CURRENT AFFAIRS — 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

Wednesday, 23 September 2026 • Asia/Kolkata (IST) • Prelims + Mains GS-wise digest

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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR UPSC CSE

TODAY AT A GLANCE — 10 THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Multilateral lender raises India's FY27 GDP growth forecast to 7.0% from 6.6%
- Q1 FY27 growth came in at 7.8%; retail inflation seen at 5.0% this year
- RBI absorbs ₹71,971 crore through a variable rate reverse repo auction
- Exercise Nomadic Elephant 2026: India and Mongolia train at Pithoragarh till 3 October
- Supreme Court: no criminal consequence for a conscientious refusal to sing the national song
- Supreme Court faults 'mechanically issued' electoral roll notices to 33 lakh Delhi voters
- India-New Zealand FTA enters into force on 20 October 2026 with 100% duty-free access
- Visegrad Group backs India's UN Security Council permanent membership bid
- Global water assessment: 34% of India's monitored groundwater stations below normal in 2025
- Canal-top solar potential pegged at about 131 GW, needing no additional land

SECTION A • GS-III: SCI-TECH, ECONOMY & SECURITY

Growth forecast for FY27 raised to 7% on strong first-quarter momentum

[ECONOMY] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Indian Economy: growth, mobilisation of resources. Prelims: ADB, Asian Development Outlook, fiscal year vs calendar year forecasts, GDP vs GVA.
Context	The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, in its **Asian Development Outlook (ADO) September 2026**, raised India's growth forecast for **FY27 (2026-27)** to **7.0%**, up from the **6.6%** projected in July. The revision follows a first quarter that beat expectations.
Key Facts	■ **FY27 GDP growth** revised up by **0.4 percentage points** to **7.0%**; **FY28** trimmed to **7.1%** from **7.3%**. ■ **Q1 FY27** real GDP grew **7.8% year-on-year**, the trigger for the upgrade. ■ **Retail inflation** projected at **5.0%** for FY27 (down from **5.2%**) and **4.0%** for FY28. ■ Drivers cited: **robust investment demand**, **resilient consumption**, strong **manufacturing and services**, and sustained **capital inflows**. ■ **ADB** is a regional development bank headquartered in **Manila, Philippines**, established in **1966**; India is a founding member and among its largest borrowers.
Way Fwd	Sustaining 7%-plus growth needs private capex to broaden beyond a few sectors and export demand to hold up against global tariff turbulence.
Concept	**Real GDP** is output valued at constant prices; **nominal GDP** at current prices. **GDP at market prices = GVA at basic prices + product taxes - product subsidies**. A **fiscal year** in India runs **1 April to 31 March**, so FY27 means 2026-27.

RBI absorbs ₹71,971 crore of surplus liquidity through VRRR auction

[ECONOMY] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Indian Economy: monetary policy, banking. Prelims: LAF, repo and reverse repo, VRRR and VRR, call money rate, SDF and MSF.
Context	The **Reserve Bank of India** absorbed **₹71,971 crore** against a notified amount of **₹75,000 crore** in a **Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR)** auction, continuing its effort to drain surplus banking-system liquidity.
Key Facts	■ Under a **VRRR**, banks park surplus funds with the RBI for a fixed tenor and the rate is discovered through **auction**, not fixed in advance. ■ It is a **liquidity absorption** tool under the **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF)**; **VRR (Variable Rate Repo)** does the opposite by injecting liquidity. ■ Objective: pull the **weighted average call rate (WACR)** closer to the **repo rate**, since excess liquidity pushes overnight rates below the policy rate. ■ Undersubscription (**₹71,971 crore** against **₹75,000 crore**) signals banks prefer to keep funds deployable rather than lock them in. ■ The RBI's operating target of monetary policy is the **WACR** in the overnight segment.
Way Fwd	Calibrated absorption keeps transmission intact without starving credit; the test is doing it without spiking short-term rates around tax and festival outflows.
Concept	**LAF** lets banks borrow (repo) or park (reverse repo) overnight funds with the RBI. The **corridor** has **MSF** as the ceiling, **repo rate** in the middle and **SDF** as the floor. **SDF** needs no collateral.

Canal-top solar offers a land-free path to about 131 GW of clean power

[SCI-TECH] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Science and Technology, renewable energy, conservation. Prelims: solar photovoltaics, bifacial modules, floating solar, PM Surya Sarovar Yojana.
Context	With land acquisition the biggest brake on utility-scale solar, **canal-top photovoltaics (CTPV)** is being revisited. Mounting panels over irrigation canals generates power and cuts evaporation at the same time.
Key Facts	■ A **2024 assessment** pegs India's combined **canal-top plus canal-bank potential at about 131 GW**. ■ India's **first canal-top solar plant** came up at **Mehsana, Gujarat, in 2012** on the **Narmada canal** network. ■ A **1-MW** canal-top array there saves roughly **9 million litres of water a year** and generates about **1.6 million units** of electricity annually. ■ A **20-MW** project in **Punjab** avoided the use of roughly **100 acres** of land. ■ High-potential States: **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab**. For canals wider than **30 m**, **vertical bifacial** panels along banks are suggested. ■ **PM Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY)** targets **5,000 MW** of floating solar and is expected to extend support to canal-top projects.
Way Fwd	Viability gap funding and standardised structural designs are needed because elevated mounting makes CTPV costlier per MW than ground-mounted solar.
Concept	India's **non-fossil capacity target** and the **National Solar Mission** under **NAPCC** drive solar deployment. **Bifacial modules** capture light on both faces; **evaporation suppression** is the co-benefit that distinguishes CTPV from ordinary ground-mounted solar.

Canal-top Solar (CTPV): the numbers

- **131 GW** — estimated national CTPV + canal-bank potential
- **9 mn litres** — water saved every year by a 1-MW canal-top array
- **1.6 mn units** — electricity a year from that same 1-MW array
- **~100 acres** — land saved by a single 20-MW canal-top project

First project: Mehsana, Gujarat (2012) • no extra land needed

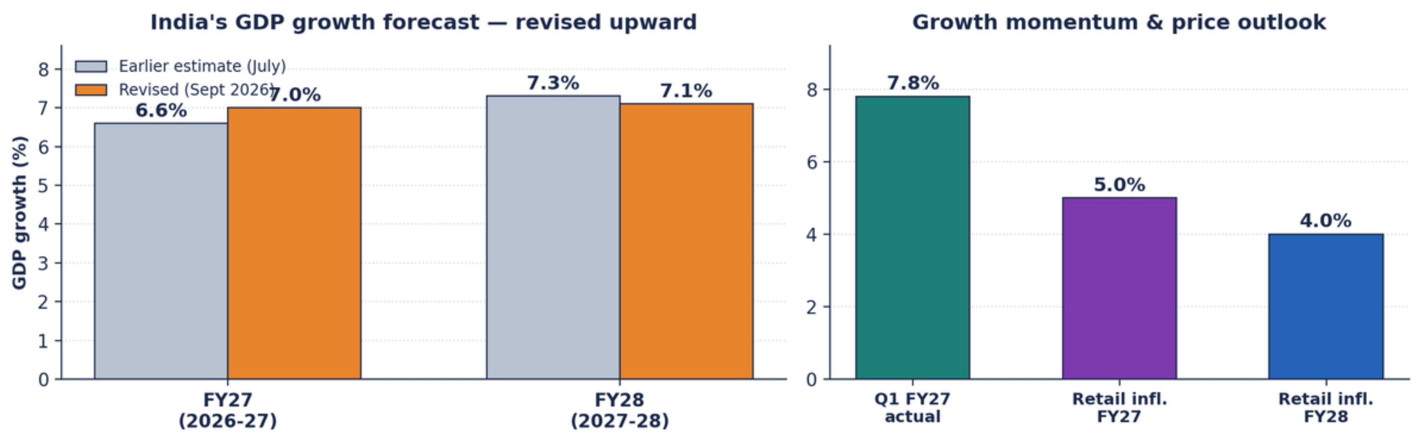
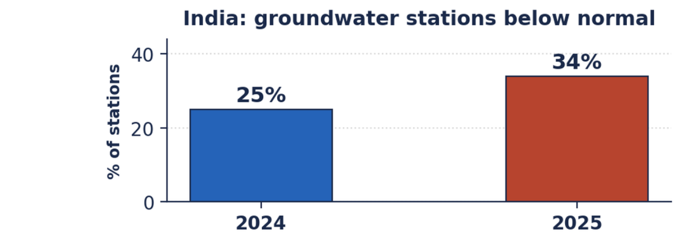


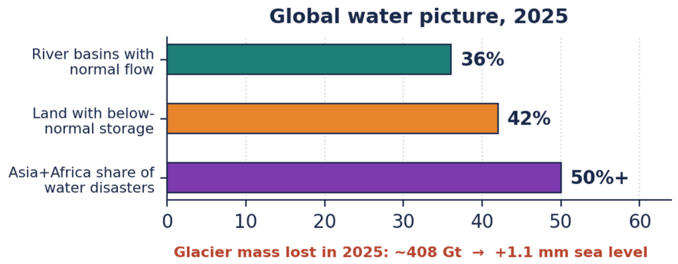
Chart — Growth forecast for FY27 raised to 7% on strong first-quarter momentum

Global water assessment flags deepening groundwater stress in India

[ENVIRONMENT] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3**

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Environment: conservation, climate change, water resources. Prelims: WMO, terrestrial water storage, glacier mass balance, river discharge.
Context	The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** released the **State of Global Water Resources 2025** report on **17 September 2026**. It records an erratic global water cycle, a fourth straight year of glacier loss, and groundwater that is not recovering even where rivers ran full.
Key Facts	■ **2025** was among the **driest years in 35 years** for river discharge: only **36%** of global river-basin area saw normal flows. ■ **42%** of global land area recorded **below-normal terrestrial water storage** in 2025, continuing a decline since **2014-16**. ■ All major glaciated regions lost mass for the **fourth consecutive year**; **2025** loss was about **408 gigatonnes**, adding roughly **1.1 mm** to sea level. ■ **India**: **34%** of monitored groundwater stations were below or much-below normal in **2025**, up from **25%** in **2024**. ■ Deficits persisted **2022-2025**, especially in **north-western India**, with **over-abstraction** the key driver; deep reserves did not recover despite above-normal discharge in the **Ganga, Godavari, Krishna and Indus**. ■ **Asia and Africa** together account for over **50%** of recorded water-related extreme events and over **80%** of associated deaths in the previous five years.
Way Fwd	Aquifer-level participatory management, crop realignment in over-drawn belts and real-time monitoring must replace the assumption that a good monsoon automatically refills deep aquifers.
Concept	**Terrestrial water storage** is all water held on and under land, tracked by gravimetric satellites. **Glacier mass balance** is accumulation minus ablation. **WMO** is a **UN specialised agency** headquartered in **Geneva**, established in **1950**.

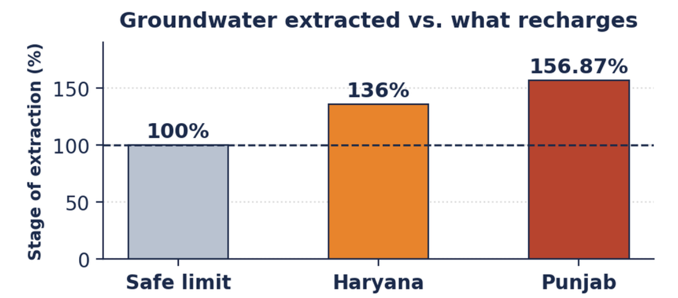




Punjab's groundwater extraction touches 156.87% of what recharges

[ENVIRONMENT] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3**

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Agriculture and environment: cropping patterns, irrigation, subsidies. Prelims: Central Ground Water Board, stage of extraction, over-exploited blocks.
Context	A **Central Ground Water Board** assessment places Punjab's **stage of groundwater extraction at 156.87%** of the annual extractable resource, and the crisis is now visibly widening the wealth gap between small and large farmers.
Key Facts	■ **115 of 153** assessment units in Punjab are classified **over-exploited**; irrigation consumes roughly **25 billion cubic metres** a year. ■ Drivers: **subsidised electricity** that makes pumping nearly free, and **assured procurement** of paddy that locks in the **rice-wheat** cycle. ■ As water tables fall, smallholders must **buy water** from larger landowners with deeper bores, transferring wealth upward. ■ **Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao** pays farmers cash for unused pumping units, but enrolment has stayed low. ■ **Crop Diversification Programme** under **PM-RKVY** and the State's water regulation framework are the other policy levers in play.
Way Fwd	Shift the subsidy from extraction to access: pay for water saved, collectivise irrigation assets, and make sure benefits reach tenant cultivators, not only pump owners.
Concept	**Stage of extraction = (annual groundwater extraction / annual extractable resource) x 100**. Above **100%** a unit is **over-exploited**; **90-100%** is **critical** and **70-90%** **semi-critical**. Groundwater is a **State subject** but regulated through **CGWA** under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.



Punjab's water stress at a glance

- **115 / 153** — assessment units over-exploited
- **~25 bcm** — groundwater used for irrigation a year
- **Rice-wheat** — cycle locked in by assured procurement

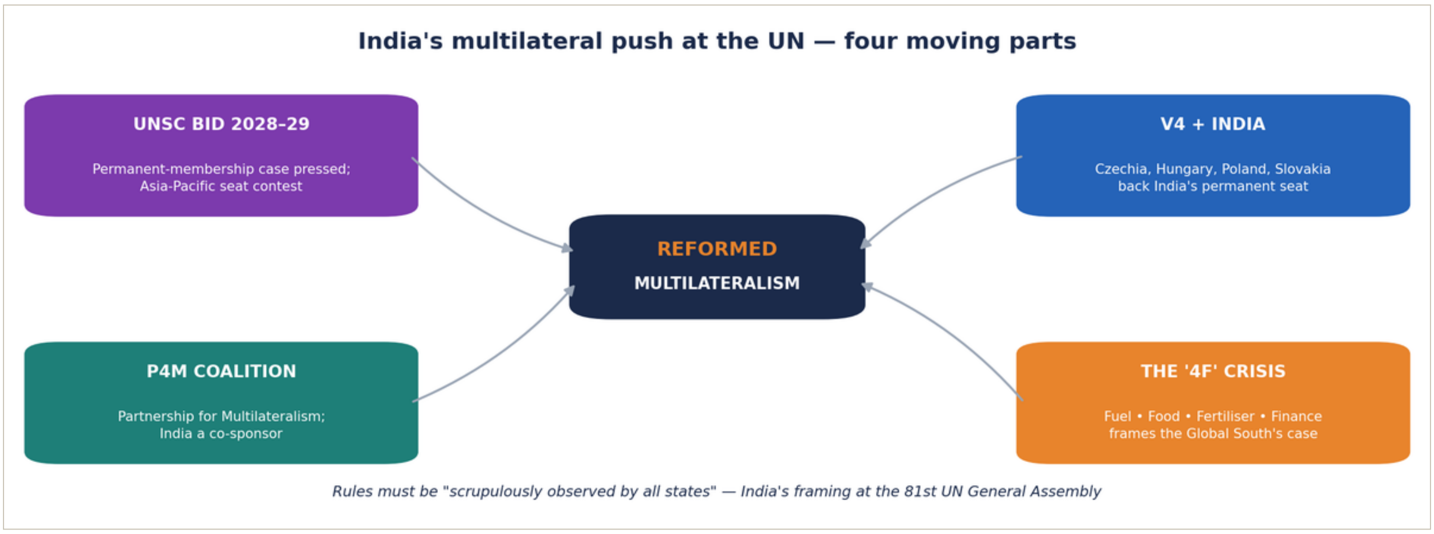


Chart — Visegrad Group backs India's UN Security Council bid as reform push intensifies

Exercise Nomadic Elephant 2026: India and Mongolia train at Pithoragarh

[DEFENCE] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS3**

Syllabus Linkage	GS3 - Security: defence exercises and interoperability. GS2 - India and its neighbourhood, extended neighbourhood. Prelims: bilateral exercise names and partner countries.
Context	The **18th edition of Exercise Nomadic Elephant**, the India-Mongolia joint military exercise, began on **21 September 2026** at the **Foreign Training Node, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand**, and runs until **3 October 2026**.
Key Facts	■ A **platoon-level bilateral** exercise with **45 personnel** from each side, held **alternately** in India and Mongolia. ■ The previous edition was held in **Ulaanbaatar** in **May-June 2025**. ■ Focus: **counter-insurgency operations** in semi-urban and mountainous terrain, and operations under a **UN mandate**. ■ Drills include **cordon and search**, **room intervention**, **special heliborne operations**, **cyber security**, and **drone and counter-drone** employment. ■ **Mongolia** is a landlocked Central Asian partner; India's engagement spans energy, mining, culture and Buddhist diplomacy.
Way Fwd	Small-format exercises like this build interoperability cheaply; the value lies in carrying the drone and counter-drone lessons into India's own border formations.
Concept	Remember India's bilateral exercise pairings for Prelims: **Nomadic Elephant** with **Mongolia**, **Garuda Shakti** with **Indonesia**, **Mitra Shakti** with **Sri Lanka**, **Yudh Abhyas** with the **USA**, and **Dharma Guardian** with **Japan**.

SECTION B • DATA POINT OF THE DAY

7.0% **India's GDP growth forecast for FY27 (2026-27)**

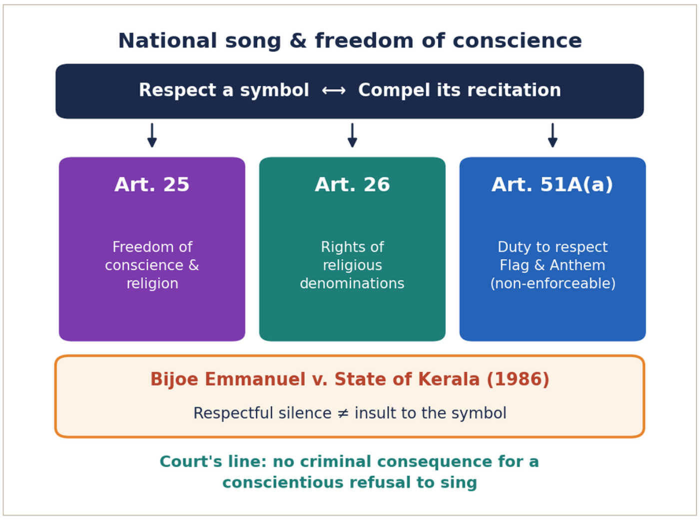
Revised up from **6.6%** after **Q1 FY27** growth of **7.8%**; **FY28** trimmed to **7.1%** and retail inflation seen at **5.0%** this year.

SECTION C • GS-II: POLITY, GOVERNANCE & IR

No criminal consequence for a conscientious refusal to sing the national song

[POLITY] **COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2**

Syllabus Linkage	GS2 - Indian Constitution: fundamental rights, fundamental duties, judiciary. Prelims: Articles 25, 26, 51A(a); national song vs national anthem.
Context	Hearing a petition against the compulsory singing of **Vande Mataram**, a three-judge Bench of the **Supreme Court** told the Centre it expects **no criminal consequence** for a person who declines on religious or conscientious grounds, and sought the government's formal position.
Key Facts	■ The challenge is to the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026** and **Union Home Ministry circulars** issued in **January and July 2026**. ■ The petitioner is the Carnatic vocalist **T.M. Krishna**; the Bench was headed by **CJI Surya Kant**. ■ The Court leaned on **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)**, which protected students who stood respectfully but did not sing the national anthem. ■ Core reasoning: nobody can be made to **infract Articles 25 and 26** and then face **criminal prosecution** for it. ■ **Vande Mataram**, from **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath**, was adopted as the **national song** on **24 January 1950**, with equal status to the national anthem but **no separate legal penalty** attached historically. ■ Separately, the **Karnataka Governor** has asked the State to reconsider a **8 September** order limiting the rendition to **two stanzas**, raising a **Centre-State** question over national symbols.
Way Fwd	Fundamental duties are meant to inspire, not to prosecute; the workable line is to encourage participation while keeping respectful silence outside the reach of penal law.
Concept	**Article 25** gives freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, subject to public order, morality and health. **Article 51A(a)**, a **fundamental duty**, is **non-justiciable** and was inserted by the **42nd Amendment, 1976** on the **Swaran Singh Committee's** recommendation.



Creating an offence is a legislative function, not an executive one

[POLITY] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2

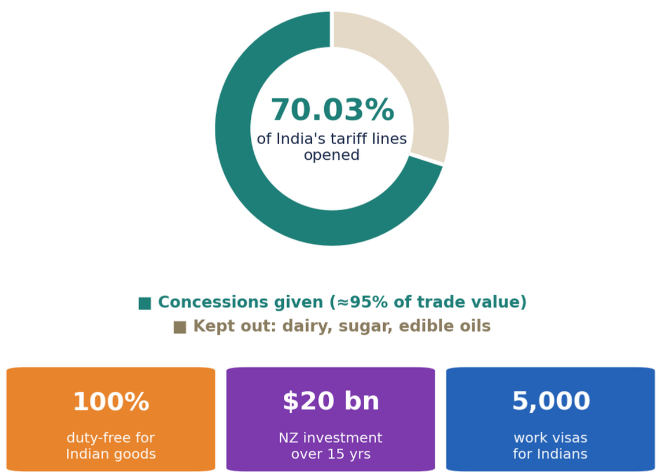
Syllabus Linkage	GS2 - Separation of powers, delegated legislation, fundamental rights. Prelims: Article 20(1), ex post facto laws, excessive delegation doctrine.
Context	In **Shiv Pratap Singh v. State of U.P.** and a connected matter, the **Supreme Court** held that the **Uttar Pradesh Gangsters Act** definition of a gangster was constitutionally infirm because it left the content of the offence to **executive discretion**.
Key Facts	■ The Court found the definition rested on the executive's **ipse dixit**, offending **Article 20(1)**, which bars conviction except for violation of a **law in force** at the time of the act. ■ **Core principle**: creating an offence and prescribing punishment is an **exclusively legislative** function and cannot be delegated through rule-making. ■ The judgment revisits the distinction between **act-based** punishment (what a person did) and **status-based** punishment (what a person is labelled). ■ This is a classic application of the **doctrine of excessive delegation**: the legislature must lay down the **essential legislative policy** itself. ■ **Article 20** also guarantees protection against **double jeopardy** (20(2)) and **self-incrimination** (20(3)), and is **non-derogable** even during an Emergency under **Article 359**.
Way Fwd	State special-security statutes need legislative redrafting with tight definitions, rather than relying on administrative labelling that courts will keep striking down.
Concept	**Article 20(1)** embodies the principle of **nullum crimen sine lege** (no crime without law) and bars **ex post facto** criminal laws and enhanced retrospective penalties. **Delegated legislation** is permissible for detail, never for essential policy.

India-New Zealand FTA to enter into force on 20 October 2026

[IR] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2 & GS3

Syllabus Linkage	GS2 - Bilateral agreements affecting India's interests. GS3 - Effects of liberalisation, external sector. Prelims: FTA vs CEPA vs customs union, tariff lines, TRQ, rules of origin.
Context	The **India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement**, concluded in **2026**, will **enter into force on 20 October 2026**, giving Indian exporters immediate duty-free access to the New Zealand market.
Key Facts	■ **New Zealand** gives **100% duty-free access** to Indian exports from **day one**. ■ **India** offers concessions on **70.03% of its tariff lines**, covering roughly **95% of bilateral trade value**; the remaining **29.97%** stays protected. ■ **Excluded or shielded**: **dairy**, select agricultural items, **sugar** and **edible oils**. **Tariff Rate Quotas** and **Minimum Import Prices** apply to **apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey**. ■ New Zealand has committed to facilitate **US$20 billion** of investment over **15 years**. ■ **Mobility**: a dedicated quota of **5,000 temporary employment visas** for skilled Indians and **1,000 working-holiday visas** a year; post-study work rights of **3 years for STEM graduates** and **4 years for doctoral scholars**. ■ Gainers: **textiles, leather, footwear, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods**.
Way Fwd	The gain now depends on utilisation: exporters need help with rules-of-origin paperwork and standards compliance, which is where past FTAs have leaked value.
Concept	An **FTA** removes tariffs between members but each keeps its own external tariff; a **customs union** adds a **common external tariff**. **Rules of origin** stop **trade deflection**, where goods route through the lowest-tariff member. A **TRQ** allows a set quantity at low duty, with higher duty beyond it.

India-New Zealand FTA: India's offer



Visegrad Group backs India's UN Security Council bid as reform push intensifies

[IR] COMMON: Prelims + Mains GS2

Syllabus Linkage	GS2 - Important international institutions, groupings and agreements involving India. Prelims: V4 members, UNSC composition and elections, UNGA sessions.
Context	On the margins of the **81st UN General Assembly**, the **Visegrad Group (V4)** backed India's bid for **permanent membership of the UN Security Council** at the **first V4-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting**, while India also co-sponsored a coalition pressing for reformed multilateralism.
Key Facts	■ **V4 members**: **Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**. Formed on **15 February 1991** at **Visegrad, Hungary**; all four joined the **EU in 2004**. ■ The V4 is an **informal intergovernmental platform**, not supranational: decisions by **consensus**, a **rotating annual presidency**, and **V4+** formats for third countries. ■ India is pressing a **UNSC non-permanent seat candidature for 2028-29** as well; **Tajikistan** has also entered the Asia-Pacific contest. ■ India joined the **Partnership for Multilateralism (P4M)** as a co-sponsor alongside **Australia, Brazil, Barbados and Kenya**. ■ India framed today's disruption through the **'4F' crisis - Fuel, Food, Fertiliser and Finance** - and argued that international rules must be **scrupulously observed by all states**. ■ **UNSC** has **15 members**: **5 permanent** with veto and **10 non-permanent** elected for **two-year** terms by the **UNGA** under **Article 23** of the UN Charter.
Way Fwd	Endorsements are cheap; the binding constraint is Charter amendment under Article 108, which needs two-thirds of the UNGA plus ratification by all five permanent members.
Concept	India seeks reform through the **G4 (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan)**, opposed by the **Uniting for Consensus (Coffee Club)** group led by **Italy, Pakistan, South Korea and others**. Reform requires amending the **UN Charter under Article 108**.

SECTION D • PRELIMS RAPID-FIRE

Quick facts worth a second look before the exam

Delhi electoral rolls: the Supreme Court called notices sent to over **33 lakh** voters in the Special Intensive Revision **'mechanically issued'**; disposal deadline is **29 October**.	**Outer Space Treaty, 1967**: opened for signature on **27 January 1967**; **Article II** bars **national appropriation** of celestial bodies, but says little on commercial mining rights.
Mining 'squatting': the Mines Secretary flagged miners holding allotted blocks without starting work, and signalled a large scheme for **domestic nickel and lithium processing**.	**Drug-free target**: the Union Home Minister set **31 December 2029** to uproot the drug trade, shifting enforcement from seizures to **network dismantlement** and financial investigation.
SEBI settled Adani-group adjudication proceedings for about **₹1.5 crore** across **five entities**, without admission or denial of the allegations.	**Trichophyton indotineae**, a **terbinafine-resistant dermatophyte** first flagged in India, is spreading globally, making **ringworm (tinea)** harder to treat.

SECTION E • PRACTICE CORNER

Two Prelims MCQs with explanations and one Mains question

Q1. With reference to the Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR) conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, consider the following statements:
1. It is used to inject liquidity into the banking system.
2. The interest rate under it is determined through an auction rather than being fixed in advance.
3. It operates under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: B A VRRR **absorbs** liquidity rather than injecting it, so statement 1 is wrong. The rate is discovered through **auction** and the facility sits under the **Liquidity Adjustment Facility**, so statements 2 and 3 are correct. Liquidity injection through an auction-determined rate is done by the **Variable Rate Repo (VRR)**.

Q2. The Visegrad Group (V4), which recently held its first Foreign Ministers' Meeting with India, comprises which of the following countries?

(a) Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovenia
(b) Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia
(c) Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania
(d) Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

Answer: B The **V4** was formed in **1991** at **Visegrad, Hungary**, originally by **Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia**. After the Czech-Slovak split in **1993** it became a four-member grouping of **Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**, all of which joined the **EU in 2004**.

MAINS PRACTICE

Punjab now extracts more groundwater than it recharges, yet the crisis hurts small farmers far more than large ones. Examine the causes of this inequality and suggest a welfare-consistent policy response that protects farm incomes while making further extraction unattractive. (250 words, 15 marks)

Hint: Open with the **156.87%** stage of extraction and **115 of 153** over-exploited units. Explain the mechanism: free power plus assured procurement locks in the **rice-wheat** cycle; falling water tables raise the capital needed for deeper bores, so smallholders end up **buying water** from large landowners. Then move to solutions - pay for **water saved** rather than power consumed, redirect part of the electricity subsidy to smallholders, collectivise irrigation assets, strengthen procurement for alternative crops, and route benefits to **tenant cultivators**. Close with the constitutional point that groundwater is a State subject regulated through central environmental law.

ONE-LINE REVISION

Remember today by five numbers: 7.0% FY27 growth, ₹71,971 crore absorbed via VRRR, 156.87% groundwater extraction in Punjab, 70.03% of tariff lines opened to New Zealand, and 131 GW of canal-top solar potential.

Compiled & simplified by the StudyForGS.com Research Team

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