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WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT & SOCIAL MEDIA

Q1. India ranks 116th on the World Happiness Report 2026 despite being the world's fastest-growing major economy. How do you explain this paradox?

opinion

Position (P): India's happiness deficit is fundamentally a social equity gap, not an income gap. GDP growth, while necessary, does not automatically translate into improved subjective well-being — particularly when gains are unequally distributed.

Acknowledge the other side (A): One could argue that India's low rank reflects methodological limitations. The Gallup World Poll's Cantril Ladder is a self-reported measure, and cultural norms of stoicism or humility in South Asian societies may result in lower self-ratings even at comparable welfare levels.

Illustrate with specifics (I): India scores particularly low on "social support" (urban joint family erosion), "freedom to make life choices" (caste and gender constraints), and "perceptions of corruption" — India ranks 96th on the Corruption Perceptions Index 2024. Costa Rica ranks 4th on the happiness index despite a GDP per capita of roughly \$14,000, because it abolished its standing army in 1948 (Article 12 of its Constitution), redirected defence spending to universal healthcare under the CCSS since 1941, and prioritises community well-being over consumption.

Link to governance (L): As a future district officer, I would focus on the indicators within administrative control — improving service delivery to reduce corruption at the point of contact, strengthening Ayushman Bharat coverage to include mental health (NIMHANS estimates 10% of Indians need mental health care but only 1% access it), and implementing NEP 2020's social-emotional learning components in schools.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Finland has topped this index for nine consecutive years. What specific element of the Nordic model is most transferable to India?

Some scholars argue that happiness indices impose Western individualist frameworks on collectivist cultures. How do you respond?

As a collector, how would you measure and improve the “happiness” of your district using existing government data?

The board tests whether you can separate economic growth from human development. Cite the HDI-GDP divergence alongside the WHR data. Avoid being defensively nationalist — honest acknowledgment of India’s gaps is more credible than dismissal. Show you know the six Cantril Ladder indicators cold.

Q2. The World Happiness Report 2026 finds that teenagers using social media more than five hours per day show significantly lower life satisfaction. Should India treat this as a public health emergency?

policy-critique

Position (P): Yes, this warrants a public health designation — not because social media itself is the danger, but because Indian teenagers average 6.5 hours of daily screen time (FICCI-EY 2025), exceeding the report’s five-hour risk threshold, and no Indian law currently addresses this harm.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Opponents rightly note that correlation is not causation. Causality in the social media-mental health link remains contested, and heavy smartphone use may be a marker for underlying social distress rather than its cause. Regulatory overreach risks restricting a medium that also provides education, social connection, and economic opportunity for youth.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The UK’s Online Safety Act 2023 takes a middle path: it bans addictive design features such as infinite scroll and night-time push notifications for users under 18, and empowers Ofcom to fine platforms up to £18 million or 10% of global turnover. This targets platform design, not usage itself — a more defensible approach than outright bans.

Link to governance (L): India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 requires parental consent for processing children’s data under 18, but the consent mechanism is not operationalised — a checkbox “Are you over 13?” is not verification. As an administrator, I would push for Aadhaar-linked age verification by platforms, a dedicated statutory mandate for NCPCR on digital safety, and algorithmic chronological feed defaults for minor users as a first step.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What does Section 67B of the IT Act, 2000 cover, and why is it insufficient for addressing the harms you described?

Australia has set a social media age limit of 16 years. Would you support a similar age restriction in India?

As a district officer, how would you implement a smartphone-free school policy without excluding children who rely on phones for e-learning?

Distinguish between CSAM protection (already in law) and broader psychological harm (not yet addressed). The board rewards awareness of DPDP Act 2023 gaps and knowledge of international models. Frame your answer around platform-level structural obligations rather than individual/parental responsibility alone.

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS & NALSA

Q3. The Supreme Court's NALSA judgment of 2014 established the right to self-identify one's gender without surgery or medical certification. The Transgender Amendment Bill 2026 replaces this with mandatory Medical Board certification. Is this a legitimate regulatory clarification or a constitutional rollback?

policy-critique

Position (P): It is a constitutional rollback, not a regulatory clarification. The Supreme Court in NALSA 2014 held explicitly — under Articles 14, 19(1)(a), and 21 — that the state cannot require medical diagnosis or surgical certification as a condition for gender recognition. The 2026 Amendment does precisely that, which makes it constitutionally suspect.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The government's position is that a Medical Board provides a structured, consistent process and prevents abuse of self-identification for fraudulent purposes. This concern is not entirely without basis — similar debates exist in several European jurisdictions.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The NALSA bench — Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan and Justice A.K. Sikri — held that gender identity is an internal, deeply felt experience that cannot be externally validated. The Yogyakarta Principles 2006, used as persuasive authority in NALSA, state in Principle 3 that gender identity cannot be subject to medical preconditions. The Bill also narrows the definition to those undergoing gender transition — effectively excluding non-binary persons, gender-fluid individuals, and traditional Hijra and Kinnar communities whose identity is cultural, not medical.

Link to governance (L): Ordinary legislation cannot override fundamental rights pronouncements. The Bill will almost certainly face a constitutional challenge under Articles 14 and 21, and the judiciary will likely strike it down or significantly limit it. As an administrator, I would advocate for a self-declaration model with grievance redressal, rather than a gatekeeping medical board that most transgender persons — over 90% of whom lack formal employment — cannot practically access.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What was the constitutional basis of the NALSA judgment? Cite the specific articles and what each protects.

The 2019 Transgender Persons Act already required a District Magistrate certificate. How does the 2026 Amendment differ in constitutional impact?

How would you, as a district officer, ensure that the transgender community in your district can access the certificate process without harassment?

Know the NALSA bench names (Radhakrishnan + Sikri), the three articles (14/19/21), and the Yogyakarta Principles by name. The board may follow up with Navtej Singh Johar (2018) or Supriyo (2023) — be ready to distinguish between gender identity and sexual orientation in law.

Q4. The Census 2011 counted approximately 4.9 lakh transgender persons in India, but community estimates range from 10 lakh to 25 lakh. What accounts for this discrepancy, and what are its policy consequences?

factual

Definition and basis: The Census 2011 was the first Indian census to enumerate a “third gender” category — a direct result of the NALSA 2014 judgment’s direction to the government (although the census data collection preceded NALSA, the category was introduced as “others” in gender recording). The count of approximately 4.9 lakh is considered a severe undercount by researchers and community organisations.

Why the undercounting occurs: Three structural reasons explain the gap. First, social stigma and fear of discrimination cause many transgender persons to identify as their assigned birth gender on official forms to avoid harassment. Second, the Census methodology relies on household head declarations, meaning a transgender person living with family may be recorded in their assigned gender. Third, nomadic and homeless transgender persons — a significant portion of the community — are systematically undercounted in household-based enumeration.

Policy consequences: An undercount directly affects welfare delivery. If the government estimates only 4.9 lakh persons, welfare schemes, reservation seats, shelter homes, and healthcare facilities will be calibrated to that number. The National Commission for Women and the NHRC have both flagged this as a data integrity problem. The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) methodology is considered better suited to capturing this population than the regular census.

India-specific context: Despite 90% employment exclusion from the formal sector (per community surveys), there is no caste-census equivalent data for transgender persons. The NALSA judgment directed OBC-equivalent reservation — but reservation quotas cannot be designed without accurate population data.

Cross-Questions from Board:

The NALSA judgment directed transgender persons to be treated as a socially and educationally backward class. Which constitutional article enables this, and has it been implemented?

What specific changes to Census methodology would you recommend to improve enumeration of marginalised gender identities?

How would you, as a district collector, create a transgender-inclusive local welfare programme given the data gap?

Article 15(4) enables special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes — this is the NALSA reservation direction's constitutional anchor. The board values awareness of data quality as a governance problem, not just a statistical one.

FDI, CHINA & ECONOMIC SECURITY

Q5. India's Press Note 3 of 2020, issued after the Galwan clash, required government approval for all FDI from land-border countries. The Cabinet has now relaxed it to permit automatic-route FDI where Chinese beneficial ownership is below 10% and non-controlling. Is this pragmatic economics or a strategic retreat?

opinion

Position (P): This is calibrated economic pragmatism, not a strategic retreat. The original blanket restriction had an unintended consequence: it blocked legitimate global capital — Singapore, Mauritius, and Cayman-domiciled funds with incidental Chinese LP stakes of 2–5% — from investing

in India, diverting that capital to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The concern that even minority Chinese investment creates strategic vulnerability is legitimate. A 9.9% non-controlling stake is still a stake — and India’s enforcement mechanism for beneficial ownership disclosures under FEMA is self-declared, making complex offshore SPV structures difficult to verify. The 2026 relaxation is only as strong as its enforcement.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The economic reality is that complete decoupling from Chinese supply chains is impossible in the five to ten-year horizon. India imports approximately 70% of its Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient supply from China; Indian EV manufacturers rely on Chinese battery cells (CATL, BYD); approximately 80% of global solar polysilicon comes from China. The PLI schemes in electronics, EV, and solar cannot succeed without some Chinese supply chain integration. A Singapore PE fund with a 5% Chinese LP stake is not in a position to direct India investments — the 10% non-controlling threshold (consistent with IFRS accounting standards for significant influence) is an appropriate calibration.

Link to governance (L): As a policymaker, I would support the relaxation while advocating for mandatory third-party beneficial ownership verification before automatic route approval for any entity with land-border country connections — and for categorical carve-outs from the relaxation for defence, telecom infrastructure, power grids, and media.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Press Note 3 was issued by which ministry, and under which law does it operate? What is the full form of FEMA?

India’s trade deficit with China is approximately \$85 billion. If we are worried about strategic dependence, why are we relaxing investment restrictions rather than imposing import tariffs?

If you were posted as a DPIIT joint secretary, how would you design a beneficial ownership verification mechanism that is practical but not easily gamed?

Know the Galwan context (June 15, 2020; 20 Indian soldiers killed), DPIIT as the issuing ministry, FEMA 1999 as the operative law, and the 7 land-border countries by name. The board values nuance here — neither “all Chinese FDI is bad” nor “let all Chinese capital flow freely” is the right answer.

Q6. India imports approximately 70% of its Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient supply from China. What are the national security implications, and what is

India's strategy to reduce this dependency?

factual

Definition and strategic significance: Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) are the chemically active components of medicines. India is the world's largest generic drug exporter — often called “pharmacy of the world” — but approximately 70% of the raw materials for those generics come from China. This creates a strategic vulnerability: a disruption in Chinese API supply (trade friction, geopolitical crisis, or pandemic) could halt production of essential medicines.

National security dimension: In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, China briefly restricted export of several pharmaceutical inputs, triggering alarm in India's Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers. The Ministry of Health's Essential Medicines List includes approximately 700 drugs; API dependency affects critical categories including antibiotics, cardiovascular drugs, antipyretics (paracetamol), and vitamins.

India's response strategy: The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for bulk drugs was launched in 2020 with a budget of Rs 6,940 crore to incentivise domestic API manufacturing in three bulk drug parks — Andhra Pradesh (Visakhapatnam), Himachal Pradesh (Una), and Gujarat. The target is to reduce API import dependence by 20–25 percentage points over five years. The scheme focuses on 53 critical APIs where India is fully import-dependent.

Current progress and gaps: Domestic API manufacturing requires sustained policy support because Chinese manufacturers benefit from economies of scale, state subsidies, integrated chemical clusters, and lower environmental compliance costs. Indian manufacturers cannot compete on price alone without similar infrastructure support.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Name the three bulk drug parks being established under the PLI scheme and their host states.

Should India's concern about Chinese API dependence be categorised under GS3 Economy or GS2 International Relations? Make the case for both.

If China were to restrict API exports tomorrow, what immediate administrative measures would you recommend as a district health officer?

The board often links this to the broader “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” narrative — but be careful to distinguish the rhetoric from the actual policy architecture (PLI schemes, bulk drug parks). Know the Rs 6,940 crore figure and the 53 critical APIs target.

SOCIAL MEDIA REGULATION & CHILDREN'S SAFETY

Q7. Should India enact a dedicated Children's Online Safety Act on the lines of the UK's Online Safety Act 2023, or is digital literacy education a sufficient response to social media's harm to children?

hypothetical

Position (P): Digital literacy is necessary but structurally insufficient. If I were Secretary, MeitY, I would draft a Children's Online Safety Bill within 12 months while simultaneously scaling digital literacy — because you cannot teach children to resist algorithmic systems designed by billion-dollar companies specifically to maximise engagement.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The case for education over regulation is real: over-regulation risks restricting a medium that provides educational access, social connection, and economic opportunity for India's 200 million internet users under 18. Enforcement of age verification in a country with high smartphone sharing (multiple family members using one device) is genuinely complex.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The UK's Online Safety Act 2023 takes a design-regulation approach that sidesteps the enforcement complexity: it mandates that platforms ban addictive design features — infinite scroll, autoplay, night-time push notifications — for users under 18, and requires children's risk assessments before product launches. Ofcom can fine platforms £18 million or 10% of global annual turnover. India's DPDP Act 2023 requires parental consent for under-18 data but provides no mechanism to operationalise that consent — a checkbox does not constitute meaningful verification.

Link to governance (L): As Secretary, my three-step plan would be: first, operationalise DPDP Act 2023's parental consent provision through mobile number-linked verification (parents' KYC-verified mobile as the consent gateway); second, mandate chronological feed defaults for minor accounts; third, designate NCPCR as the statutory digital safety authority with penalty powers. This does not require a new law — amendments to IT Rules 2021 and DPDP Act rules can achieve most of this.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is NCPCR's current mandate under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005, and does it have enforcement powers over digital platforms?

Australia has banned social media for children under 16. Do you agree with age-based bans as a policy tool?

A parent complains to you as a district officer that her daughter is being bullied on social media. Walk me through exactly what the current legal remedies are.

Know the IT Rules 2021's "significant social media intermediary" (SSMI) definition — platforms with over 5 million users in India. The board values knowledge of what existing law can already do without waiting for Parliament to act.

Q8. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube earn revenue by maximising user time on their apps. Is it ethically acceptable for the state to regulate how private companies design their products to protect children?

opinion

Position (P): Yes, state regulation of product design is ethically justified when the product is proven to cause measurable harm to a vulnerable population — particularly children who lack the cognitive development to make fully autonomous choices about addictive systems.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The counter-argument grounded in economic freedom is serious: design mandates are a form of state micromanagement of private innovation, and platforms may relocate or reduce India-specific investment if compliance costs are prohibitive. The principle of caveat emptor — buyer beware — places responsibility on users and parents, not platform engineers.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The state already regulates product design in analogous contexts. Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) mandates nutritional labelling and bans certain additives — companies cannot profit from selling demonstrably harmful food to children regardless of consumer demand. Tobacco products must carry graphic health warnings. The World Happiness Report 2026's finding that 5+ hours of social media use correlates with significantly lower life satisfaction in teenage girls constitutes the kind of evidence that justifies state intervention on public health grounds, just as early tobacco studies justified packaging regulations.

Link to governance (L): The ethical principle at work is GS4's concept of duty of care — the state has a special obligation toward those who cannot fully protect themselves. Addictive design features (variable reward notifications, no natural scroll-stopping point) are not accidental; they are deliberately engineered. Regulating them does not suppress expression — it removes a public health hazard from a product that reaches 200 million Indian children.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Jonathan Haidt's book "The Anxious Generation" is frequently cited in this debate. What is its central argument?

How would you distinguish between content regulation (which raises free speech concerns) and design regulation (which does not)?

A tech company argues that Indian children benefit enormously from YouTube's educational content, and screen time restrictions will harm learning outcomes. How do you respond?

The content vs. design distinction is the critical analytical divide. The board will probe whether you conflate the two. Addictive design features (infinite scroll, autoplay) are not speech — regulating them does not raise Article 19(1)(a) concerns the way content moderation does.

IRAN-US CONFLICT & INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY

Q9. The Strait of Hormuz handles approximately 20% of globally traded oil and 20% of global LNG. Iran has closed it in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes. Walk us through the implications for India's energy security.

factual

Definition and geography: The Strait of Hormuz, approximately 33 kilometres wide at its narrowest point with a navigable lane of only 3 kilometres in each direction, is the world's single most critical energy chokepoint. Iran controls the northern coast; Oman controls the southern coast. Approximately 20–21 million barrels of crude oil pass through it daily, representing roughly one-fifth of globally traded oil.

India's direct exposure: India imports 85–88% of its crude oil requirements. Approximately 60% of those crude imports originate from West Asia — Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar. India also imports approximately 50% of its LNG from Qatar's Ras Laffan complex, which is directly threatened by Iranian retaliatory strikes. India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve holds only 5.33 million metric tonnes — approximately 9.5 days of consumption — at three locations: Visakhapatnam (1.33 MMT), Mangaluru (1.5 MMT), and Padur (2.5 MMT).

Diplomatic complexity: India maintains ties with all parties simultaneously. India's Chabahar port project in Iran (operated by India Ports Global Ltd) is valued at approximately \$500 million and provides strategic land access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Israel is India's second-largest defence equipment supplier after Russia. The US-India strategic partnership under QUAD and iCET is a central pillar of India's foreign policy. India did not join Operation Prosperity Guardian — the US-led Red Sea naval coalition — maintaining formal neutrality.

Immediate consequences: A sustained Hormuz closure would spike global crude prices, worsen India's current account deficit, increase imported inflation, and pressure the rupee — arriving at the exact moment the RBI is attempting rate cuts on moderating CPI.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the JCPOA, when was it signed, and why did it collapse? What were its key commitments from Iran?

India has exemptions from US sanctions for the Chabahar port project. What is the strategic rationale for that US exemption?

If you were posted as an energy secretary, what three immediate measures would you recommend if Hormuz were completely blocked for 30 days?

Know the SPR locations and exact capacities (Vizag 1.33, Mangaluru 1.5, Padur 2.5 = total 5.33 MMT). The board values the linkage between Hormuz closure, global crude prices, India's CAD, and the rupee — the fiscal and monetary chain reaction is a high-yield answer structure.

Q10. India maintains diplomatic ties with Iran (Chabahar), Israel (defence contracts), and the US (QUAD). Does “strategic autonomy” as a principle hold up when India's energy security requires it to take sides?

opinion

Position (P): Strategic autonomy is not neutrality — it is the freedom to make interest-based decisions without being bound by alliance commitments. India's West Asia policy demonstrates that strategic autonomy is operationally viable, but it requires constant calibration as crises escalate.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Critics argue that India's refusal to condemn either Iran's Hormuz closure or the US-Israeli strikes represents moral inconsistency — that a democracy cannot be equally friendly with a state practising theocratic authoritarianism and a liberal democratic partner. They point out that India's silence was noted unfavourably in Washington and Tel Aviv.

Illustrate with specifics (I): India's track record bears examination. India did not join Operation Prosperity Guardian (the US Red Sea coalition), which aligned with its historical reluctance to join military coalitions not sanctioned by the UN. But India also continued defence procurement from Israel — ₹20,000 crore+ in active contracts — throughout the Gaza and Iran crises. India's position on the Ukraine war (continued Russian oil purchases, no condemnation vote) established the precedent

that energy security and economic interest take priority over declaratory alignment. The Chabahar port, exempted from US sanctions, represents perhaps the most elegant example of strategic autonomy in practice — a US-sanctioned country hosting Indian infrastructure with US consent.

Link to governance (L): As an IFS officer, I would argue that the test of strategic autonomy is not ideological purity but outcomes: has India secured its energy supply? Maintained diverse defence sourcing? Preserved space for diplomatic engagement? On all three counts, the answer is largely yes — though the 9.5-day SPR buffer represents a structural vulnerability that no amount of diplomatic dexterity can substitute for.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the QUAD, and what does iCET stand for? How do these frameworks relate to India's strategic autonomy?

India abstained on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. How do you explain this to a Ukrainian diplomat?

Should India expand its Strategic Petroleum Reserve from 9.5 days to 90 days, as the IEA recommends for member countries?

“Strategic autonomy” is a values-loaded term — the board may push you to define it precisely. Be ready to distinguish it from “non-alignment” (Cold War) and “multi-alignment” (current practice). The IEA's 90-day SPR standard versus India's 9.5-day reality is a strong factual contrast.

RBI MONETARY POLICY & INFLATION

Q11. What is the Monetary Policy Committee, and why does the question of whether food inflation should be excluded from India's inflation targeting framework matter for ordinary citizens?

factual

Definition and composition: The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is India's six-member body that sets the policy repo rate under the inflation targeting framework established by the RBI Act 1934 (Sections 45ZA–ZL, inserted by the Finance Act 2016). It comprises three members from the RBI — the Governor (who chairs and holds the casting vote), a Deputy Governor, and one RBI nominee — and

three external members appointed by the Government for four-year terms. The MPC meets bi-monthly (six times a year), and its minutes are published 14 days after each meeting. The current Governor is Sanjay Malhotra, appointed in December 2024.

The inflation targeting mandate: The MPC is mandated to maintain CPI inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of plus or minus 2% — meaning the acceptable range is 2% to 6%. The framework was first established in August 2016 and is currently under its mandatory five-year review (due March 2026).

Why food exclusion matters for citizens: Food inflation in India is structural and supply-driven — caused by monsoon failures, fragmented cold chain infrastructure, and the price cycles of vegetables (tomato-onion-potato). Raising interest rates does not cool food prices. But including food in the CPI target means the MPC raises rates when food prices spike — making borrowing more expensive for small businesses and home loan borrowers, even though the underlying problem requires agricultural supply-chain fixes, not monetary tightening. As of February 2026, food inflation is 6.2% while core inflation (excluding food and fuel) is 3.8% — demonstrating exactly this divergence.

Cross-Questions from Board:

The repo rate is currently 5.25%. What is the SDF rate, and why is the difference between them significant for banks?

The RBI Governor has a casting vote in MPC decisions. Is this an appropriate concentration of power, or does it undermine the committee principle?

Explain the difference between CPI and WPI. Which does India target, and why?

Sections 45ZA–ZL of the RBI Act are the legal basis — cite them precisely. The board will also probe fiscal-monetary coordination: what is the government doing on the supply side (PM-AASHA, PM Kisan Sampada) to complement rate policy? This shows systems thinking.

Q12. The RBI cut rates from 6.5% to 5.25% over the past year. Some economists argue this is premature given global oil price risks from the Hormuz closure. How do you assess this trade-off?

policy-critique

Position (P): The rate cut cycle is broadly appropriate based on domestic inflation data, but the Hormuz risk is a legitimate upside risk to inflation that the MPC must factor into its forward guidance rather than acting as if the external environment is stable.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The argument for pausing the rate cut cycle is serious. A sustained Strait of Hormuz closure would spike crude prices, pass through to petrol, diesel, and LPG (which together have significant CPI weight), reverse the food price moderation, and weaken the rupee — all inflationary. The RBI cutting rates into this environment would create a contradiction: the MPC loosening monetary conditions while inflation pressures rebuild.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The RBI's own Q4 FY26 CPI projection is approximately 3.0%, supported by a bumper rabi harvest cooling vegetable prices. This justifies the rate cut trajectory domestically. But India imports 85–88% of its crude, and approximately 60% from West Asia — the most directly affected region. During the 2022–23 global inflation episode, RBI raised rates by 250 basis points (from 4.0% to 6.5%) primarily because of imported commodity inflation. The same mechanism runs in reverse: it can quickly force a pivot.

Link to governance (L): The ideal response is for the MPC to cut rates as warranted by domestic data but to communicate clearly that it is monitoring the Hormuz situation and retains the flexibility to pause or reverse if the crude price shock materialises in CPI. This is conditional monetary guidance — a standard central banking communication tool. The fiscal side should simultaneously prepare for excise duty calibration on fuel to buffer the pass-through if crude prices spike past \$100 per barrel.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the “output gap,” and how does it relate to the MPC’s rate decisions?

Can you explain the “Jevons Paradox” and why it matters for India’s energy efficiency policy?

If the Hormuz closure drives crude prices to \$120 per barrel, walk me through the chain of effects on India’s fiscal deficit, current account deficit, and inflation.

The three-deficit linkage (fiscal deficit, current account deficit, inflation) when crude spikes is a signature board-level macroeconomics question. Prepare to trace the full chain: crude up → import bill up → rupee weakens → fuel CPI up → fiscal deficit widens (subsidy pressure) → fiscal-monetary conflict.

CLIMATE CHANGE & PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

Q13. Six of nine planetary boundaries have been breached as of 2026. Is the concept of “green growth” — growing the economy while reducing environmental impact — proving to be an illusion?

opinion

Position (P): Green growth is a necessary policy direction but an insufficient theory of change. The evidence that six planetary boundaries have been breached — including freshwater depletion, novel chemical entities, and biosphere integrity alongside climate change — suggests that efficiency-based decoupling is not keeping pace with the scale of economic expansion.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Green growth advocates correctly point to real achievements: renewable energy costs have fallen by 90% for solar over the past decade, EVs are approaching cost parity with internal combustion, and energy intensity of global GDP is declining. Dismissing green growth entirely would be premature and would remove the political coalition for climate action built around the idea that growth and environment are compatible.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The problem is relative vs. absolute decoupling. Global CO₂ from energy use reached approximately 37 billion tonnes in 2024 — a record high — even as emissions per unit of GDP decline. This is Jevons Paradox in action: efficiency gains make energy cheaper, encouraging more consumption. Furthermore, high-income countries appear to have decoupled by outsourcing manufacturing (and its emissions) to China, Vietnam, and India — the emissions count in the producer country's ledger, not the consumer's. The current NDC pledges, if fully implemented, still track toward 2.8 to 3.2 degrees Celsius warming by 2100, against the Paris Agreement's 1.5-degree target.

Link to governance (L): India's position is that development is a right — absolute degrowth is not a realistic option for a country still lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty. But India can lead on targeted consumption reduction in high-impact sectors: aviation, fast fashion, red meat production. India's NDC targets (45% emissions intensity reduction by 2030 from 2005 levels, 500 GW non-fossil capacity, net zero by 2070) represent a green growth framework that the government must now execute, not just announce.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Who developed the Planetary Boundaries framework, and in which year? Name the nine boundaries and identify which are currently breached.

India has committed to net zero by 2070 while China committed to 2060 and the EU to 2050. Is India's target ambitious enough given its current trajectory as the third-largest emitter?

As a district collector in a coal-dependent region, how would you manage the just transition — protecting workers' livelihoods while the coal economy declines?

Johan Rockström, Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2009 — have this citation ready. The board values the distinction between India’s right to development (equity argument) and India’s growing absolute emissions (science argument). A credible answer holds both.

Q14. India has committed to protecting 30% of its land and ocean by 2030 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. India’s forest cover is currently around 24% of land area, against a National Forest Policy target of 33%. How realistic is the 30x30 commitment?

hypothetical

Position (P): The 30x30 commitment is achievable only if India fundamentally reframes what counts as “protected” — moving beyond tiger reserves and national parks to include community conserved areas, agroforestry landscapes, and coastal mangroves. As an Environment Secretary, I would pursue exactly this broader definition.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Critics of India’s biodiversity commitments argue that the 30x30 target will be met on paper by reclassifying existing forest areas as “protected,” without adding real ecological integrity. India has a history of announced targets that are not backed by enforcement — the 33% forest cover goal in the National Forest Policy 1988 remains unmet nearly four decades later.

Illustrate with specifics (I): India is one of 17 megadiverse countries, hosting approximately 7–8% of all recorded species despite covering only 2.4% of the world’s land surface. It has four of the world’s 36 global biodiversity hotspots — the Himalaya, Indo-Burma, Western Ghats plus Sri Lanka, and the Nicobar Islands. The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) under the Biological Diversity Act 2002 is the statutory body, but it lacks enforcement powers over linear infrastructure projects that fragment forest corridors — the primary threat to India’s wildlife. The Kunming-Montreal GBF, adopted at COP15 in 2022, specifically recognises Indigenous and community-led conservation as qualifying for the 30% target — this creates space for India’s Joint Forest Management and community reserves model.

Link to governance (L): As Environment Secretary, my three interventions would be: operationalise the biodiversity heritage site (BHS) category under the Biological Diversity Act for community-protected landscapes; create a linear infrastructure green corridor fund to finance wildlife underpasses on National Highways; and integrate forest carbon accounting into state SDG reporting to give states a fiscal incentive to conserve rather than clear.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is IPBES, and how does it differ from the IPCC?

Name India's four biodiversity hotspots and the primary threat to each.

The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) manages funds collected when forests are diverted for development. Is this model sufficient for biodiversity conservation?

Distinguish between area-based conservation (the 30x30 metric) and ecological integrity conservation (whether the protected areas actually function as ecosystems). The board will probe whether you understand the difference between a forest on paper and a functioning ecosystem.

INDIA'S INSTITUTIONAL HEALTH

Q15. The Opposition has moved a no-confidence motion against the Lok Sabha Speaker and served an impeachment notice to the Chief Election Commissioner simultaneously. What does this convergence of institutional challenges reveal about Indian democracy?

opinion

Position (P): This convergence reveals a deepening crisis of institutional trust — where the perceived impartiality of constitutional offices has eroded to the point that formal adversarial mechanisms, rather than political negotiation, are being used as the primary tool of accountability.

Acknowledge the other side (A): One must acknowledge that the Opposition's use of constitutional mechanisms — a no-confidence motion under Article 179©, an impeachment notice under Article 324 read with the CEC Act 2023 — is itself evidence that democratic processes are working. That these mechanisms exist and are being invoked is different from a coup or extra-constitutional challenge.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The Speaker's structural problem is well-documented: Article 122 makes the Speaker's rulings nearly unchallengeable in courts, while the Tenth Schedule makes the Speaker the sole adjudicator of defection petitions — despite the Speaker remaining a party member. In the UK, Speakers resign from their party upon election — a convention maintained since 1728. The CEC appointment crisis is equally structural: the CEC and Other EC Act 2023 removed the Chief Justice of India from the selection committee (which the Supreme Court had mandated in Anoop Baranwal 2023), replacing it with a panel of the PM, a Cabinet minister, and the Leader of Opposition — giving the ruling party a two-to-one majority on the appointment panel.

Link to governance (L): The editorial prescription I find compelling is bipartisan appointment committees for all constitutional offices with fixed non-renewable terms. Structural solutions, not procedural motions, restore institutional credibility. As a future officer, I am acutely aware that my own institutions — the district administration, the collector’s office — derive legitimacy from public trust, which is built through impartial, transparent conduct, not formal authority alone.

Cross-Questions from Board:

Under Article 179©, what majority is required to remove the Speaker, and what procedural requirement must precede the motion?

The Nabam Rebia case (2016) held that the Speaker cannot decide defection petitions when their own removal notice is pending. What principle does this illustrate?

Do you think the anti-defection law has achieved its purpose since 1985? What reforms would you recommend?

Article 179© requires an effective majority (majority of all then members of the House) with 14 days advance notice — know both elements. The Nabam Rebia principle (no adjudicator with a personal interest in the outcome) is a natural justice principle that can anchor a wider answer on judicial independence.

Q16. The government-dominated selection committee for the Chief Election Commissioner raises concerns about the independence of the Election Commission. Is the Election Commission’s independence guaranteed by the Constitution, or does it depend on convention?

factual

Constitutional basis: Article 324 of the Constitution establishes the Election Commission and vests the “superintendence, direction and control” of elections in it — including elections to Parliament and state legislatures, and elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President. Article 325 provides for the CEC’s removal only through the same process as a Supreme Court judge — parliamentary impeachment by special majority — giving strong tenure protection.

Appointment gap: The Constitution is silent on the appointment process for the CEC and Election Commissioners. This was historically left to presidential discretion (effectively Prime Ministerial advice). The Anoop Baranwal case (2023) — a five-judge Supreme Court bench — held that until Parliament legislates a proper appointment mechanism, the selection committee must include the

Chief Justice of India. Parliament responded with the CEC and Other EC (Amendment) Act 2023, replacing the CJI-inclusive panel with a three-member committee: the Prime Minister, a Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition. This gives the ruling party a two-to-one majority.

Dependence on convention: The CEC's substantive independence depends on conventions — the restraint of appointing governments not to select partisan loyalists, the professional norms within the Commission itself, and the respect for Election Commission orders by political parties and the administration. These conventions have held imperfectly in India's history. The T.N. Seshan tenure (1990–96) is often cited as an example of how a strong, independent-minded CEC transformed electoral administration — demonstrating that institutional character depends enormously on the individual appointed.

The structural tension: Appointment by the executive, combined with removal only by Parliament, creates a design where independence is secured at the back end (removal is difficult) but is vulnerable at the front end (a loyalist appointee cannot be easily removed). True independence requires both ends to be protected.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the difference between the Chief Election Commissioner and an Election Commissioner in terms of removal protection? Why does this asymmetry matter?

T.N. Seshan is credited with transforming the Election Commission. Name two specific reforms he implemented.

If you were on the selection committee for the next CEC, what criteria beyond professional qualifications would you consider, and how would you make the process transparent?

The asymmetry between CEC removal (same as SC judge) and Election Commissioner removal (at the CEC's recommendation — much weaker) is a high-yield constitutional nuance. The board often asks this follow-up, and candidates who know it stand out.

MATERNITY LEAVE & GENDER EQUALITY

Q17. The Supreme Court ruled in March 2026 that adoptive mothers are entitled to the same maternity leave as biological mothers. What is the constitutional basis of this ruling, and what does it reveal about the relationship between law and social assumptions?

factual

Constitutional basis: The Supreme Court bench grounded the ruling in two articles. Article 14 (Right to Equality) was invoked because treating biological and adoptive mothers differently — when both are engaged in the identical act of nurturing a new child — constitutes an unreasonable classification. An “intelligible differentia” (the constitutional test for classification under Article 14) requires the classification to be rationally connected to the object of the law. Since the purpose of maternity leave is parent-child bonding and child welfare — not the physical experience of childbirth — distinguishing biological from adoptive mothers serves no legitimate legislative purpose. Article 21 (Right to Life) was invoked because the Supreme Court’s expanded interpretation includes the right to dignified parenthood and parent-child bonding — none of which differ based on how the parent-child relationship was formed.

Reframing the purpose of leave: The most significant jurisprudential shift is the court’s explicit statement that maternity leave is not compensation for physical childbirth — it is time for parent-child bonding. This reframing has downstream implications for paternity leave reform (if bonding is the purpose, fathers need substantial leave too), commissioning mothers in surrogacy (already addressed in the 2017 Amendment), and eventually same-sex couples adopting.

Relationship between law and social assumptions: The Maternity Benefit Act 1961 was designed around the assumption that mothers are biological and that maternity leave serves post-natal physical recovery. The 2017 Amendment added adoptive and commissioning mothers to the Act but set a lower 12-week ceiling — revealing that Parliament still implicitly valued biological motherhood more. The SC’s ruling corrects this by applying the Act’s own stated purpose (child welfare) against the discriminatory structure Parliament created. Law here is being used to challenge social assumptions embedded within prior legislation.

Cross-Questions from Board:

The Maternity Benefit Act applies only to establishments with 10 or more employees. What proportion of India’s working women are outside this protection?

How does Article 15(3) relate to protective legislation like the Maternity Benefit Act?

Should India move toward a gender-neutral “parental leave” framework as in Sweden, or should maternity leave remain a gender-specific protection? Make the case for your position.

Know the exact leave entitlements: 26 weeks biological (first two children), 12 weeks adoptive (post-SC ruling as the mandated floor). The board will probe the unorganised sector gap — approximately 90% of India’s female workforce is outside the Act’s coverage. The Rajasthan Platform Workers Act 2023 is an emerging state-level response worth knowing.

Q18. India's paternity leave for central government employees is 15 days with no statutory private sector equivalent. The Supreme Court's maternity leave ruling reframes the purpose of parental leave from physical recovery to child-bonding. Should India enact a statutory paternity leave law?

hypothetical

Position (P): Yes, India should enact a statutory paternity leave law — and if I were drafting it as a Ministry of Labour official, I would propose four weeks paid paternity leave for all formal sector employees, funded through the Employees' State Insurance scheme, to prevent employers from discriminating against men who take leave.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Employers — particularly SMEs — argue that mandatory paternity leave increases labour costs and may paradoxically worsen women's employment prospects, as companies that must now fund both 26 weeks of maternity leave and four weeks of paternity leave may prefer not to hire young married employees at all. This is the “well-intentioned harm” argument that labour economists take seriously.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The Supreme Court's own reasoning in the March 2026 ruling — that the purpose of parental leave is child bonding, not physical recovery — logically requires extending substantial leave to fathers. Countries that have implemented equal parental leave have seen measurable gender equity gains in the workplace: in Sweden, where both parents receive 240 days of paid leave each, the gender wage gap has narrowed significantly, and the “maternal wall” (the penalty women face in promotions after having children) has weakened. In India, the gender wage gap is approximately 28% (ILO 2024), and the labour force participation rate for women is approximately 25% — among the lowest globally, driven partly by the career penalty of sole responsibility for childcare.

Link to governance (L): As a Ministry of Labour official, I would design the paternity leave scheme with three features to address the SME objection: insurance funding through ESIC (not direct employer cost), phased implementation starting with enterprises above 50 employees, and a public education campaign reframing paternity leave as an investment in child development rather than a productivity cost.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the current paternity leave entitlement for central government employees, and under which service rules is it granted?

India's female labour force participation rate is approximately 25%. What are the three most significant structural barriers to women's employment beyond maternity leave policy?

The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act 2021 bans commercial surrogacy. How does it interact with the commissioning mother's maternity leave entitlement under the 2017 Amendment?

The ESIC funding mechanism is a strong administrative answer — it converts an individual employer burden into a social insurance mechanism, which is how most advanced economies handle parental leave without penalising SMEs. Know that ESIC covers employees earning up to Rs 21,000 per month.

DRONE WARFARE & DEFENCE MANUFACTURING

Q19. The Iran-US-Israel conflict has featured extensive drone warfare — Iranian Shahed drones, Israeli Harop loitering munitions, Houthi drones targeting Gulf energy infrastructure. What does this tell us about India's readiness for future warfare, and where does India's defence manufacturing stand?

opinion

Position (P): The drone-dominated battlefield in West Asia represents a strategic inflection point for India. India's defence manufacturing capacity in unmanned systems is currently insufficient relative to its strategic requirements — particularly given the China threat on the northern border, where similar drone tactics have been deployed.

Acknowledge the other side (A): India has made genuine progress: the iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) scheme has funded several indigenous drone startups; the Nagastra-1 loitering munition was inducted by the Indian Army in 2024 — the first indigenous suicide drone. The Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020's "Atmanirbhar" categories (Buy Indian, Make in India) specifically target unmanned systems.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The 2026 West Asia conflict demonstrates that low-cost drone swarms (Shahed-136 costs approximately \$20,000 per unit) can overwhelm high-cost air defence systems (Patriot interceptors cost \$3–4 million per missile). This asymmetric cost exchange fundamentally challenges traditional air defence economics. India's military operates on a capital expenditure budget where approximately 59% goes to salaries and maintenance — leaving limited capital for the mass-procurement of drone systems and countermeasures needed at the scale demonstrated in Ukraine and now West Asia. India imports approximately 60% of its defence equipment (the government's target is to reduce this to 25% by 2030 under the Defence Production Policy 2020).

Link to governance (L): As a future civil servant advising the Defence Ministry, I would advocate for three policy shifts: a dedicated drone warfare budget line separate from capital expenditure; mandatory 30% indigenous content in all drone procurement as a condition for government contracts; and a civilian-military dual-use research fund for counter-drone technology, drawing on the model of DARPA in the United States.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the Nagastra-1, who manufactures it, and when was it inducted? What category of weapon system does it belong to?

India's defence exports have grown from approximately Rs 2,000 crore in 2018 to over Rs 21,000 crore in 2024. What has driven this growth, and is it sustainable?

Israel supplies India with a significant portion of its defence equipment. Given the current conflict and India's strategic autonomy concerns, should India accelerate diversification away from Israeli weapons?

The cost-exchange asymmetry of drones versus traditional air defence is the analytically rich frame here — cheap offensive drones exhausting expensive defensive interceptors. This is a systems-level argument that impresses boards more than a list of defence schemes.

NFRA, CORPORATE GOVERNANCE & GDP MEASUREMENT

Q20. The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) was established in 2018 to regulate audit quality independent of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI). Why was an independent regulator needed, and what governance failures does its creation acknowledge?

factual

Definition and basis: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) is a statutory body established under Section 132 of the Companies Act 2013, notified in October 2018. It sets accounting and auditing standards for listed companies, large unlisted companies, and specified classes of companies, and has disciplinary authority over auditors of these entities — including the power to debar auditors.

Why a new regulator was needed: Prior to NFRA, the ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India) performed a dual role: it regulated the profession (setting standards, disciplining members) and simultaneously represented the profession (acting as a trade body for chartered accountants). This structural conflict of interest meant that disciplinary actions against auditors for professional failures were rare, slow, and often lenient. The series of corporate governance failures in the 2010s — IL&FS, Jet Airways, PMC Bank, DHFL, and the Satyam Computer scandal of 2009 — exposed systematic audit failures where auditors either missed fraud or were complicit in financial misrepresentation.

Governance failure acknowledged: The creation of NFRA is an implicit acknowledgment that self-regulation of the audit profession had failed. The logic is identical to why SEBI was created to regulate securities markets independent of stock exchange self-governance — professional bodies protecting their members’ interests cannot credibly discipline those same members when the public interest requires it.

NFRA’s scope and powers: NFRA has jurisdiction over approximately 6,500 listed companies and large unlisted entities. It can debar individual auditors and audit firms for up to ten years, impose monetary penalties, and conduct inspections of audit quality. Its annual inspection reports have found systemic deficiencies in engagement quality review and documentation standards.

Cross-Questions from Board:

The IL&FS crisis of 2018 is frequently cited as an audit failure. What specifically did the auditors miss, and what regulatory response followed?

The Companies Act 2013 mandates audit committee independence and rotation of auditors every five years for listed companies. Have these provisions been sufficient?

As a district collector, you discover that a major local employer has been falsifying accounts to avoid taxes. Walk me through the enforcement pathway under Indian law.

The ICAI dual-role conflict (regulator + trade body) is the core structural argument — understand it well.

The board may link this to the broader corporate governance architecture: SEBI (securities regulator), MCA (company law), RBI (banking), and now NFRA (audit). Know which regulator has jurisdiction over what.

Q21. India is revising its GDP base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23. Why does a GDP base year revision matter, and what are the risks of it being used to produce politically convenient growth numbers?

opinion

Position (P): Base year revision is a legitimate and necessary statistical exercise — GDP is measured relative to a reference year’s prices and economic structure, and that reference year must be periodically updated to reflect the actual composition of the modern economy. However, the concern about political manipulation of the revision is well-founded and requires institutional safeguards.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The strongest criticism of India’s statistical system is not about base year revision per se but about the methodology used in the 2011–12 base year revision, which sharply revised upward India’s GDP growth figures. Critics — including Arvind Subramanian, a former Chief Economic Adviser — argued this revision made India’s growth appear faster than it actually was, inconsistent with other indicators such as electricity consumption, freight movement, and bank credit growth.

Illustrate with specifics (I): When India last revised its GDP base year (from 2004–05 to 2011–12) in 2015, it shifted from factor cost to market prices (GVA methodology) and incorporated corporate balance sheet data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. This is methodologically sound in principle. The risk in the 2022–23 revision is that the new base year includes the COVID-19 years (extremely depressed activity), which could make subsequent growth rates appear artificially high in comparison — a base effect problem. The National Statistical Commission (NSC) and its advisory capacity is the safeguard; ensuring its functional independence from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is the governance challenge.

Link to governance (L): As a policymaker, I would advocate for NSSO methodology papers to be published in advance of the revision for public comment, for the National Statistical Commission to include independent academic economists, and for growth data to be accompanied by supplementary indicators — electricity consumption index, transport freight data, banking credit — as a reality check.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the difference between GDP at factor cost and GDP at market prices? Which does India currently use?

Explain the concept of “base effect” in the context of GDP growth rates. How would a low-GDP base year inflate subsequent growth figures?

The IMF and World Bank both use purchasing power parity (PPP) to compare GDP across countries. Explain what PPP adjusts for and why it matters for India.

The Arvind Subramanian 2019 working paper arguing India’s growth was overstated by 2.5 percentage points is the specific critical reference. The board tests whether you can engage with legitimate statistical criticism without either dismissing it as anti-India or uncritically accepting it.

INTEGRATED AND CROSS-TOPIC QUESTIONS

Q22. India is simultaneously dealing with a Hormuz-driven energy crisis, a monsoon-dependent food inflation problem, and an RBI rate cut cycle. As Finance Secretary, how would you coordinate monetary and fiscal policy to navigate all three at once?

hypothetical

Position (P): As Finance Secretary, I would establish a weekly inter-ministerial coordination mechanism — MoF, MoPNG, MoCI, RBI — because these three crises are causally connected: a Hormuz-driven crude spike directly generates food and fuel inflation, erodes the rupee, widens the current account deficit, and creates fiscal pressure — all of which constrain the RBI's rate cut space. Coordinated response is not optional.

Acknowledge the other side (A): Critics of fiscal-monetary coordination argue that it compromises RBI independence — the Finance Ministry nudging the MPC toward lower rates even when inflation signals a pause. This concern is legitimate and must be managed through transparent communication rather than informal pressure.

Illustrate with specifics (I): The immediate fiscal tools are clear. If crude prices spike past \$100 per barrel because of the Hormuz closure, I would first deploy the Strategic Petroleum Reserve's 5.33 MMT to buffer domestic supply disruption. Second, I would calibrate excise duties on petrol and diesel — a tool used effectively in 2020 to raise revenue and in 2022 to reduce the pass-through to consumers. India's fiscal deficit is currently 4.9% of GDP; there is limited headroom, but targeted fuel excise reductions are more efficient than broad-based subsidies. Third, on food: buffer stock releases through NAFED and FCI operations, PM-AASHA activations for key vegetables, and temporary export restrictions on onions and pulses if domestic prices spike.

Link to governance (L): The RBI's role in this scenario is to communicate clearly that it is monitoring the Hormuz risk and will pause the rate cut cycle if crude prices and CPI data warrant — but not to be stampeded into premature tightening by a supply shock that is temporary rather than demand-driven. The Finance Ministry's job is to absorb the fiscal shock through calibrated duty adjustments, so the RBI does not need to tighten prematurely.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the FRBM Act, and what fiscal deficit target does it set for FY26? Has India met it?

India's CAD (current account deficit) widened to approximately 2% of GDP in Q3 FY26. What are the threshold levels at which the CAD becomes a macro-stability risk?

How would a depreciation of the rupee against the dollar simultaneously worsen inflation and help the current account deficit? Explain the J-curve effect.

Demonstrating systems-level macroeconomic thinking — tracing the chain from crude prices through CAD to fiscal deficit to inflation — distinguishes an excellent answer from a good one. The Finance Secretary role requires exactly this cross-domain integration.

Q23. India's adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework commits it to protecting 30% of its land by 2030, while the government's infrastructure pipeline requires linear projects through forested areas. How do you resolve this tension as a district collector in a biodiversity-sensitive region?

hypothetical

Position (P): As a district collector in a biodiversity-sensitive region, I would approach this not as a binary choice between development and conservation — both of which I am constitutionally obligated to pursue — but as a design and sequencing challenge. Most infrastructure-biodiversity conflicts arise from poor planning, not from an unavoidable trade-off.

Acknowledge the other side (A): The pressure to fast-track infrastructure is real and legitimate. Economic surveys consistently show that poor connectivity — not just in roads but in power and telecom — is a primary reason for regional poverty persistence in ecologically sensitive districts (the Northeast, Western Ghats, Central Indian forested belt). Infrastructure delays that invoke environmental concerns carry a human cost that a conservation frame alone does not capture.

Illustrate with specifics (I): India's National Biodiversity Authority under the Biological Diversity Act 2002 must be consulted for projects in biodiversity-sensitive areas. The Forest Conservation Act 1980 (now replaced by the Van (संरक्षण एवं समृद्धि) Adhiniyam 2023) governs forest diversion for non-forest purposes, requiring compensatory afforestation in the CAMPA fund. The practical tools I have as a collector are: routing infrastructure through already-degraded land rather than intact forest (linear infrastructure site selection reform), mandating wildlife underpasses on all new National Highways through forested corridors (the NH authorities already have a standard design), and using the DPIIT's single-window clearance process to flag environmental risks before, not after, project announcement.

Link to governance (L): My specific commitment: in my district, I would prepare a GIS-based habitat connectivity map (NCBS and WII have published methodology) before the Infrastructure Pipeline's project list reaches my office, so that I can proactively route projects around critical corridors rather than reactively fighting clearance battles. This converts a reactive conflict into a proactive planning exercise.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the compensatory afforestation requirement under the Forest Conservation Act, and is the CAMPA fund model effective in achieving net-zero forest loss?

The Wildlife Protection Act 1972 designates National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, and Community Reserves. What is the legal difference between the three in terms of permissible activities?

A scheduled tribe community in your district claims that a proposed highway will pass through their traditional forest rights area under the Forest Rights Act 2006. What is the legal process you must follow before any clearance is granted?

The Forest Rights Act 2006 and FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) of Gram Sabhas for diversion of forest land is a mandatory procedural requirement that cannot be waived — the Niyamgiri judgment (2013) established this. This is a signature answer differentiator.

Q24. You have been posted as the first-ever District Child Protection Officer in a district with high social media penetration, declining school attendance, and reports of cyberbullying. Your collector asks you for a 100-day action plan. What would it include?

hypothetical

Position (P): My 100-day plan has three phases: understand (Days 1–30), build (Days 31–70), and act (Days 71–100). Child protection at the district level works best when the administrative response is grounded in community trust, not just legal enforcement.

Acknowledge the other side (A): There is a real risk that a heavy enforcement-first approach — summoning school principals, sending notices to parents, blocking content — creates backlash, drives harmful behaviour underground (from public social media to private messaging apps), and erodes the trust needed for children and families to come forward. The UK experience with Online Safety enforcement shows that regulatory pressure on platforms must be paired with community-level support infrastructure.

Illustrate with specifics (I): Days 1–30: I would commission a rapid survey through ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) and ASHA workers on screen time patterns and mental health indicators across five clusters in the district. I would map all existing CHILDLINE (1098) responses and identify the top five cyberbullying complaint types. Days 31–70: I would establish a District Digital Safety Committee under the existing District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) structure (mandated under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015) with NGOs, school representatives, and NCPCR-affiliated child rights organisations. I would negotiate with block education officers to implement a one-hour “digital literacy and well-being” period in all government middle and high schools — using NEP 2020’s social-emotional learning curriculum components. Days 71–100: I would issue a district-level order requiring all private schools to establish a Cyberbullying Redressal Committee (mirroring the Sexual Harassment Committees under POSH), with a mandatory grievance register submitted to the DCPU quarterly. I would hold a public Jan Sunwai on digital safety attended by district police’s cybercell, to give families direct access to reporting mechanisms.

Link to governance (L): The 100-day plan deliberately avoids demanding new legislation or new budgets — it works within the DCPU structure, ICDS network, ASHA workers, NEP curriculum, and CHILDLINE system that already exist. Administrative creativity within existing frameworks is faster and more sustainable than waiting for Parliament to act.

Cross-Questions from Board:

What is the CHILDLINE service, who operates it, and under which ministry does it fall?

The POCSO Act 2012 mandates mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse. Who is a “mandatory reporter” under the Act, and what is the penalty for non-reporting?

You discover that a 15-year-old in your district has been groomed and exploited on social media by an adult outside the state. What is your immediate administrative response, and which agencies do you loop in?

The board assesses administrative creativity and systems knowledge simultaneously in scenario questions. Knowing that DCPUs exist under the JJ Act 2015, that ASHA workers are the last-mile government health workers, and that NEP 2020 has social-emotional learning components — and connecting all three into one coherent plan — is more impressive than citing new laws. Show you can work with what exists.

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