

## Today's Prelims Topics

### Makhana - Super Food

#### Context

Recently the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare visited Bihar to interact with Makhana producers.

#### About Makhana/ Fox Nut

- It is a highly nutritious aquatic crop that grows in still or slow-moving water bodies like ponds, lakes and wetlands.
- It is known for its edible seeds, which are rich in protein, fiber and antioxidants.
- It is **native to Southeast Asia and China**.
- **Climate & Soil Requirements:**
  - Grows best in a **tropical and subtropical climate**.
  - Requires a **hot and humid** environment with temperatures ranging between **20°C to 35°C**.
  - Grows best in **smooth loamy soil**.
- **Water Requirements:**
  - Grows in **shallow water bodies** with a depth of 1-2 meters.
  - Requires clean, **nutrient-rich and stagnant water** for proper growth.



#### Makhana Production in India

- **India is the largest producer of Makhana in the world.**
- The major producing states are:
  - **Bihar (90% of India's production, mainly in the Mithilanchal region)**
  - **Other States:** West Bengal, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura etc.
- Despite Bihar producing 90% of the country's makhana crop, the **largest makhana exporters in India are Punjab and Assam.**
  - Punjab **does not even produce makhana.**
  - **Reason:** Bihar neither has a developed food processing industry, nor required export infrastructure.

#### Health Benefits of Makhana

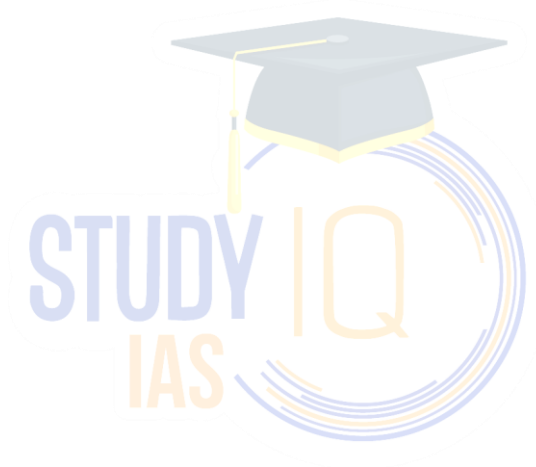


### Recent Developments

- **Mithila Makhana** from Bihar was awarded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2022.
- In the Union Budget 2025, establishment of **Makhana Board in Bihar** was announced to improve production, processing, value addition and marketing of makhana.
- **National Research Centre for Makhana** - Darbhanga (Bihar).

### Source:

- [The Hindu - Makhana](#)



## Legal Framework for Website Blocking in India

### Context

Recently the website of Tamil magazine Vikatan became inaccessible for many users.

### About the Procedure

- **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000:** Gives the government the **power to block websites** for reasons such as:
  - Sovereignty and integrity of India.
  - Defence and security of the state.
  - Friendly relations with foreign states.
  - Public order or prevention of incitement.
  - **Blocking orders are confidential** and are not publicly disclosed.
- **The Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009:**
  - Allows **Ministries or State government departments to request website blocking** through a **nodal officer**.
  - The **IT Ministry appoints a committee to review the request** and decide on blocking.
  - Once approved, the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT) informs** Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block the site.
- **IT Rules, 2021 (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code):**
  - Governs **content removal** on websites, social media and streaming platforms.
  - Allows **the I&B Ministry and IT Ministry to issue emergency orders** to remove content.
  - Unlike full website blocking, **this rule is used to take down specific content** (posts, articles, videos, etc.).
- **Technical Challenges in Blocking Specific Content:**
  - With the rise of **secure HTTPS websites**, blocking **specific pages** is difficult.
  - ISPs can only block entire domains, not individual web pages, **unless the website cooperates**.

### Source:

- [The Hindu - How was 'Vikatan' made inaccessible?](#)

## SC Ruling on Gag orders

### Context

The Supreme Court has granted interim protection from arrest to podcaster and influencer Ranveer Allahbadia in connection with multiple FIRs registered against him.

### What Are Gag Orders?

- A **gag order** is a **legal directive** that prohibits individuals or media outlets from publicly discussing certain matters.
- **Purpose:**
  - Protects **fair trial rights**.
  - Prevents **prejudicial media influence**.
- The Supreme Court's directive barring Allahbadia from airing any show on YouTube or other media platforms amounts to a **gag order**.
- **Legal Concept behind judgement:** Doctrine of Prior Restraint.
  - It refers to **state action prohibiting speech or expression before it occurs**.
- **Legal Basis for Gag orders in India:**
  - **Section 144 of CrPC:** Allows the government to restrict public statements in cases of law and order concerns.
  - **Contempt of Court Act, 1971:** Prohibits public discussion on ongoing legal cases to prevent judicial influence.
  - **Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution:** Allows reasonable restrictions on free speech for security, public order, and morality.

### Interim Relief in Criminal Cases

- **Conditions for Interim Relief:** **No statutory guidelines** exist; courts exercise **judicial discretion** based on three key factors:
  - **Flight Risk** – Whether the accused might **abscond**.
  - **Intimidation of Witnesses** – Risk of **threats** to witnesses.
  - **Tampering with Evidence** – Possibility of **interference** with the investigation.
- **Supreme Court Rulings on Bail Conditions:**
  - **Satender Kumar Antil v. CBI (2022):** Unreasonable bail conditions can **defeat the purpose of granting bail**.
  - **Frank Vitus v. Narcotics Control Bureau (2024):** Rejected bail condition requiring accused to **share Google Maps location PIN**.
    - The court ruled it **violated the right to privacy under Article 21**.

### Source:

- [The Hindu - Gag Orders](#)

## Melting Glaciers and Rising Sea Levels

### Context

A newly published study has found that **glaciers worldwide have been losing 273 billion tonnes of ice per year**, leading to a **sea level rise of nearly 2 cm in the 21st century alone**.

### Why the Sea Level is Rising

- Sea level rise is the **increase in the ocean's surface height**, measured from the **center of the Earth**. The two main causes are:
  - **Melting of Glaciers and Ice Sheets**
    - **Glaciers** (large masses of ice and snow moving over land) are melting due to **global warming**.
    - **Ice sheets** (glaciers covering more than **50,000 sq. km**) in **Greenland and Antarctica** are also losing ice at an alarming rate.
    - Since **2000**, **glaciers have lost 5% of their ice globally**, a rate higher than even the **Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets**.
  - **Thermal Expansion of Seawater**
    - **As global temperatures rise, oceans warm up**.
    - Warm water **expands in volume**, contributing to **one-third to half of global sea level rise**.
    - NASA has confirmed that **thermal expansion is a major driver** of rising sea levels.
  - **Sea level rise is not uniform worldwide**.
    - **Southwestern Indian Ocean**: Rising at **2.5 mm per year**, higher than the **global average**.
    - **Reasons for Uneven Rise**: Local changes in ocean heat content and salinity.

### Concerns due to Sea Level rise

- **Coastal Flooding and Land Loss**:
  - Rising sea levels lead to **frequent and intense coastal flooding**.
  - **West Bengal** alone lost 99 sq. km of land between 1990 and 2016.
  - More flooding results in **higher coastal erosion, displacing coastal populations**.
- **Impact on Coastal Ecosystems**:
  - Higher sea levels **push seawater inland**, damaging ecosystems such as: Mangroves, Coral reefs & Salt marshes.
  - These ecosystems are vital for biodiversity and protect coastal areas from storms.
- **Increased Storm Surges and Saltwater Contamination**:
  - Rising sea levels **intensify storm surges** during tropical cyclones, causing **more destruction inland**.
  - **Saltwater intrusion** contaminates freshwater supplies, affecting: Drinking water, Agriculture & Fisheries.
- **Human Population at Risk**:
  - A **2024 study in Scientific Reports** found that:
    - **29% of the global population** lived within **50 km of the coast** in 2018.
    - **15% lived within just 10 km** of water bodies.

### Source:

- [Indian Express - 2 cm of sea level rise](#)

## Banon Export of Tapentadol-Carisoprodol Drug Combinations

### Context

Recently the Health Ministry has banned Export of Tapentadol-Carisoprodol Drug Combinations.

### About

- **Tapentadol:**
  - It is an **Opioid analgesic**.
  - It is used to treat moderate to severe pain, including post-surgical pain, neuropathic pain etc.
  - **Side effects: Risk of addiction and dependence** (classified as a **Schedule H1 prescription drug** in India, requiring a doctor's prescription).
- **Carisoprodol:**
  - It is a muscle relaxant.
  - It is used to treat muscle spasms and pain due to injuries, sprains or musculoskeletal disorders.
  - Acts on the **central nervous system (CNS)** to **block pain sensations** between **nerves and the brain**.
- **Tapentadol-Carisoprodol Combination:** Not Approved in India
  - Both **Tapentadol and Carisoprodol are individually approved** by the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)**.
  - **Risks:**
    - Highly addictive due to their combined opioid + sedative effects.
    - Can cause severe respiratory depression, sedation, overdose risks.
    - Misused as a recreational drug in some regions.

### Source:

- [The Hindu - Tapentadol, Carisoprodol](#)

## Places in News

### Mount Etna

- Europe's tallest and most active volcano has erupted once again.



- **Location:** Sicily, Italy.
  - It is located above the convergent plate boundary between the African and Eurasian Plates.
  - It is a **Stratovolcano** (Composite Volcano)
- Facts**
- It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** (since 2013).
  - It is the largest volcano in Europe.
  - The United Nations designated Mount Etna as a **Decade Volcano** because of its history of volcanic activity and proximity to populated areas.

**Source:**

- [The Hindu - Mt. Etna](#)

### Gulf of Tonkin

- Recently Vietnam's foreign ministry released a map defining its baseline claim in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- **Purpose:** To **protect and enforce** Vietnam's **sovereign rights** in the Gulf of Tonkin.



- **Location:** Situated in the northwestern South China Sea.
- It borders **Vietnam** (West & Northwest) and **China** (North & East).
- It is referred to as "Beibu Gulf" in Chinese and "Bac Bo Gulf" in Vietnamese.
- **Historical Significance:**
  - **Vietnam War (1964):** The Gulf of Tonkin Incident led to U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

**Source:**

- [DD News- Gulf of Tonkin](#)

## News in Shorts

### Bay of Bengal (BOB) Inter-Governmental Organisation

- India has assumed the chairmanship of the Bay of Bengal Inter-Governmental Organisation at the **13th Governing Council Meeting in Male, Maldives.**

#### About BOB Inter-Governmental Organisation

- It is a regional fisheries advisory body established in **2003** to promote sustainable coastal fisheries development and management in the Bay of Bengal region.
- Its primary mandate is to enhance cooperation among member countries and provide technical and management advisory services.
- **Member Countries:** Bangladesh, India, Maldives & Sri Lanka.
  - **Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand** participate as cooperating non-contracting parties.
- BOB-IGO evolved from the Bay of Bengal Programme initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in **1979**.



#### Source:

- [Business Standard - BOB IGO](#)

### UGC-CARE List

- **The UGC-CARE list has been discontinued** to decentralize journal selection and improve transparency.

#### About UGC-CARE List

- It is a list of journals that are considered to be of high quality and are used for academic purposes.
- University Grants Commission (UGC) created this list to improve research quality and promote academic integrity.
- It was introduced in **2018** to ensure only **reputable academic journals** were recognized for: Faculty selections, Promotions & Research funding applications.
- **New System:**
  - **A new system of suggestive parameters** (36 under 8 criteria) will now guide journal selection.

#### Source:

- [The Hindu - UGC Care list](#)



## Editorial Summary

### Global Talent Shortage- Opportunity For India

#### Context

A recent FICCI-KPMG study, 'Global Mobility of Indian Workforce', has estimated that by 2030, the demand for skilled workers will exceed supply, leading to a talent shortage of over 85.2 million people.

#### India's Advantages and Opportunities

- **Favorable Global Perception:** Indian workers do not face significant hostility in most international markets.
  - Skilled Indian professionals continue to find opportunities despite anti-immigration sentiments.
- **Large and Young Workforce:** India has a demographic advantage with a large pool of skilled professionals.
  - Ability to supply talent to aging economies in Europe, GCC, and Australia.
- **Diverse Skill Base:** Strong presence in IT, healthcare, engineering, and emerging sectors like AI and automation.
  - Expanding skillsets in renewable energy, sustainability, and digital economy.
- **Strategic Geographies for Workforce Mobility:** Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Europe (including the United Kingdom) and Australia have high demand for skilled professionals.
  - Healthcare, services, construction, and manufacturing remain high-demand sectors.
- **Potential to Boost Economic Growth:** Indian workforce participation in global markets can help India reach the **\$9-trillion GDP** target by 2030.
  - Tapping into the **\$8.45 trillion** unrealized global economic potential.
- **Government's Focus on Legal Migration:** Efforts to curb illegal migration enhance India's reputation as a reliable talent supplier.
  - Ensures better working conditions and legal protections for Indian migrants.

#### Barriers to the Efficient Movement of Skilled Workers Across Borders

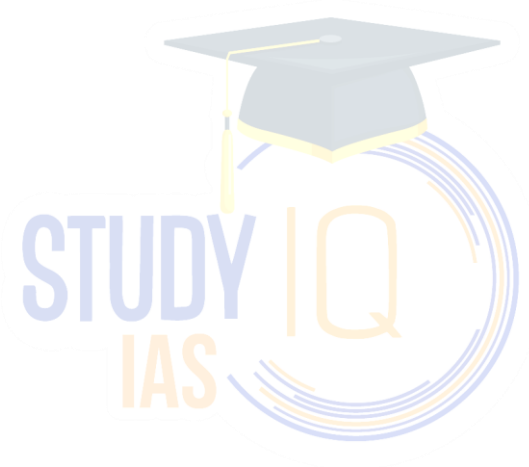
- **Regulatory and Immigration Barriers:** Complex visa processes and stringent work permit regulations hinder skilled migration.
  - Some countries have protectionist policies limiting the entry of foreign workers.
- **Recruitment Malpractices and Trafficking:** Exploitative recruitment practices and fraudulent agents take advantage of workers.
  - Human trafficking remains a serious concern for migrant workers' safety and rights.
- **Policy Barriers and Skill Mismatches:** Indian degrees, especially in medicine, are not universally recognized, leading to underemployment.
  - Some international job markets require additional certifications or licensing.
- **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Lack of proficiency in the host country's language affects job opportunities.
  - Cultural differences make integration challenging, reducing workforce efficiency.

#### Indian Government Initiatives

- **Bilateral Agreements and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):** Agreements with GCC nations and other countries to protect Indian workers' rights.
  - The **Joint India-UAE Vision** emphasizes skill cooperation between the two nations.
- **Skill Development Programmes:** Training initiatives to align Indian workforce skills with global market needs.

- Focus on sectors like automation, AI, big data, and healthcare.
- **Digital Platforms for Workforce Support:** Online recruitment systems ensure legal protections for workers.
  - Helps prevent fraud, especially in GCC countries.
- **Recognition of Qualifications:** Ongoing efforts for mutual recognition of Indian academic and professional degrees abroad.
- **Regulation of Recruitment Practices:** Stricter oversight on recruitment agencies to prevent exploitation and trafficking.
- **Promoting Circular Migration and Mobility:** Temporary work visas and rotational workforce models to address labour shortages.

Source: [The Hindu: Talent shortage — global challenge, India's opportunity](#)



## Appointment of Election Commissioners

### Context

The appointment process of election commissioners (ECs) has been questioned for years, raising serious concerns about the autonomy and impartiality of this vital institution.

### Process of Appointment of Election Commissioners (CEC and ECs)

| Aspect                       | Old Procedure   | SC Verdict (Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India) 2023   | New Law   |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Appointment Process</b>   | Appointed by the President on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers, usually suggested by the Law Minister and the Prime Minister. | SC ordered that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) shall be appointed on the advice of a committee comprising the <b>Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Chief Justice of India.</b> | Appointed by the President based on the recommendation of a Selection Committee comprising the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition or leader of the largest opposition party in Lok Sabha. |
| <b>Selection Committee</b>   | Not specified.  | Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Chief Justice of India.  | Includes the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition/leader of the largest opposition party in Lok Sabha.  |
| <b>Search Committee</b>      | Not specified.  |  | A Search Committee led by the Cabinet Secretary will recommend a panel of names to the Selection Committee.   |
| <b>Salary and Conditions</b> | Equivalent to a Supreme Court Judge.  |  | Made equivalent to that of the Cabinet Secretary.   |
| <b>Removal Process</b>       | The CEC could be removed in a manner similar to a Supreme Court judge. ECs could be removed on the CEC's recommendation.                  |  | Retains the constitutional provision for CEC's removal like a Supreme Court Judge. ECs can only be removed on the recommendation of the CEC.  |

### Challenges in the Appointment Process of Election Commissioners

- **Lack of Institutional Independence:** The executive **dominates the selection panel**, affecting the neutrality of the ECI.
  - The **2023 Act replaced the CJI with a Union Minister**, giving the ruling party greater control.
- **Violation of Supreme Court's Spirit:** **SC's 2023 ruling** recommended a balanced committee (**PM, LoP, and CJI**) until Parliament passed a law.

- The new law **overturned the spirit of the ruling**, leading to concerns over executive overreach.
- **Delay in Judicial Review:** Despite the **ADR's legal challenge**, the **SC did not grant an interim stay**, allowing fresh appointments under the new law.
  - The **hearing on February 19, 2025, was adjourned without a new date**, leaving uncertainty over the legitimacy of the appointments.
- **Lack of Transparency:** The **current selection process lacks public scrutiny and institutional checks**.
  - No parliamentary oversight or independent review mechanism exists.
- **Public Perception and Credibility Issues: Optics matter** in democracy—any perception of bias undermines the credibility of elections.
  - The **ECI's independence must not only exist but be visible** to maintain public trust.
- **Global Best Practices Ignored:** Other democracies have **more transparent, bipartisan, and institutionally balanced** selection processes.
  - India's model remains **opaque and politically controlled**, despite being a leading democracy.

#### Global Best Practices in EC Appointments

- **United States:** President appoints commissioners with advice and consent of the **Senate**.
- **South Africa:** President appoints ECs based on the **recommendation of the National Assembly**.
- **Brazil:** ECs are appointed by the **Federal Supreme Court**.
- **United Kingdom:** Appointments are made by the **Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission**, which has **cross-party membership**.
- **France:** ECs are appointed **jointly by the President, legislature, and judiciary**.
- **Nepal:** President appoints ECs based on **recommendation by the Constitutional Council**, followed by a **parliamentary hearing**.

#### Conclusion

- **Embracing a bipartisan and neutral collegium-based appointment system** would strengthen the ECI's independence.
- **Drawing inspiration from global best practices** can help ensure **credibility and fairness** in India's election process.
- The future of electoral democracy in India depends on addressing these concerns with **judicial intervention, public pressure, and political will**.

Source: [Indian Express: Doing the Right Thing](#)