

DAILY **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION

DATE : 26-12-25



The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Friday, 26 Dec, 2025

Edition : International Table of Contents

Page 05 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity / Prelims	Carrying the red flag into the next century
Page 06 Syllabus : GS 2 : Social Justice / Prelims	Circulatory system ailments caused most deaths in 2023: report
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 2 : Social Justice / Prelims	Rabies: the cruel and expensive disease of India's most impoverished
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	A year of dissipating promises for Indian foreign policy
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 2 : Governance	Doping menace India must make National Anti-Doping Agency well-funded and independent
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS 1 : Social Issues	The urban future with cities as dynamic ecosystems

As the Communist Party of India (CPI) completes a century of political engagement in December 2025, its journey offers an opportunity to critically assess the historical role of Left politics in India's freedom struggle, nation-building, and democratic consolidation. The centenary is not merely symbolic; it invites reflection on enduring questions of social justice, economic equality, secularism, and the nature of Indian democracy amid contemporary political and economic challenges.

Carrying the red flag into the next century

As the Communist Party of India marks a century of political engagement, its legacy invites reflection on the task to rebuild India on the foundations of equality, secularism, and justice



D. Raja
General
secretary of the
Communist
Party of India

In December 26, 2025, the Communist Party of India turns 100. This centenary is not merely the marking of time for a political party but a moment of historical reflection on a movement that profoundly shaped India's freedom struggle, its vision for the future of the nation, and its social and economic vision. From its earliest years, the CPI gave voice to the revolutionary slogan "Inquilab Zindabad", coined by Maulana Hasrat Mohani – who chaired the Reception Committee of the historic Kanpur Conference – and immortalised by Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Through communist activists, this call for revolutionary transformation travelled to every nook and corner of the country, becoming a living expression of resistance, hope and patriotism. The CPI emerged confronting colonial rule and sought to answer a fundamental question confronting the national movement: freedom for whom and to what end. Over a century, the CPI has consistently argued that political independence without social and economic transformation would leave the masses trapped in old and new forms of exploitation.

The historical roots of the CPI lie in its uncompromising struggle against colonial capitalism. British imperialism subordinated India's economy to the needs of foreign capital, destroyed indigenous industries, imposed exploitative land relations, and produced widespread poverty. At the same time, it created a modern working class and exposed Indian revolutionaries to global currents of socialist thought, particularly after the Russian Revolution of 1917. In-

dian activists and revolutionaries who encountered Marxism abroad or through international networks began to see that national liberation and social emancipation were inseparable. This understanding matured into organisational form with the founding of the CPI in December 1925 at Kanpur.

Marxist theory, Indian realities
The Kanpur conference brought together revolutionaries, trade unionists, and anti-imperialist activists committed to building a revolutionary party rooted in Marxist theory and Indian realities.

The CPI's role in the fight against colonial rule was uncompromising and profoundly patriotic. Unlike strands of nationalism that sought accommodation with imperial power, the communists understood colonialism as a system of economic exploitation sustained by political domination. They fought British rule through trade union struggles, peasant movements, underground resistance, and ideological battles. Their patriotism was rooted not in elite negotiations but in the lives and struggles of ordinary Indians.

One of the CPI's most enduring contributions was its emphasis on building mass organisations. The party recognised that political emancipation could not be achieved without mobilising society in all its diversity. It helped build and strengthen platforms such as the All India Trade Union Congress, the All India Kisan Sabha, the All India Students' Federation, cultural and writers' organisations like the Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association, and, later, organisations of women and youth.



Social emancipation: It was through mass struggles that communist politics acquired its deepest roots. G. RAMAKRISHNA

Through these formations, the CPI united workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, and artists around shared struggles.

It was through mass struggles that communist politics acquired its deepest roots. The CPI led historic movements for land and dignity, including the Telangana armed struggle against feudal oppression, the Tebhaga movement in Bengal that asserted peasants' rights over their produce, the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle in Kerala against landlord tyranny, and the militant land struggles of the Tharjaur delta. In industrial centres such as Kanpur, Bombay, Calcutta, and Pudukcherry, the trade union movement under communist leadership won major labour victories, securing rights, wages, and dignity for workers.

The CPI decisively radicalised the agenda of the national struggle. At a time when dominion status was being debated as a possible compromise, the communists in-

sisted on complete independence. They were among the earliest and most consistent advocates of the demand for a Constituent Assembly, arguing that only a sovereign body elected by the people could frame a democratic Constitution. This demand later became central to India's transition to independence. The party placed structural reforms at the centre of the freedom struggle, arguing that independence without land reforms, labour rights, and social equality would merely replace foreign rulers with indigenous elites.

Land redistribution, abolition of landlordism, protection of tenants, trade union rights, minimum wages, and social security were pushed into the national agenda through communist-led movements. The CPI articulated the vision of a classless and casteless India, recognising caste not as a cultural residue but as a material system deeply intertwined with class exploitation. By linking caste

oppression to economic structures, the party broadened the meaning of social justice and gave the freedom struggle a transformative content. Many of these demands found reflection in the Constitution and in post-independence policy debates.

Independence in 1947 did not end the CPI's struggle. It marked the beginning of a new phase focused on dismantling feudal structures, resisting monopolistic capitalism, and deepening democracy. The party led historic peasant struggles against landlordism and played a decisive role in advancing land reforms in States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Tripura, and Bihar. In parliamentary and extra-parliamentary arenas, the CPI championed public ownership of key sectors of the economy and consistently advocated the nationalisation of banks, coal, insurance, and other core industries, arguing that strategic resources must serve national development and social welfare rather than private accumulation.

Defender of federalism

The CPI was also a strong defender of federalism and linguistic and cultural diversity, strengthening India's democratic fabric. Its commitment to social justice found expression in its defence of the rights of Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, and women, as well as its steadfast adherence to secularism and rational thought. Across decades, the red flag symbolised reform, progress, and resistance to reactionary forces.

Today, as the CPI enters its second century, India confronts grave challenges. Communalism and emerging fascism threaten the

foundations of the Republic. Economic growth has been accompanied by massive unemployment, precarity, and widening inequalities.

For the Left, the challenge is to once again become synonymous with the aspirations of the masses. This requires renewing its understanding of contemporary capitalism while remaining anchored in its core values of equality, democracy and justice.

At this critical juncture in our history, the centenary of the CPI is not merely a moment of remembrance but a call to action. Democracy itself is under assault, people's rights and livelihoods are being systematically eroded, and the achievements of the freedom movement are being deliberately undone. The RSS-BJP combine seeks to dismantle our social solidarity, hollow out our economic sovereignty, and subvert the Constitution to impose an authoritarian, exclusionary order. This danger cannot be resisted in fragments. The CPI and the Left must be strengthened and brought closer together to form a broad democratic resistance. Class exploitation, caste oppression, and patriarchy remain formidable structures of domination, demanding organised and uncompromising struggle. The task before us is clear: cleanse institutions of their corrosive influence, reclaim the Republic, and rebuild India on the foundations of equality, secularism, and justice. United we must resist. United we must advance. United we must create a new India: egalitarian, democratic, and prosperous. The red flag must rise higher. The people must prevail. The future must be ours.

Historical Significance of CPI in India's Freedom Struggle

The CPI emerged in 1925 against the backdrop of colonial exploitation and global socialist movements, particularly inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917. Unlike moderate nationalist approaches, the CPI viewed colonialism as a structural system of economic exploitation rather than merely a political subjugation.

Key historical contributions include:

- Radicalising the freedom movement by insisting on *complete independence* when dominion status was still debated.
- Early advocacy of a Constituent Assembly, later central to India's democratic transition.
- Mobilisation of workers and peasants through mass struggles such as the Telangana armed struggle, Tebhaga movement, and Punnapra–Vayalar uprising, embedding nationalism within grassroots resistance.

- Integration of Marxist theory with Indian socio-economic realities, particularly by linking class exploitation with caste oppression, a perspective that broadened the meaning of social justice.
- These interventions ensured that India's freedom struggle was not confined to elite negotiations but grounded in mass participation.

Role in Post-Independence Nation-Building

- After 1947, the CPI repositioned itself as a defender of socio-economic democracy rather than merely political independence.
- Its post-independence contributions include:
 - Land reforms and dismantling of landlordism in States such as Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura, and Tamil Nadu.
 - Strengthening trade union rights, minimum wages, and social security mechanisms.
 - Advocacy for public sector expansion and nationalisation (banks, coal, insurance) to ensure economic sovereignty and inclusive development.
- Defence of federalism, linguistic diversity, and secularism, reinforcing India's plural democratic structure.
- Many of these ideas influenced constitutional values and policy debates, even when not fully implemented.

Contemporary Relevance and Challenges

- The article situates CPI's centenary within a context of democratic stress marked by rising inequality, unemployment, informalisation of labour, and ideological polarisation.

Key concerns highlighted include:

- The perceived erosion of constitutional values due to the politics of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh–Bharatiya Janata Party, particularly regarding secularism and institutional autonomy.
- Concentration of economic power and weakening of labour protections, undermining social justice.
- Declining space for dissent, civil liberties, and democratic pluralism.
- From a UPSC perspective, this raises critical GS-II issues related to constitutional morality, institutional resilience, federalism, and democratic accountability, as well as GS-III concerns on inclusive growth and labour reforms.
- Critical Evaluation (Answer Enrichment)

While the CPI's ideological legacy is significant, a balanced analysis must acknowledge:

- Electoral marginalisation of Left parties in recent decades.
- Difficulty in adapting classical Marxist frameworks to contemporary capitalism driven by technology, finance, and globalisation.
- The challenge of building broad-based democratic coalitions without ideological rigidity.
- Thus, the centenary is as much a moment of introspection as celebration.

Conclusion

The centenary of the Communist Party of India serves as a reminder that India's democracy was forged not only through political independence but also through sustained struggles for economic justice, social equality, and secularism. In an era of rising inequalities and democratic anxieties, the CPI's historical emphasis on mass mobilisation, constitutionalism, and social justice retains normative relevance.

For India's future, the challenge lies not in ideological revivalism but in renewing democratic politics that can reconcile growth with equity, authority with accountability, and nationalism with pluralism. The red flag's legacy, therefore, must ultimately be judged by its capacity to adapt while remaining anchored to the constitutional promise of justice—social, economic, and political.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Communist movement in India, consider the following statements:

1. The demand for a Constituent Assembly was first systematically articulated by communist groups before it became a mainstream nationalist demand.
2. The Communist Party of India viewed colonialism primarily as a political problem rather than an economic system of exploitation.
3. Early communist movements in India were significantly influenced by global socialist developments, particularly after 1917.

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

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "The Communist Party of India played a significant role in transforming the freedom struggle from an elite negotiation into a mass-based movement." Critically examine with suitable examples. **(150 Words)**

Page 06 : GS 2 : Social Justice

The "Annual Report on Medical Certification of Cause of Death, 2023" released by the Office of the Registrar-General of India highlights a critical public health challenge: diseases of the circulatory system accounted for 36.4% of all medically certified deaths in India in 2023, making them the leading cause of mortality. The findings underline India's growing non-communicable disease (NCD) burden and expose systemic gaps in death registration and health surveillance.

Circulatory system ailments caused most deaths in 2023: report

Such diseases accounted for 36.4% of all medically certified deaths in the country, says report released by Office of the Registrar-General of India

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Diseases of the circulatory system remained the leading cause of medically certified deaths across India in 2023, a report released this week by the Office of the Registrar-General of India said. Such diseases accounted for 36.4% of all medically certified deaths in the country, says the "Annual report on medical certification of cause of death, 2023" of the RGI.

The figure was four percentage points lower than that of 2022, when over 40% of certified deaths were caused by these diseases.

The report looked at causes of deaths that were medically certified out of the total registered deaths across the country. For 2023, the report noted that 22% of all deaths registered in the Civil Registration System had been medically certified, which was 0.3 percentage points below that of the previous year (2022).

According to the report, diseases of the circulatory



According to the report, deaths due to circulatory system diseases were highest for people aged above 70. FILE PHOTO

system were the leading cause of death in medically certified cases, with diseases of pulmonary circulation or other heart diseases causing more than half of these deaths. A breakdown by age showed that deaths due to circulatory system diseases were highest for people aged above 70. People aged between 55 and 64 had the second highest incidence of such deaths.

However, the report noted that in age cohorts starting from 15 years of age, diseases of the circulatory system were the leading cause of death reported.

The release of the data

comes amid academic journals reporting an increase in heart attacks among younger people in India, with a study quoting Indian Heart Association data that half of all heart attacks in Indian men occur under the age of 50.

The report further noted that the medical certification of cause of deaths occurs in different States and Union Territories with different levels of efficiency, noting that only Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Delhi, Goa, Lakshadweep were medically certifying more than half of registered deaths.

Key Findings of the Report

1. Dominance of Circulatory System Diseases

- Circulatory system diseases (CVDs) constituted over one-third of medically certified deaths.
- More than 50% of these deaths were due to pulmonary circulation disorders and other heart diseases.

- Despite a decline from 2022 levels (over 40%), CVDs remain the single largest mortality contributor.
- UPSC relevance: Reflects India's epidemiological transition from communicable to non-communicable diseases (GS III).

2. Age-wise Mortality Pattern

- Highest deaths due to circulatory diseases were reported in the 70+ age group.
- The 55–64 age cohort recorded the second-highest mortality.
- Crucially, from the age of 15 onwards, circulatory diseases emerged as the leading cause of death, indicating early onset of cardiovascular risks.
- This aligns with findings cited by the Indian Heart Association, which suggest that nearly 50% of heart attacks in Indian men occur below the age of 50.
- Implication: Lifestyle risks, stress, sedentary habits, and metabolic disorders are affecting the productive workforce.

3. Low Coverage of Medical Certification of Deaths

- Only 22% of registered deaths were medically certified in 2023.
- This represents a marginal decline from 2022.
- High certification levels (>50%) were observed only in a few UTs such as Delhi, Goa, Chandigarh, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- This exposes weaknesses in the Civil Registration System, particularly in rural and under-resourced States.

Governance and Policy Challenges

A. Weak Mortality Data Ecosystem

- Low medical certification undermines evidence-based policymaking.
- Under-reporting distorts disease burden estimation, resource allocation, and health planning.

B. Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases

- Cardiovascular diseases are linked to:
 - Urbanisation and lifestyle changes
 - Poor dietary patterns
 - Air pollution
 - Inadequate preventive healthcare
- India faces a dual burden: communicable diseases + NCDs.

C. Inter-State Inequality in Health Capacity

- Variations in certification reflect unequal access to:
 - Qualified medical professionals
 - Institutional delivery of healthcare

- Health governance capacity
- This raises concerns under Article 21 (Right to Health) and cooperative federalism (GS II).

Way Forward

- Universalise medical certification of deaths through digital integration with CRS and Ayushman Bharat health IDs.
- Strengthen preventive cardiology via population-level screening under National Health Mission.
- Promote early lifestyle interventions targeting youth (school-based health education, workplace wellness).
- Address social determinants of health such as pollution, nutrition, and urban planning.
- Build State capacity in health data management and vital statistics.

Conclusion

The 2023 mortality data reaffirms that cardiovascular diseases are no longer a problem of old age but a systemic public health challenge affecting India's demographic dividend. While the declining share of circulatory deaths from 2022 offers cautious optimism, persistently low medical certification limits the credibility of national health statistics. For India to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals and ensure equitable healthcare, strengthening mortality surveillance and prioritising preventive healthcare must become central to governance. Reliable data, early intervention, and robust public health systems are indispensable to reversing the silent epidemic of heart disease.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : With reference to the "Annual Report on Medical Certification of Cause of Death, 2023" released by the Office of the Registrar-General of India, consider the following statements:

1. Diseases of the circulatory system accounted for more than one-third of all medically certified deaths in India in 2023.
2. The share of circulatory system-related deaths increased in 2023 as compared to 2022.
3. Only about one-fifth of registered deaths in India were medically certified in 2023.

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

Ans: A

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The medical certification of cause of death is critical for evidence-based public health policymaking. In this context, examine the findings of the 2023 report on causes of death in India and highlight the governance challenges associated with low certification coverage.

Rabies remains one of India's most neglected yet deadly public health challenges. Despite being 100% preventable, India accounts for nearly one-third of the world's 59,000 rabies deaths annually (around 20,000 deaths), the highest for any country. As highlighted by recent research published in *One Health* and corroborated by field realities, rabies in India is not merely a biomedical issue but a manifestation of poverty, weak health systems, inadequate urban governance, and poor animal management policies.

Rabies: the cruel and expensive disease of India's most impoverished

Of the 59,000 rabies-mediated human deaths in the world every year, India represents a third, around 20,000, and more than any other country, according to a paper; besides a lack of awareness of the disease, poor accessibility, affordability, and availability of PEP makes it a serious public health problem

Divya Gandhi
Afshan Yasmeen

There is a ward at the government Epidemic Diseases Hospital in Bengaluru from where every single patient is wheeled out dead. The windows are blackened, the room is airless, the only piece of furniture is a solitary cot. This room is not a punitive space; on the contrary, it is refuge for rabies patients who suffer hydrophobia, the fear of light, even of air.

Recently, a 50-year-old construction worker from Delhi was brought in after a rabid dog bit him months ago. "He will be dead by tonight," says Suresh N.V., Bengaluru district surgeon, who is also the medical superintendent of the hospital. This was patient number 17 this year, just in this one hospital. "Some patients can be sedated to stop them from hallucinating and for hyperactivity, but others can get very aggressive," he says.

One patient, the doctor recalls, lay crumpled with fear that the army was out to get him. Death by rabies is frightening, painful, and inescapably cruel.

Of the 59,000 rabies-mediated human deaths in the world every year, India represents a third, around 20,000, and more than any other country, according to a paper published in *One Health* in December 2024. Rabies is endemic to India, with the main reservoir of the virus being dogs, and the poorest, the majority of the patients.

Days, weeks or months after a rabid dog bite, if the victim is not vaccinated, death is inevitable. The symptoms begin with paralysis from the feet upwards, typically followed by cardio-respiratory failure that finally strikes the victims down. Rabies is a neurotropic virus, and unlike other pathogens, travels via the peripheral nerves (not blood) to the spinal chord, and then to the brain.

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) involves immediately washing the wound under running water with soap for 15 minutes, followed by the anti-rabies vaccination (ARV), rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) and a tetanus shot.

Who is at risk? "Human populations inhabiting areas that sustain free-roaming dogs are at the high risk of being bitten," says Harish Kumar Thwait, of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, and co-author of the *One Health* paper, describing rabies as being a disease of the poor and vulnerable. These are usually daily wage workers, often living on the margins of the society: brick kiln workers, waste collectors, rural and remote populations, farming communities.

"Besides a lack of awareness of the disease, there is poor accessibility, affordability, and availability of PEP," he points out.

In November 2025, the Supreme Court directed all States to remove stray dogs



Need for care: Controlling street dog population involves birth control surgeries, anti-rabies vaccination, and establishment of shelters. N. Venu

from hospital premises, educational institutions, railway stations and other spaces of public use and place them in shelters after they are sterilised and vaccinated. Animal rights activists have, ever since the court order, claimed that this prospective programme is "impractical" and "cruel". According to data available, there are 80 million free roaming dogs in India and 20 million dog bites per year, making rabies a large public health problem.

Economics at play: Access to good quality, affordable healthcare continues to remain unavailable to large parts of the country, out-of-pocket expenditure on health is high, and families, to date, are pushed into poverty due to medical costs. But with rabies, finances play a role even before health is compromised.

Take the case of a 59-year-old man in a village in Assam (as recounted by the *One Health* paper researchers), who died of rabies after being bitten by a neighbour's pup. The pup was not immunised by the family because of financial constraints. In May 2023, the pup "attacked the victim unprovoked, causing deep bite wounds". Even though he was administered PEP and RIG (at a private hospital because the government one refused to hospitalise him citing "unsatisfactory care by the staff") he soon developed a headache, high fever, began drooling saliva and experienced difficulty in drinking or swallowing one month later. He then became violent, and eventually died.

"In the order of significance of the actions that led to rabies death, the lack of seriousness on the part of the hospital staff to attend to dog bite injury, prompting the patient to approach a local

private nursing home, ranks foremost," states the *One Health* paper.

While the patient in this case faced unacceptable delays in treatment, the treatment itself – PEP and RIG – continues to remain out of reach for many dog bite victims. A January 2025 study in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, which surveyed 3,37,808 individuals in 60 districts in 15 Indian States, found that among those who had been bitten by a dog, 20.5% did not receive ARV and nearly half (49%) of those who received one dose "did not complete their full course of vaccination", says M. K. Sudarshan, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Rabies, one of the authors of the paper.

Doctors note that when it comes to a small bleed or severe dog / animal bite, the rabies vaccine alone is not enough. An RIG that is injected into the dog bite wounds is needed: RIG is life saving. But the country suffers from a severe shortage of RIG, and it is only used for bites that bleed, not for a lick on a scratch, which could cause rabies too, says Aniruddha Belsare, assistant professor of disease ecology at Auburn University, U.S. "Most public health hospitals do not even have doctors, leave alone RIG for bite victims," he says, forcing families to run from pillar to post to try and obtain it. RIG is also prohibitively expensive: costing anywhere between ₹5,000 and ₹20,000. As a result, dog bite victims, mainly children under 15 (forming 40% of cases in India), are taken to local quacks who use substances such as chilli powder and chalk to 'cure' the disease, Dr. Belsare says.

RIG apart, even ARV, is in short supply. "We need 60 million doses of ARV vaccinations. But India produces only 50 million, out of which 15 million are

exported," he adds.

Hearteningly, recently, two novel rabies monoclonal antibodies have been produced in India. RmAbs are cheaper than human rabies immunoglobulin, but being new drugs, are currently under pharmacovigilance and are yet to be included in the national guidelines, says Dr. Sudarshan, who is also the founder president and mentor of the Association for Prevention and Control of Rabies in India.

Tackling the source: Even though India has one of the highest populations globally of free-ranging dogs (FRD) and the highest incidence of dog-mediated human rabies, it "only deploys Catch-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release for FRD control as a humane alternative to lethal methods, without evidence of it working successfully," the *One Health* paper states.

So what is the solution? "My advice would be that dog lovers, who feed strays on the roads, should fully support 20 dogs in their area, have them neutered and regularly vaccinated," says Dr. Belsare. Every city, municipality, gram panchayat has to ensure a dog bite is attended to with PEP and also that families are compensated for the expenses they bear, he says. Dr. Tiwari adds that we need "good quality shelters, with closed and enclosed spaces for homeless dogs." Increasing awareness about washing wounds from animals and seeking immediate medical help, ensuring the vaccine and immunoglobulin are available and speeding up processes to make cheaper, indigenous drugs available, are all crucial. (divya.gandhi@thehindu.co.in) (yasmeen.afshan@thehindu.co.in)

THE GIST

Rabies is endemic to India, with the main reservoir of the virus being dogs, and the poorest, the majority of the patients. Days, weeks or months after a rabid dog bite, if the victim is not vaccinated, death is inevitable. The symptoms begin with paralysis from the feet upwards, typically followed by cardio-respiratory failure that finally strikes the victims down.

Doctors note that when it comes to a small bleed or severe dog / animal bite, the rabies vaccine alone is not enough. An RIG that is injected into the dog bite wounds is needed. But the country suffers from a severe shortage of RIG.

Increasing awareness about washing wounds from animals and seeking immediate medical help, ensuring the vaccine and immunoglobulin are available across the length and breadth of the country and speeding up processes to make cheaper, indigenous drugs available, are all crucial.

Why Rabies Persists as a Major Public Health Problem in India

1. Disease of Poverty and Marginalisation

- Rabies disproportionately affects:
- Daily wage workers
- Waste collectors
- Rural and remote populations
- Children below 15 years (≈40% of cases)
- Limited awareness, delayed care-seeking, and dependence on informal healers make rabies a disease of the poorest, reinforcing health inequity.

2. Structural Gaps in Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

- Rabies becomes fatal once symptoms appear, yet timely PEP can fully prevent death. However, India faces multiple systemic failures:
- Low awareness of immediate wound washing (15 minutes with soap and water)
- Severe shortage of Rabies Immunoglobulin (RIG) — the most critical life-saving component
- High cost of RIG (₹5,000–₹20,000), forcing families into distress financing
- Incomplete vaccination: nearly half of dog-bite victims fail to complete ARV schedules
- Public hospitals often lack trained doctors, vaccines, or RIG
- These failures convert a preventable exposure into an inevitable death.



3. Health System Failures and Governance Deficit

Case studies cited in the article reveal:

- Refusal or delay of treatment in government hospitals
- Poor clinical seriousness towards dog-bite injuries
- Dependence on private hospitals at high out-of-pocket cost
- This reflects deeper weaknesses in primary healthcare responsiveness, accountability, and patient-centric service delivery (GS II).



The Stray Dog–Rabies Nexus

India has:

- ≈80 million free-roaming dogs
- ≈20 million dog bites annually
- The principal control strategy — Catch–Neuter–Vaccinate–Release (CNVR) — is implemented unevenly, inadequately funded, and weakly monitored.
- The Supreme Court of India (November 2025) directed States to remove stray dogs from sensitive public spaces and place them in shelters after sterilisation and vaccination. However:
- Municipal capacity is limited

- Shelters are insufficient and poorly maintained
- The policy debate is polarised between animal welfare and public health
- The absence of evidence-based dog population management continues to fuel human rabies.



Economic Dimensions of Rabies

Rabies illustrates how poverty precedes illness:

- Pet owners unable to vaccinate dogs due to cost
- Victims unable to afford RIG or transport to hospitals
- Families pushed into poverty due to treatment expenses or death of earning members
- High out-of-pocket health expenditure worsens India's human development indicators (GS III).

Emerging Solutions and Missed Opportunities

Positive Developments

- Indigenous rabies monoclonal antibodies (RmAbs) developed in India
- Lower cost compared to human RIG
- Potential to transform rabies management once included in national guidelines

Persistent Gaps

- Limited ARV production (≈50 million doses vs need of 60 million)
- Export of vaccines despite domestic shortages
- Slow regulatory and pharmacovigilance processes

Way Forward (High-Value Answer Enrichment)

Universal access to PEP

- Free ARV and RIG at all government health facilities
- Emergency dog-bite response protocols

Strengthen dog population management

- Scientifically monitored CNVR
- Well-funded municipal shelters
- Community-based responsibility for feeding, neutering, and vaccination

Accelerate indigenous innovation

- Fast-track inclusion of RmAbs in national guidelines

- Scale domestic vaccine production

Awareness and behavioural change

- School-level education on animal bites
- Community campaigns on wound washing and early reporting

Compensation and accountability

- Financial support to victims
- Fix responsibility on local bodies for failures

Conclusion

Rabies in India is not a medical mystery but a governance failure. That a disease with near-zero survival after symptom onset continues to kill thousands reflects systemic neglect of the poor, weak public health infrastructure, and inadequate urban-animal governance. Eliminating rabies requires integrating public health, veterinary services, municipal capacity, and social awareness under a One Health approach. Until then, rabies will remain a cruel reminder that preventable deaths persist where equity, access, and accountability are absent.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Rabies in India, consider the following statements:

1. Rabies is caused by a virus that spreads primarily through the bloodstream to reach the brain.
2. Once clinical symptoms of rabies appear, survival is almost impossible.
3. Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) includes wound washing, anti-rabies vaccine, and rabies immunoglobulin.
4. India accounts for the highest number of rabies-related human deaths globally.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans : a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "Rabies is not merely a health issue but a governance and equity challenge." Examine the statement in the context of India's public health system.

The year 2025 was widely expected to mark a diplomatic resurgence for India after the political churn of the 2024 general elections. With PM poised to resume active diplomacy, optimism prevailed over trade agreements, regional stabilisation, and strategic partnerships — particularly with the United States, China, and Russia. However, as analysed by Suhasini Haidar, these expectations largely dissipated, exposing structural vulnerabilities in India's foreign policy across economic security, energy security, global strategic stability, and neighbourhood management. The year thus serves as a cautionary tale on the limits of symbolism-driven diplomacy in an increasingly transactional world order.

A year of dissipating promises for Indian foreign policy

The year 2025 began as one of considerable promise for Indian foreign policy. After 2024, a year that was dominated by national elections and political recalibration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was expected to resume active diplomacy, with a full calendar of bilateral visits and multilateral engagements. Relations with the United States were expected to be reset under the second term of the Trump administration, continuing from Donald Trump's first term. Long-running Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) negotiations with partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union (EU) seemed imminent, with commitments to complete them by the end of the year.

Across the geopolitical divide, a new engagement appeared to be taking shape with China after years of a stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), especially after Mr. Modi's visit to China. Economic ties with Russia were also at a high point: India's oil imports from Russia had surged to \$52 billion, with U.S. and EU sanctions pressure having eased. Regionally, the government attempted to repair frayed relationships by reaching out to the Yunus administration in Bangladesh with a visit, in December 2024, by the Foreign Secretary, Vikram Misri, sending External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Pakistan (October 2024), engaging the Taliban leadership in Dubai (January 2025), and preparing for regional visits from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and others. Five years after the Balakot strikes and the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir, New Delhi was also projecting confidence in its security posture and its deterrent capacity for terrorism from Pakistan.

However, many of those expectations for 2025 dissipated by the end of the year. India's foreign policy planners found themselves wrestling with profound challenges across four interconnected domains: economic security, energy security, global strategic stability and regional security.

Economic and energy security

Instead of resetting India-U.S. ties, 2025 proved to be the most difficult year of this century. Actions by the Trump administration on tariffs, immigration and sanctions pushed trust levels back by decades. Washington's decision to levy a steep 25% reciprocal tariff on Indian goods hit key labour-intensive sectors such as apparel, gems and jewellery, and seafood. This followed from the Trump first term, where India's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade privileges were withdrawn.

To compound matters, the U.S. introduced a 25% surcharge on Indian imports of Russian oil, effectively making India the most heavily tariffed trading partner. Even if a forthcoming BTA softens the blow, the losses in contracts mean that factory-line closures and the retrenchment of workers remain. Immigration restrictions, particularly on H-1B visas, further undermined remittances, a key pillar of India's foreign exchange inflows. Of all the trade deals on the anvil, India signed FTAs with the U.K., Oman and New Zealand. But the big prizes that leaders had committed to signing in 2025, with the U.S. and the EU, are still pending.

Ties with China and Russia remained tenuous despite the iconic photo-moment of Mr.



Suhasini Haidar

Modi-President Xi-President Putin holding hands at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit (September 2025) and the Modi-Putin bear hug on the tarmac of New Delhi airport earlier this month. While India-China flight-visa-pilgrimage links were restored, more fundamental security guarantees for the LAC were not. Neither have economic investment regulations been removed. The hours-long detention of an Indian air passenger from Arunachal Pradesh at Shanghai (November 2025) has raised new concerns.

After three years of resisting western pressure over Russian Ural energy imports, New Delhi appeared to bend, after a new wave of U.S. sanctions. Whether India will be compelled to zero out its Ural imports — similar to how it halted Iranian and Venezuelan oil imports under U.S. pressure in the past — remains uncertain, but the choice carries economic and reputational costs. The India-Russia summit, that ended without any major agreements in strategic spheres such as defence, energy, nuclear and space cooperation, disappointed all the hype preceding it.

Global and regional security

A central challenge for Indian strategists in 2025 has been the rise in global unpredictability. In its 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), Washington identified China and Russia as "revisionist powers" seeking to undermine U.S. influence and global stability. In contrast, the 2025 NSS presents a softened, more ambiguous stance — avoiding direct mentions of China's aggression in the South China Sea and toward Taiwan, and treating Russia with more caution than criticism. The 2017 NSS hailed India's rise as a "leading global power" and "major defense partner", but the 2025 version offers only a limited articulation of India's role, primarily in the context of Indo-Pacific security and critical minerals. Given the short shrift to traditional U.S. allies in Europe and Asia, any deeper alignment with Washington, as had earlier been envisaged, seems risky now. Mr. Trump's references to his meeting with Xi Jinping as a potential "G-2" only intensify concerns about India's position in the Asian power balance.

At the same time, global acceptance of the Gaza and Ukraine peace proposals — both of which critics argue favour the aggressors — signals a weakening of the international rules-based order. China's rollout of a framework for "Global Governance" reflects its ambition to shape an alternative international architecture. For India, this requires serious thought about its own vision for a future global order, especially as the UN's failures at controlling conflict grow.

India's immediate neighbourhood, which initially appeared stable in early 2025, became more volatile as the year progressed. The terror attack in Pahalgaon (April) was a grim reminder that even with the security crackdown in Jammu and Kashmir and past cross-border operations in 2016 and 2019, threats remain embedded. That terrorists came hundreds of kilometres inside the Valley to carry out the killings and escaped should merit serious introspection. India's retaliatory Operation Sindoor was militarily effective, but New Delhi's diplomatic campaign following the strike encountered setbacks. While countries condemned the terror attack, few openly supported India's cross-border response.

Persistent questions — particularly regarding speculation about the loss of Indian jets — damaged India's credibility, as the government neither confirmed nor denied the reports.

Complicating matters were claims that other countries supported Pakistan's military actions. While India set aside concerns over China's role in Pakistan Air Force strikes, ties with Türkiye and Azerbaijan have nose-dived. The announcement of a Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence pact was an additional blow to India's regional calculus.

Mr. Modi's declaration of a "new normal" after the Pahalgaon attack led to international worries over rapid escalation of the next conflict in South Asia. India's restrained handling of the Delhi blasts conspiracy (November 2025) eased some of those worries, but the broader issue remains: how will New Delhi respond to the next major attack, especially with Pakistan's political landscape increasingly shaped by the ultra-hawkish Field Marshal Asim Munir?

The 2024 regime-change protests in Bangladesh and the 2025 Gen-Z demonstrations in Nepal have created fragile transitional governments, reducing predictability in India's periphery. With elections in both countries scheduled for early 2026, New Delhi must prepare to engage with new leadership that is not necessarily positively disposed to it. With Bangladesh in particular, the end of the year has seen relations at their lowest ebb yet. The elections in Myanmar, on December 28, will be held on the Junta's terms, despite New Delhi's best attempts at fostering talks with the deposed NUG members and to ask for the more humane treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Lessons for 2026

Several lessons from 2025 stand out clearly. India must recognise the limits of performative diplomacy — warm embraces, highly publicised summits and symbolic gestures such as awards and leaders driving together in the same car do not necessarily translate into tangible gains. Performative aggression — threats to isolate or boycott countries only mean something if other countries join in. The government was sensible in shifting its projection of India as "Vishwaguru" (global teacher) during the G-20 year in 2023 to "Vishwamitra" (global friend). But it must now avoid slipping into the narrative of a "Vishwa-victim", blaming all others — American sanctions, Chinese manoeuvring, Pakistan's machinations, or the "ingratitude" of neighbouring states — for its disappointments.

New Delhi must stop being blind to its own double standards too — concerns over the lynching of a minority member in Bangladesh can only ring true only if the Modi government is prepared to condemn and stop similar attacks on minorities in India. The same is true for concerns about democracy and inclusive elections in the neighbourhood. If rising Islamism in the region is an issue, then how does the government sanguinely sup with the Taliban? In 2026, with a world turning increasingly transactional, India can only bring up principles if it follows them consistently, regardless of whether they pertain to ties with geopolitical powers, or its own neighbours.

suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

New Delhi confronts challenges that concern economic and energy security, global strategic stability, and regional security

Key Domains of Foreign Policy Stress in 2025

1. Economic and Trade Security: Strategic Dependence Exposed

- Instead of a reset, India–U.S. relations entered their most turbulent phase in decades under Donald Trump’s second administration:
- Imposition of 25% reciprocal tariffs on Indian exports damaged labour-intensive sectors (apparel, gems & jewellery, seafood).
- Additional 25% surcharge on Indian imports of Russian oil uniquely penalised India among major economies.
- Continued H-1B visa restrictions weakened remittance inflows — a critical component of India’s balance of payments.
- While India concluded FTAs with the U.K., Oman, and New Zealand, major promised agreements with the U.S. and the EU remained unrealised, revealing the gap between diplomatic intent and delivery.

2. Energy Security: Strategic Autonomy Under Pressure

- India’s pragmatic energy strategy — importing discounted Russian crude — came under renewed Western sanctions pressure. The uncertainty over whether India may be forced to reduce or eliminate Ural oil imports mirrors earlier capitulations on Iranian and Venezuelan oil.
- This raises concerns about India’s real strategic autonomy.
- The India–Russia summit, despite high symbolism, delivered no substantive breakthroughs in defence, nuclear, or space cooperation.
- Core issue: Strategic autonomy is constrained when economic and financial dependencies are asymmetric.

3. Global Strategic Instability: Shrinking Space for Middle Powers

- The evolving global order further complicated India’s calculus:
- The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy diluted earlier commitments to India as a “leading global power”.
- Ambiguity towards China and Russia, and talk of a potential U.S.–China “G-2”, risks marginalising middle powers like India.
- Weak international responses to conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine underscore the erosion of the rules-based order and the declining effectiveness of institutions like the United Nations.
- India is thus compelled to articulate a clearer vision of global governance, beyond balancing rhetoric.

4. Regional and Internal Security: Deterrence Without Consensus

- The Pahalgam terror attack (April 2025) exposed lingering vulnerabilities despite past operations (2016, 2019):
- India’s military response (Operation Sindoor) was tactically effective.

- Diplomatically, however, India failed to secure broad support for its cross-border action.
- Persistent ambiguity regarding aircraft losses weakened India's narrative credibility.

Additionally:

- Deteriorating ties with Türkiye and Azerbaijan.
- Saudi–Pakistan defence pact undercut India's regional assumptions.
- Growing instability in Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan has made the neighbourhood less predictable.

Critical Lessons Highlighted in the Article**A. Limits of Performative Diplomacy**

- High-visibility summits, symbolic gestures, and leader optics do not guarantee material outcomes.

B. Inconsistency Undermines Moral Authority

- India's concerns over minority rights and democracy in neighbouring states ring hollow without internal consistency.
- Engagement with the Taliban while criticising regional Islamism highlights selective principled diplomacy.

C. Risk of "Victimhood Narrative"

- Shifting from Vishwaguru to Vishwamitra was prudent, but drifting towards a "Vishwa-victim" narrative undermines agency and accountability.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy experience in 2025 underscores a fundamental truth: in a fragmented, transactional global order, symbolism without strategy yields diminishing returns. The challenges faced — from trade coercion and energy insecurity to neighbourhood volatility and global uncertainty — demand a recalibration rooted in realism, consistency, and institutional credibility.

As India moves into 2026, its diplomatic success will depend less on optics and more on aligning principles with practice, diversifying strategic dependencies, and crafting a coherent vision for both regional leadership and global governance. Only then can India convert aspiration into sustained influence.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : "India's foreign policy in 2025 exposed the limits of symbolism-driven diplomacy in an increasingly transactional global order." Critically examine.

India's aspiration to emerge as a global sporting power faces a serious credibility challenge due to its persistently high incidence of doping violations. According to data released by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) for 2024, India recorded 260 adverse analytical findings (AAFs), the highest in the world for the third consecutive year, with a positivity rate of 3.6%. As India prepares to host major international sporting events and eyes a future Olympic bid, the doping menace has become not just a sports integrity issue but a matter of national reputation and governance.

Scale and Nature of the Doping Problem

1. Alarming Global Position

- India topped the world in absolute doping cases, ahead of France and Italy.
- Despite being 7th in total tests conducted, India's positivity rate remains disproportionately high.
- This indicates a systemic problem, not merely a function of increased testing.

2. Mixed Trends in Recent Years

- Post-pandemic data shows fluctuating but consistently high AAF rates:
- 2022: 3.2%
- 2023: 3.8%
- 2024: 3.6%
- While National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) claims improvement in 2025 (1.5% positivity till mid-December), such short-term gains must be interpreted cautiously.

3. Ecosystem-Level Malaise

- Doping is not limited to individual athletes:
- Support staff and coaches have been suspended for abetment.
- Instances of athletes evading testers highlight weak enforcement and deterrence.
- Structural incentives such as:
- Government jobs under sports quota

Doping menace

India must make National Anti-Doping Agency well-funded and independent

One of the biggest impediments for India in achieving the status of a global sports power is strongly rooted in its dubious distinction of being the table topper in dope positive cases for the third consecutive year. As the country is set to host the 2029 World Police and Fire Games and the 2030 Centenary Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, the low-on-performance and high-on-doping trend may prove detrimental to its aspirations of bidding for the 2036 Olympic Games. As in the 2024 figures by the global watchdog, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), India logged 260 adverse analytical findings (AAFs) out of 7,113 tests, at 3.6%. France (91) and Italy (85) were second and third in terms of numbers. India, far behind China (24,214), was seventh in terms of overall testing figures. Nevertheless, the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) looks at the brighter side of the picture, claiming that the higher positivity rate is due to bigger testing numbers. In the post-COVID-19 era, the AAFs and total number of samples were 125 and 3,865 (at 3.2%), respectively, in 2022, and 213 and 5,606 (at 3.8%), respectively, in 2023.

NADA takes pride in stating that up to December 16 this year, it has carried out 7,068 tests with fewer number of positive cases (110), at 1.5%. It has adopted several measures, including awareness drives and encouraging the use of 'Know Your Medicine' app, to curb doping. There are many instances of NADA officials pursuing athletes and them trying to escape to avoid testing. Such cat-and-mouse stories point a finger at the sorry state of affairs and a deeper malaise within the sports ecosystem that includes support staff, who have been suspended for abetting doping. Even as the Sports Ministry is addressing the concern, it acknowledges that government jobs through sports quota are a big lure for the athletes to take shortcuts. It cannot be denied that lucrative cash awards for big international medals may also be prompting elite athletes to take banned performance-enhancing drugs, despite the risks of adverse effects on one's health, over the years. India has passed the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025, to add muscle to its anti-doping efforts. Whether doping is triggered by need or greed or ignorance, the country, under pressure from the International Olympic Committee over the issue, should make NADA a truly independent entity and provide more funds to put up a stronger fight against this menace, which has kept pace with modern scientific developments.

- High cash rewards for medals unintentionally promote shortcuts over sustained performance development.

Governance and Institutional Challenges

A. Lack of Institutional Independence

- NADA functions under executive control, raising concerns about:
- Conflict of interest
- Political pressure
- Inadequate autonomy in investigation and enforcement

B. Resource and Capacity Constraints

- Doping methods are increasingly sophisticated, driven by advances in biotechnology.
- Testing, research, intelligence gathering, and education require substantial and sustained funding.

C. International Pressure and Reputational Costs

- India faces scrutiny from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- Persistent doping scandals could:
- Undermine India's Olympic hosting ambitions
- Weaken its soft power and sports diplomacy
- Affect athlete participation in international competitions

Recent Policy Response: A Step, Not a Solution

- The National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025 strengthens the legal framework, signalling political intent. However:
- Legal reform without institutional reform risks becoming symbolic.
- Enforcement quality, independence, and preventive education remain decisive factors.

Way Forward

- To address the doping menace comprehensively, India must:
- Ensure full statutory and functional independence of NADA, on the lines of autonomous regulators.
- Increase financial allocations for advanced testing, research, and international collaboration.
- Shift from a punitive-only approach to a preventive ecosystem, including:
 - Athlete education at junior levels
 - Mandatory certification of coaches and support staff
- Rationalise incentive structures in sports to reduce perverse motivations.
- Strengthen whistle-blower mechanisms and intelligence-based testing.

Conclusion

Doping is not merely an ethical lapse by individual athletes but a reflection of deeper governance failures within the sports ecosystem. As India seeks to host marquee global sporting events and position itself as a serious Olympic contender, credibility, integrity, and athlete welfare must take precedence over medal tallies. Making the National Anti-Doping Agency genuinely independent and adequately funded is not optional—it is a strategic necessity. Only a transparent, well-resourced, and future-ready anti-doping regime can protect India's sporting ambitions from being undermined by this persistent menace.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Despite legal reforms and increased testing, India continues to record a high number of doping violations. Examine the institutional and governance challenges faced by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA). Suggest measures to make India's anti-doping framework more credible and effective. **(150 words)**

The urban future with cities as dynamic ecosystems

Cities stand at the epicentre of global discourse, driving development, policymaking, science, and technology. Yet, amidst all the planning and progress, we often overlook the most fundamental element: the diverse people who inhabit these urban spaces and make them home. The disconnect between the cities we design, the cities we wish to inhabit, and the cities we live in is the critical missing link in our tale of interconnected realities.

The invisible tax of exclusion

When individuals migrate, there is an unspoken expectation of assimilation, often summarised as “do what the Romans do”. Language emerges as the primary, non-negotiable standard for integration, necessary for communication and alignment with the city’s linguistic identity. The failure to meet this linguistic standard often results in an invisible tax paid by “new residents” and migrants from different linguistic zones.

This marginalisation reflects a systemic tension between the vibrant, multi-lingual reality of major metropolitan hubs and the emotional, cultural and political expectations placed upon those seeking a better life within them. The core issue is about the validation of belonging within the city that a resident calls home.

This “linguistic tax” translates directly into economic disadvantage. Navigating a job search, negotiating complex housing agreements, or accessing essential government benefits or health care becomes a bureaucratic maze when official documents and primary communication channels are monolingual.

This cultural and linguistic friction serves as an



Aruna Bhattacharya

is a medical anthropologist and a public health expert specialising in urban health systems, and is based in Bengaluru

Merely designing better infrastructure will not deliver the desired outcome if the human element of belonging is ignored

economic roadblock. It often channels migrants into the informal economy, where exploitation is higher and opportunities for formal social mobility are curtailed. Ironically, the city, which relies heavily on the labour, skills and taxes contributed by these new residents, structurally denies them full and equal access to the very opportunities and services they were promised. The failure to integrate them linguistically and culturally is a self-inflicted wound that undermines the long-term social and economic resilience of the city itself.

The fundamental flaw in modern urban planning is the assumption of a static, homogenous user base. Urban infrastructure – the actual blueprint of the designed city – is often conceived for the established resident, rendering the new resident invisible. We design ‘smart’ cities, but they are often only smart for those who already speak the right language and possess the right documents.

This invisibility is compounded by a lack of culturally diverse governance. When local bodies and planning committees fail to reflect on the cosmopolitan reality of the metropolis, homogeneous perspectives inevitably dominate plans for profoundly heterogeneous spaces. Planning for schools, transport hubs or public parks often misses the mark when planners do not recognise, or account for, the needs of recent, diverse demographic shifts.

Designing cities ‘for all’

The urban future we wish to reimagine must be layered. Simply designing better infrastructure will not deliver the desired outcome if the human element of belonging is ignored. Cities are not

static blueprints; they are dynamic ecosystems. We need to stop viewing them as spaces defined by fixed, hard boundaries and start seeing them as fluid entities with an infinite capacity to expand, reconfigure and include.

To proactively bridge the cultural divide, city planners must anticipate potential friction – the clash between the ‘known’ and the ‘new’, the ‘us’ and the ‘them’. A small, targeted investment in cultural sensitisation training for public-facing staff could be the essential ingredient. This training is not just about politeness; it is about operational efficiency and upholding democratic rights.

For any truly transformative change to succeed, we must prepare for temporary commotion on the path to greater development and a better social outcome.

A city must be imagined, designed and governed with all the inhabitants who call it home: those who were born here, those who have lived here for decades, and those who will arrive tomorrow. We must design a city that is dynamic enough to embrace future growth, welcome diversity and encourage amalgamation and regeneration.

The missing link

For an inclusive, sustainable, urban future, let us commit to designing cities – not just for the infrastructure they contain but for the people that they are built to serve. The true missing link in the tale of our interconnected realities is empathy: the recognition that the comfort, security and validated belonging of the lived experience is the ultimate measure of successful urban design.

GS Paper 1 : Social Issues

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Urban planning in India continues to operate on the assumption of a static and homogeneous population. Critically examine this statement in the context of increasing internal migration and cultural diversity in Indian cities. (150 words)

Context :

Urbanisation is one of the defining transformations of the 21st century. Cities today are not merely centres of economic activity but complex socio-cultural and political spaces that shape human well-being, equity, and identity. The article “The urban future with cities as dynamic ecosystems” foregrounds a critical yet often neglected dimension of urban development — the lived experience of migrants and new residents, particularly through the lens of linguistic and cultural exclusion. It challenges the dominant infrastructure-centric model of urban planning and calls for a more people-centric, inclusive, and adaptive urban governance framework.

Core Argument of the Article

The central thesis of the article is that modern cities suffer from a structural disconnect between design and reality. While cities depend heavily on migrant labour and diversity for growth, they are planned and governed as if they serve a static, homogeneous population. This mismatch produces an “invisible tax” on migrants, especially in the form of linguistic exclusion, which undermines social equity, economic mobility, and democratic access.

Key Issues Highlighted

1. Linguistic Exclusion as a Structural Barrier

- Language is presented not merely as a cultural marker but as an instrument of power and access. Monolingual governance systems:
- Restrict access to jobs, housing, healthcare, and welfare.
- Increase transaction costs for migrants.
- Push workers into the informal economy, reinforcing vulnerability and exploitation.
- This directly links to GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice) and GS Paper I (Urbanisation & Migration).

2. Economic Consequences of Cultural Friction

- The article establishes a clear causal chain:
- Linguistic and cultural exclusion → Informality → Reduced social mobility → Urban inequality.
- This is a classic case of institutional exclusion, where the city benefits from migrant labour but denies equal participation — a contradiction that weakens long-term urban resilience.
- Relevant to GS Paper III (Inclusive Growth, Informal Sector, Labour Issues).

3. Flawed Assumptions in Urban Planning

- Urban planning is criticised for assuming a static and “ideal” user, ignoring demographic churn. As a result:
- Smart cities become “selectively smart”.
- Infrastructure excludes those without linguistic or documentary capital.
- Public services fail to respond to evolving urban realities.
- This reflects a deeper governance failure — planning without representation, linking to GS Paper II (Urban Governance, Local Bodies).

4. Democratic Deficit in Urban Governance

- The absence of cultural diversity in decision-making bodies leads to:
- Policies shaped by dominant groups.
- Invisibility of migrant needs.
- Misalignment between policy intent and social reality.
- This reinforces the argument that urban inclusion is not just social policy but democratic necessity.

Value Addition

- Right to the City (Henri Lefebvre): Cities must ensure participation, access, and belonging to all residents, not just legal or cultural insiders.
- Sustainable Development Goal 11: Inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities.
- Urban Commons: Language access, public services, and civic spaces as shared resources.
- Human-Centric Urbanism: Moving beyond infrastructure to dignity, empathy, and lived experience.

Way Forward Suggested in the Article

- Recognising cities as dynamic ecosystems, not fixed entities.
- Anticipatory governance that prepares for cultural and demographic change.
- Cultural and linguistic sensitisation of frontline public officials.
- Inclusive planning processes reflecting urban diversity.
- Acceptance of short-term disruption for long-term social cohesion.

Conclusion

The article makes a compelling case that the true measure of a successful city is not its skyline or smart infrastructure, but the degree of belonging it offers to its people. By exposing the hidden costs of exclusion and the limitations of technocratic urbanism, it urges policymakers to re-centre empathy, inclusiveness, and adaptability in urban design. For India — a country experiencing rapid urban migration — reimagining cities as living, inclusive ecosystems is not optional but essential for sustainable and democratic urban futures.
