatic dialogue.

Recent developments indicate a cautious but gradual improvement in India-China relations after years of border tensions. While military deployments and strategic mistrust continue, both countries are increasingly engaging through diplomatic dialogue, border-management mechanisms, river cooperation frameworks, and cultural exchanges. The broader implication is that India and China are attempting to stabilise bilateral ties through incremental confidence-building measures while continuing to manage unresolved border and strategic issues carefully.

### STATIC LINKAGE

The Brahmaputra is a major transboundary river linking **China, India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh**.

- It originates as the Yarlung Zangbo (Tsangpo) from the Ansi Glacier near Manasarovar Lake in Tibet at about 5,300 m elevation.
- The river flows nearly 1,700 km in Tibet before entering India through Arunachal Pradesh near Gelling.
- Near Namcha Barwa, it takes the famous "Great Bend" before descending into India through deep gorges.
- In Assam, the Siang joins the Lohit and Dibang near Sadiya to form the Brahmaputra.
- The river flows about 642 km in Assam and another 260 km in Bangladesh (as Jamuna) before entering the Bay of Bengal.
- The Brahmaputra basin covers around 5.8 lakh sq km, including:
  - **2.93 lakh sq km in Tibet (China)**
  - **1.94 lakh sq km in India**
  - remaining areas in Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Since China is the upper riparian state, hydrological data sharing and river management are strategically important for India.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) 'China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia'. In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour. (GS II – International relations – 2017)

## How US's tighter Green Card rules will affect Indians

The United States has introduced a major change in its Green Card processing policy by making "adjustment of status" applications more discretionary. Under the new USCIS guidance, immigrants already residing in the U.S. may face greater scrutiny while applying for permanent residency from within the country and could increasingly be required to return to their home countries for consular processing. The move particularly affects Indians waiting in long employment-based Green Card backlogs.

### Impact on Indian Professionals and Visa Categories

The policy is significant for Indians because they dominate employment-based visa categories such as EB-2 and EB-3, where waiting periods often extend beyond 15–20 years. It mainly affects H-1B professionals, F-1 students transitioning to work visas, and H-4 dependent spouses. The exhaustion of EB-2 Green Card quotas for the current financial year has further increased uncertainty for Indian applicants already facing prolonged immigration delays.

### Link to Broader U.S. Immigration Policy Trends

The policy shift reflects a broader trend in U.S. immigration administration toward stricter scrutiny of both legal and illegal immigration pathways. Recent measures indicate greater emphasis on discretionary review, procedural compliance, and tighter control over long-term immigration benefits. Critics argue that such measures may reduce predictability for skilled migrants, while supporters view them as efforts to strengthen oversight and regulate immigration processes more tightly.

### Link to Broader U.S. Immigration Policy Trends

The new USCIS approach does not completely stop Green Card approvals but raises the level of scrutiny and uncertainty for applicants, especially Indians in long waiting queues. The concern is significant because adjustment of status is the main pathway to permanent residency in the U.S., accounting for nearly 58% of all Green Cards issued in FY2024. Immigration experts advise affected individuals to maintain strict legal compliance, seek professional legal guidance before international travel, and carefully assess adjustment-of-status decisions until clearer implementation guidelines emerge. The coming months will be important in determining how aggressively the new policy is enforced in practice.

### Social and Community-Level Implications

Many affected Indians have spent decades building stable lives in the U.S. through employment, tax contributions, home ownership, and family settlement. If applicants are forced to leave the U.S. for consular processing, they may face prolonged administrative delays, employment disruptions, separation from families, interruption of children's education, and loss of work authorization for dependent spouses. Such uncertainty could create wider social and financial stress for migrant households and communities.

### Practice questions

Q.) With reference to the recent changes in U.S. Green Card processing and employment-based immigration, consider the following statements:

1. The U.S. government may impose annual numerical limits on Green Cards issued under specific employment-based categories such as EB-2 and EB-3.
2. The "adjustment of status" route accounted for nearly one-third of the total permanent residency approvals issued in the United States in FY2024.

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

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries'. Comment with examples. (GS II - International Relations - 2020)

Q.) Indian diaspora has scaled new heights in the West. Describe its economic and political benefits for India. ((GS II - International Relations - 2023)

**RELEVANCE :** GS II : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

## Quantum-safe thinking (The Hindu 29-05-2026)

Latest report by India's DST Task Force highlights the urgent need to secure national digital infrastructure against emerging quantum computing threats. Classical public key cryptography, which secures most digital communications, is vulnerable to future quantum algorithms like **Shor's algorithm**, while even symmetric systems face partial weakening via **Grover's algorithm**. The report warns of a "**Harvest Now, Decrypt Later**" risk and recommends transition to **Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC)** and selective use of Quantum Key Distribution (QKD). It calls for large-scale migration across critical infrastructure, financial systems, and defence networks, backed by investment, institutional capacity, and phased implementation. The broader concern is not just future "**Q-Day**" but an already expanding attack surface due to hybrid cyber threats.

### STATIC CORE LINKAGE

**Cryptography** : Science of securing communication using mathematical techniques  
**Encryption** : Process of converting readable data into unreadable form using keys  
**Public Key Cryptography (Asymmetric)** : Uses two mathematically linked keys  
 Secures HTTPS, digital signatures, banking systems  
**Symmetric Cryptography** : Same key used for encryption & decryption (e.g., AES)  
 Faster but requires secure key exchange  
**Quantum Computing** : Computation based on quantum mechanics using qubits

#### Quantum Computing – Core Science

- Based on quantum mechanics (sub-atomic physics laws)
- Uses qubits instead of classical bits
- Qubits can exist in 0, 1, or superposition (both simultaneously)
- Enables massive parallel computation
- Can solve advanced problems (factorization, search) exponentially faster than classical computers

#### National Quantum Mission (NQM)

- It is a long-term strategic programme (2023–2031) with a total financial outlay of ₹6003.65 crore, aimed at developing indigenous capabilities in quantum technologies including computing, communication, sensing, and materials research.
- The mission proposes the creation of 4 Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs) in leading academic and R&D institutions, each specialising in a core domain of quantum technology.
- It seeks to build a self-reliant quantum ecosystem in India by strengthening advanced R&D, promoting collaboration between academia, industry, and startups.

**Shor's Algorithm** : Efficient factorization & discrete logarithm solving. It breaks RSA, ECC (public key systems)

**Grover's Algorithm** : Speeds up brute-force search. It weakens symmetric encryption (needs longer keys)

**Q-Day** → point when quantum computers can break widely used public-key cryptography

**Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC)** : Classical algorithms resistant to quantum attacks. Primary long-term solution

**Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)** : Uses quantum mechanics to securely exchange keys.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) In India, the term "Public Key Infrastructure" is used in the context of: (2020)

- Digital security infrastructure
- Food security infrastructure
- Health care and education infrastructure
- Telecommunication infrastructure

Q) Which of the following statements with regard to the National Quantum Mission (NQM) is/are correct? (2026)

1. It aims at developing intermediate-scale quantum computers with 50-1000 physical qubits.
2. Its implementation includes setting up of four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs) in academic and national R&D institutes across India.

Select the answer using the code given below :

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

RELEVANCE : GS III : Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers

## EC must answer but SC gives it free pass & more (Indian Express - 29-05-2026)

The Supreme Court upheld the Election Commission's authority to conduct Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, emphasising that accurate electoral rolls are essential for free and fair elections under Article 324 of the Constitution. While recognising the EC's constitutional mandate and the need for periodic voter roll revision, concerns have emerged regarding documentation burdens, compressed timelines, and the possibility of voter exclusion. The judgment has also generated debate over the EC's role in conducting limited enquiries related to citizenship verification during electoral roll revision.

STATIC CORE LINKAGE	
<p><b>Special Intensive Revision (SIR)</b> : comprehensive revision of electoral rolls done to remove ineligible or duplicate entries.</p> <p><b>Electoral Roll Integrity</b> : Ensuring voter lists are accurate, updated, and free from duplication or ineligible entries.</p> <p><b>Voter Inclusion</b> : Ensuring all eligible citizens are able to remain enrolled and exercise voting rights without undue barriers.</p> <p><b>Limited Enquiry by EC</b> : Verification process undertaken by the EC to determine eligibility for inclusion in electoral rolls, without formally deciding citizenship status.</p>	<p><b>Article 324</b> : Vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission of India (ECI).</p> <p><b>Section 21, Representation of the People Act, 1950</b> : Empowers the Election Commission to undertake special revisions of electoral rolls when necessary.</p> <p><b>Citizenship Act 1955</b> : Formal determination of citizenship status lies with the competent authority under citizenship laws.</p>
<p><b>Supreme Court's Observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electoral roll accuracy is central to maintaining free and fair elections.</li> <li>Periodic revision of electoral rolls is necessary due to migration, urbanisation, duplication of entries, unreported deaths, and illegal cross-border movement.</li> <li>The Court held that the EC may conduct a "limited enquiry" to determine eligibility for inclusion in electoral rolls.</li> <li>Such enquiry does not amount to formal citizenship determination.</li> <li>The Court accepted the use of the 2003 electoral roll as a reference baseline during revision.</li> <li>Deleted names may be referred to competent authorities for adjudication under citizenship laws where necessary.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Major Concerns Raised</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Burden of proof</b> allegedly shifted onto vulnerable voters.</li> <li><b>Extensive documentation requirements</b> may disproportionately affect poorer and marginalised sections.</li> <li><b>Compressed timelines for verification</b> and appeal may weaken procedural safeguards.</li> <li><b>Concerns that large-scale deletions</b> may affect voter inclusion and democratic participation.</li> <li>Referral to citizenship authorities may indirectly expose individuals to citizenship-related scrutiny despite the EC's formally limited role.</li> </ul>

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (GS II - Indian constitution - 2022)

### Practice questions

Q.) With reference to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, consider the following statements:

- Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission of India.
- Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 empowers the Election Commission to undertake special revisions of electoral rolls when necessary.
- During the SIR process, the Election Commission is legally empowered to grant or cancel citizenship under the Citizenship Act.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

### RELEVANCE

GS II : Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

## Fund of options (TH BusinessLine : 29-05-2026)

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has released a consultation paper proposing relaxation of the long-standing rule that mutual funds can accept investments only from the investor's own verified bank account. The proposal seeks to allow limited third-party payments in specific cases to widen participation in mutual funds and improve operational flexibility while maintaining regulatory safeguards such as KYC verification and electronic payment tracking.

### Proposed Routes for Third-Party Payments

SEBI has proposed three specific channels for allowing third-party involvement in mutual fund transactions. First, employers registered with EPFO and listed companies may auto-deduct SIP contributions from employee salaries similar to NPS or EPFO deductions. Second, Asset Management Companies (AMCs) may pay distributor commissions in the form of mutual fund units instead of cash. Third, investors may nominate verified organisations to receive direct donations from their mutual fund holdings.

### Arguments Supporting the Proposal

Strict KYC norms, digital payment systems, and traceable financial transactions have significantly reduced the risk of money laundering through mutual funds. Similar third-party payment mechanisms already exist in sectors such as insurance. Allowing commissions in mutual fund units and enabling direct charitable donations are viewed as practical reforms that can improve flexibility, deepen financial participation, and modernise the investment ecosystem.

### Concerns and Possible Risks

The proposal for employer-linked SIP auto-deductions has raised several concerns. Smaller firms may fail to deposit deducted amounts on time, similar to existing EPF-related issues. Unlike EPF, mutual funds involve market risks and require informed investment decisions and periodic portfolio adjustments. Critics also argue that automatic deductions may reduce employee awareness and shrink disposable income, especially when workers already contribute significantly to EPF and increasingly to NPS.

### Concerns and Possible Risks

SEBI's proposal reflects an effort to modernise mutual fund operations and expand participation through controlled third-party payment mechanisms. However, balancing financial inclusion with investor protection remains essential, particularly in products exposed to market volatility. A calibrated approach with strong safeguards, transparent consent mechanisms, investor education, and accountability standards for employers and intermediaries will be necessary to ensure that operational convenience does not compromise financial security.

#### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) In India, which of the following can trade in Corporate Bonds and Government Securities? (2024)

1. Insurance Companies
2. Pension Funds
3. Retail Investors

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

#### Practice questions

Q.) With reference to the recent SEBI consultation paper on allowing limited third-party payments in mutual funds, consider the following statements:

1. The proposal seeks to widen participation in mutual funds by permitting certain regulated forms of third-party transactions.
2. Under the proposed framework, investors may nominate verified organisations to receive donations directly from their mutual fund holdings.
3. The risk of employer defaults in transferring employee SIP deductions is considered negligible because stringent KYC norms ensure compliance by firms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

#### RELEVANCE

GS III : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, growth, development

## India's External Sector Pressures Amid Global Shocks: The "3 Fs" Challenge

On 25 May, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted that India's current macroeconomic stress must be understood through the lens of the "three Fs"—fuel, fertiliser, and foreign exchange (especially gold imports). She argued that while India's domestic economy remains resilient, the key pressures are externally driven, mainly due to volatile global commodity prices and geopolitical conflicts. These developments have intensified pressure on the rupee, forex reserves, and overall balance of payments position, prompting policy responses from the government and the Reserve Bank of India.

### Fuel: Crude Oil Dependency

India's fuel vulnerability stems from its heavy dependence on crude oil imports, which meet nearly 89% of domestic demand. A significant portion of this supply passes through strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, making India highly exposed to geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Global oil price volatility directly raises India's import bill, fuels inflationary pressures, and weakens the rupee, thereby increasing overall macroeconomic instability.

### Fertiliser: Import Dependence & Agricultural Risk

India, the world's second-largest fertiliser consumer, relies heavily on imports of raw materials and finished fertilisers, particularly urea-based products. Disruptions in global shipping routes due to conflict have tightened supply chains, raising concerns about availability during key agricultural seasons. Although current stocks remain adequate, prolonged disruptions could increase input costs, influence sowing decisions, and contribute to food inflation, thereby affecting both rural incomes and overall price stability.

### Foreign Exchange: Gold Demand, Capital Outflows, and Rupee Pressure

Foreign exchange stress has intensified due to sustained capital outflows by Foreign Portfolio Investors and weak net FDI inflows, along with strong domestic demand for gold, particularly as an investment asset. Gold imports place significant pressure on India's current account, while continued demand—even via ETFs and alternative channels—adds to forex outflows. Alongside this, RBI intervention to stabilise the rupee has led to a noticeable depletion in forex reserves, reflecting persistent external sector strain.

### Future Implications

Together, the "3 Fs" highlight India's exposure to global commodity cycles, geopolitical disruptions, and financial market volatility, which collectively impact inflation, currency stability, and growth prospects. The broader significance lies in the need for a calibrated policy response combining demand management, import substitution with feasible, diversification of energy and fertiliser sources, and sustained forex buffer maintenance.

## Practice questions

Consider the following statements:

1. Fertiliser prices in India are highly vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions because the country depends significantly on imported fertiliser inputs and global shipping routes.
2. Domestic crude oil production accounts for only a limited share of India's total crude oil consumption, increasing exposure to global energy price shocks.
3. Rising gold imports can exert pressure on India's foreign exchange position because gold is increasingly viewed as a relatively stable investment asset during periods of uncertainty.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

## RELEVANCE

**GS III : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, growth, development**

## PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) What are the challenges before the Indian economy when the world is moving away from free trade and multilateralism to protectionism and bilateralism? How can these challenges be met? (GS III - Indian Economy - 2025)

Q.) What are the direct and indirect subsidies provided to farm sector in India? Discuss the issues raised by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in relation to agricultural subsidies. (GS III - Indian Economy - 2023)

## ₹25530 cr allotted for PDS overhaul

The Union Cabinet on 27 May 2026 approved the Scheme for Assistance in Ration Transport and Handling—Income with Automation in PDS (Sarthak PDS) for the period 2026–2031 with a Central outlay of ₹25,530 crore. The scheme aims to modernise and strengthen India's Public Distribution System (PDS) by improving food grain distribution for nearly 80 crore beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and related food security programmes.

### Key Features

Sarthak PDS integrates existing schemes related to intra-state food grain transport and **SMART PDS** reforms into a single umbrella programme. It introduces three major technology-driven components: **Nirmal** for beneficiary verification, **Asha** for AI-enabled grievance redressal and feedback collection, and **Saksham** for end-to-end digitisation, QR-based grain tracking, GPS-enabled transport monitoring, and digital supply-chain dashboards.

### Driving Factors and Expected Improvements

The scheme has been introduced to address long-standing challenges such as **leakages, false beneficiaries, inefficiencies in grain movement, and weak monitoring mechanisms** in the PDS network. By using AI, Aadhaar-linked databases, digitised supply chains, and real-time monitoring systems, the government aims to improve **transparency, accurate beneficiary targeting, accountability, and efficiency in food grain distribution** across states and fair price shops.

**ESTIMATED OUTLAY: ₹25,530 CR**

Duration of implementation: 5 years (Apr 1, 2026–Mar 31, 2031)

**Assistance to state agencies for inter-state movement of food grains**

Modernisation of fair price shops

**BENEFITS**

- Accurate identification of eligible beneficiaries
- ASHA - AI food security assistant ensures faster grievance redressal in preferred language
- ~280 Cr annual savings and 35% reduction in carbon emissions

**SMART PDS PHASE-2**

**SARTHAK PDS SCHEME**

- NIRMAL** (Red dot): AI-driven real-time PDS beneficiary registry; Live inter-ministry integration and cross-scheme convergence
- ASHA** (Blue dot): Multilingual AI grievance and citizen engagement platforms across calls, WhatsApp and chatbot
- SAKSHAM** (Green dot): AI-enabled supply chain platform with vehicle tracking, QR traceability, demand forecasting and route optimisation

### Significance

Sarthak PDS represents the next phase of technology-led reforms in India's food security architecture, building upon earlier initiatives such as IM-PDS, SMART PDS, and e-PoS automation. The scheme is expected to reduce distribution losses, strengthen cooperative Centre-State implementation, and ensure timely and reliable delivery of subsidised food grains, thereby improving welfare delivery and strengthening food security for millions of vulnerable households.

### Practice questions

Q.) With reference to the recently approved Sarthak PDS scheme for strengthening the Public Distribution System (PDS), consider the following statements regarding its technology-driven components:

1. Nirmal aims to create a technology-enabled beneficiary registry to improve identification of genuine beneficiaries and reduce leakages in the PDS system.
2. Asha is designed as an AI-enabled grievance redressal and beneficiary feedback platform to improve accountability and responsiveness in ration delivery.
3. Saksham focuses on decentralising food grain procurement by granting greater autonomy to States in fixing procurement prices and transport mechanisms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. What are the major challenges of Public Distribution System (PDS) in India? How can it be made effective and transparent? (GS III - Public Distribution System - 2022)

### RELEVANCE

**GS III : Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;**

## Practice Questions and answers

Q.) With reference to the recent concerns surrounding the “three Fs” — fuel, fertiliser, and foreign exchange — in the Indian economy, consider the following statements:

1. Fertiliser prices in India are highly vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions because the country depends significantly on imported fertiliser inputs and global shipping routes.
2. Domestic crude oil production accounts for only a limited share of India’s total crude oil consumption, increasing exposure to global energy price shocks.
3. Rising gold imports can exert pressure on India’s foreign exchange position because gold is increasingly viewed as a relatively stable investment asset during periods of uncertainty.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 — Correct:** India depends heavily on imported fertiliser raw materials and shipping routes linked to the Gulf region; geopolitical disruptions can therefore affect supply and prices.
- **Statement 2 — Correct:** India imports nearly 89% of its crude oil requirement, meaning domestic production contributes only a small share of total consumption.
- **Statement 3 — Correct:** Investment demand for gold rises during uncertainty, increasing imports and placing pressure on foreign exchange reserves and the current account balance.

Q.) With reference to the recently approved Sarthak PDS scheme for strengthening the Public Distribution System (PDS), consider the following statements regarding its technology-driven components:

1. Nirmal aims to create a technology-enabled beneficiary registry to improve identification of genuine beneficiaries and reduce leakages in the PDS system.
2. Asha is designed as an AI-enabled grievance redressal and beneficiary feedback platform to improve accountability and responsiveness in ration delivery.
3. Saksham focuses on decentralising food grain procurement by granting greater autonomy to States in fixing procurement prices and transport mechanisms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

- **Statement 1 — Correct:** Nirmal focuses on technology-enabled beneficiary verification and elimination of fake or duplicate beneficiaries.
- **Statement 2 — Correct:** Asha is an AI-enabled grievance redressal and feedback mechanism intended to improve transparency and accountability.
- **Statement 3 — Incorrect :** Saksham is not related to decentralised procurement or pricing autonomy. It focuses on end-to-end digitisation and tracking of the food grain supply chain, including QR-coded grain bags, GPS-enabled transport, and digital dashboards.

## Practice Questions and answers

Q.) With reference to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, consider the following statements:

1. Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission of India.
2. Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 empowers the Election Commission to undertake special revisions of electoral rolls when necessary.
3. During the SIR process, the Election Commission is legally empowered to grant or cancel citizenship under the Citizenship Act.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

- Statement 1 – Correct: Article 324 gives the Election Commission of India (ECI) constitutional authority over the conduct and supervision of elections in India.
- Statement 2 – Correct: Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 allows the EC to carry out special revisions of electoral rolls to maintain their accuracy and reliability.
- Statement 3 – Incorrect: The EC can only conduct a limited enquiry regarding eligibility for inclusion in electoral rolls. Formal determination, grant, or cancellation of citizenship lies with the competent authority under the Citizenship Act, not with the Election Commission.

Q.) Q.) With reference to the recent SEBI consultation paper on allowing limited third-party payments in mutual funds, consider the following statements:

1. The proposal seeks to widen participation in mutual funds by permitting certain regulated forms of third-party transactions.
2. Under the proposed framework, investors may nominate verified organisations to receive donations directly from their mutual fund holdings.
3. The risk of employer defaults in transferring employee SIP deductions is considered negligible because stringent KYC norms ensure compliance by firms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

- Statement 1 is correct because the proposal explicitly aims to broaden participation in mutual funds by allowing certain regulated forms of third-party payments and transactions.
- Statement 2 is correct because one of the proposals allows investors to nominate verified organisations to receive donations directly from their mutual fund holdings.
- Statement 3 is incorrect because KYC norms primarily help in verifying identities and tracking money trails to reduce risks such as money laundering. They do not automatically prevent employers from defaulting or delaying the transfer of employee SIP deductions. In fact, the article specifically highlights employer default as a possible concern, drawing parallels with existing EPF-related issues in smaller firms.

### Practice Questions and answers

Q.) With reference to the recent changes in U.S. Green Card processing and employment-based immigration, consider the following statements:

1. The U.S. government may impose annual numerical limits on Green Cards issued under specific employment-based categories such as EB-2 and EB-3.
2. The "adjustment of status" route accounted for nearly one-third of the total permanent residency approvals issued in the United States in FY2024.

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: A. 1 only**

- Statement 1 – Correct: Employment-based Green Card categories in the U.S., including EB-2 and EB-3, are subject to annual numerical limits. The article notes that Green Cards under the EB-2 category for Indians were exhausted for the financial year ending September 2026.
- Statement 2 – Incorrect: The adjustment-of-status route accounted for about 58% of permanent residency approvals in FY2024, not one-third. Around 7.8 lakh out of 13.5 lakh Green Cards were issued through this pathway, making it the dominant route to permanent residency in the U.S.

Q.) With reference to the debate on reducing pendency in the Supreme Court of India, consider the following measures:

1. Limiting Supreme Court intervention mainly to cases involving substantial constitutional or legal questions.
2. Continuing unrestricted admission of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) without evolving clearer institutional filters or guidelines.
3. Formulating a coherent National Litigation Policy to reduce repetitive government appeals.
4. Increasing the number of Division Benches without strengthening mechanisms for doctrinal consistency among coordinate Benches.

Which of the above measures are likely to aggravate institutional inconsistency or judicial pendency if pursued without adequate safeguards?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 2, 3 and 4 only

**Answer: B. 2 and 4 only**

- Statement 1 – Not correct: Prioritising substantial constitutional or legal questions is generally viewed as a reform measure that can reduce routine case inflow and improve judicial efficiency.
- Statement 2 – Correct: The continued broad and guideline-free use of SLPs under Article 136 has been identified as a major contributor to excessive case inflow and mounting pendency in the Supreme Court.
- Statement 3 – Not correct: A National Litigation Policy is intended to reduce unnecessary government litigation, which forms a major share of pending cases.
- Statement 4 – Correct: Merely increasing the number of Division Benches may create more conflicting rulings among coordinate Benches unless accompanied by stronger judicial discipline and institutional consistency mechanisms.