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 January 14th, 2026



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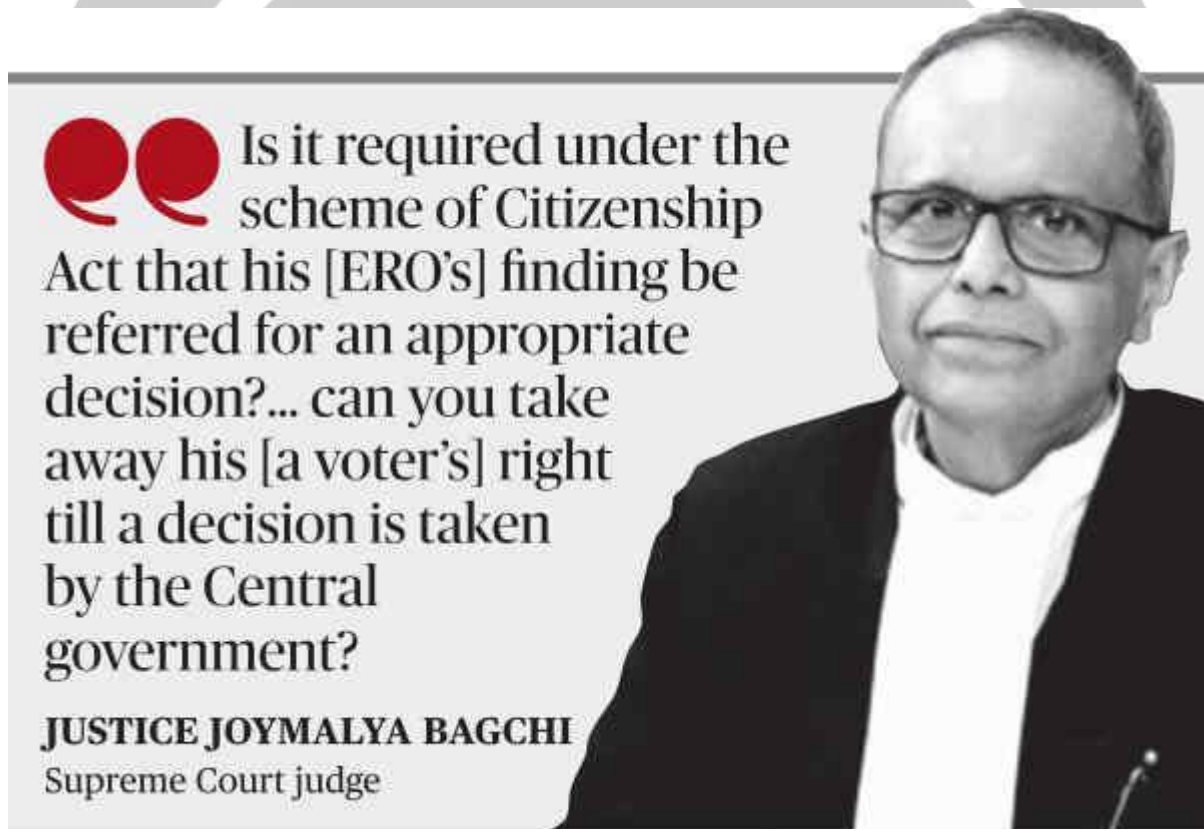
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1. SC questions EC on voter deletion, citizenship

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has questioned the Election Commission of India on whether the removal of a person's name from electoral rolls on citizenship grounds could indirectly cast doubt on the individual's right to remain in India, even before the Central government takes a final decision under citizenship laws. This comes amid reports that nearly 6.5 crore names were deleted from draft electoral rolls across nine States and three Union Territories during the second phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).



Background

What is the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

- A periodic exercise undertaken by the EC to update electoral rolls.

Aims to:

- Remove duplicate, deceased, migrated, or ineligible voters
- Ensure purity and accuracy of voter lists.

Legal Framework Governing Electoral Rolls

- Article 326 of the Constitution – Right to vote for adult Indian citizens.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 – Procedure for inclusion, deletion, and appeals.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 – Authority of the Union government to decide citizenship status.

Feature

Supreme Court's Core Question

- Can an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), after an “inquisitorial enquiry”, delete a voter’s name before the Centre formally decides on citizenship?

Does such deletion:

- Create a presumption of non-citizenship?
- Open the door for detention or deportation?

EC's Stand

- Citizenship verification is essential for electoral integrity.

ERO's decision:

- Is limited to voting rights, not deportation.
- Does not automatically trigger action under the Citizenship Act.

Persons deleted from rolls:

- Have the right to appeal.
- Can be restored if exclusion is found to be arbitrary or perverse.

Court's Concern

- Whether voting rights can be suspended without a final determination by the Centre.
- Risk of administrative overreach by election officials into citizenship matters.

Challenges

Overlap Between Voting Rights and Citizenship

- While voting is a statutory right, citizenship determines:
 - Right to reside
 - Protection against deportation
- Blurring this line risks constitutional impropriety.

Procedural Fairness

- Large-scale deletions (6.5 crore) raise concerns of:

- Errors
- Exclusion of genuine citizens
- Disenfranchisement of the poor and migrants

Risk of “Shadow Citizenship Determinations”

- ERO findings, though limited in law, may:
 - Influence executive agencies
 - Be used indirectly in foreigners’ or deportation proceedings

Federal and Democratic Implications

- Electoral rolls affect:
- Representation
- Delimitation
- Legitimacy of elections
- Errors can distort democratic outcomes.

Way Forward

Clear Institutional Firewalls

- Explicit separation between:
- Electoral eligibility checks
- Citizenship adjudication under the Citizenship Act.

Strengthening Due Process

- Mandatory:
- Prior notice
- Reasoned orders
- Opportunity to hear
- Time-bound and accessible appeal mechanisms.

Judicially Laid Safeguards

- Supreme Court may:
- Lay down guidelines on how far EROs can go.
- Clarify that EC findings cannot be used for deportation.

Technology with Accountability

- Use of databases must ensure:
- Transparency
- Auditability
- Protection against algorithmic exclusion.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court–EC exchange underscores a deep constitutional tension between ensuring clean electoral rolls and safeguarding citizenship-linked rights. While the Election Commission is duty-bound to protect electoral integrity, citizenship determination remains the exclusive domain of the Union government.

2. Quick Commerce Platforms to Stop 10-Minute Delivery Model

Why in the News?

Leading quick-commerce and food delivery platforms, including Blinkit, Zepto, Zomato, and Swiggy, have decided to discontinue their 10-minute delivery promise following the intervention of Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya. The move came after gig and platform workers went on a one-day nationwide strike on December 31, citing road accidents, health issues, and unsafe work conditions linked to ultra-fast delivery targets.

Background

- Over the past few years, India's quick-commerce sector popularised 10–20 minute delivery as a competitive branding strategy.
- Platforms claimed that such speed was enabled through dark stores/warehouses located close to consumers, not by pressuring delivery workers.
- However, workers' unions argued that delivery partners bore the brunt of this promise through:
 - Risky driving behaviour
 - Algorithmic pressure to meet deadlines
 - Mental stress and physical exhaustion

- Gig workers formally sought the Minister's intervention to end ultra-fast delivery mandates and regulate platform work practices.



Features

- Removal of 10-minute branding from apps and marketing material.
- Blinkit revised its tagline from "10,000+ products delivered in 10 minutes" to "30,000+ products delivered at your doorstep."
- Other platforms are expected to follow suit.
- The decision is voluntary but government-nudged, with a focus on worker welfare rather than punitive regulation.

Challenges

Worker Safety Risks

- Increased road accidents due to time pressure.
- Long working hours without adequate rest.

Algorithmic Management

- Ratings, incentives, and penalties are linked to delivery time.
- Lack of transparency in task allocation.

Absence of Formal Labour Protection

- Gig workers are outside traditional labour law coverage.
- Limited access to social security, insurance, and grievance redressal.

Race to the Bottom in Competition

- Platforms competing on speed rather than sustainability.

Way Forward

- Regulatory Framework for Gig Work
- Implement social security provisions under the Code on Social Security, 2020.

Safety-First Platform Design

- Algorithms must prioritise safe delivery times over speed.

Standardised Delivery Norms

- Set realistic, non-exploitative delivery benchmarks.

Worker Representation

- Institutionalised dialogue with unions like the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers.

Political and Parliamentary Oversight

- Continued advocacy by lawmakers such as Raghav Chadha to ensure accountability.

Conclusion

The rollback of the 10-minute delivery model marks a significant shift in India's gig economy discourse, from consumer convenience to worker dignity and safety. While the decision is a moral and political win for gig workers, its long-term impact will depend on whether it leads to systemic reforms in platform regulation, algorithmic transparency, and social security coverage.

3. 'Century-old Treasure' Found During Excavation in Gadag

Why in the News?

Gold ornaments weighing around half a kilogram, along with other artefacts, were discovered during excavation for house construction at Lakkundi in Gadag. The find drew public attention after a local boy, Prajwal, alerted authorities instead of keeping

the valuables, prompting official intervention by the district administration and the Archaeological Department.

Background

- Lakkundi is a historically significant settlement, renowned for its Western Chalukya–era temples, stepwells (kalyanis), and inscriptions.
- Such regions often yield archaeological artefacts during construction due to long-term habitation.
- The items were found in a copper container buried about five feet underground, suggesting deliberate concealment, possibly for safekeeping during a past period of instability.



Features

- Nature of artefacts: Gold ornaments and other articles, preliminarily assessed to be over 100 years old.
- Context of discovery: Unearthed during foundation excavation for a residential house.

Administrative response:

- Site barricaded immediately.
- Construction work halted.
- Matter was handed over to the Archaeological Survey of India-linked state archaeology authorities for examination.

Social dimension:

- Prajwal's honesty was widely praised.
- Educational support announced by the B.H. Patil Education Society.

Challenges

Distinguishing Treasure from Archaeological Artefacts

- Experts, including archaeologist Ramesh Mulimani, cautioned that such finds may not qualify as “treasure” but as historical personal wealth.

Legal Ambiguity

- Determining ownership under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and Treasure Trove rules.

Threat to Heritage Sites

- Rapid urbanisation and construction in heritage-rich villages risk damaging undiscovered remains.

Public Awareness

- Limited understanding among citizens about reporting and preserving archaeological finds.

Way Forward

Strengthen Heritage Impact Assessments

- Mandatory archaeological clearance in historically sensitive zones like Lakkundi.

Community Sensitisation

- Awareness programmes on legal obligations and heritage value.

Clear Protocols for Chance Finds

- Standard operating procedures for citizens, local bodies, and police.

Incentivising Honesty

- Formal recognition and support (education, rewards) for responsible reporting.

Digital Mapping of Heritage Zones

- GIS-based identification of high-risk excavation areas.

Conclusion

The Gadag–Lakkundi discovery highlights India’s deep, layered historical landscape, where everyday activities can intersect with heritage. While the find may not be a “treasure” in the cinematic sense, it is a reminder of the need to balance development with archaeological responsibility. Equally significant is the episode’s

civic lesson, that individual integrity, backed by responsive institutions, is crucial for preserving the nation's cultural legacy.

4. Trust-building with China on, but LAC vigilance essential: Army Chief

Why in the News?

Chief of the Army Staff Upendra Dwivedi has underlined that while India and China are working towards rebuilding trust along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), sustained military vigilance remains essential. His remarks came during the annual press conference in New Delhi amid ongoing diplomatic and military engagements between the two countries following the eastern Ladakh standoff.

Background

- India–China relations have been strained since the 2020 eastern Ladakh crisis, marked by prolonged military stand-offs and disengagement talks.
- Since then, both sides have relied on multi-layered diplomatic and military mechanisms to prevent escalation:
 - Special Representative-level talks
 - Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC)
 - Corps Commander-level military talks

- High-level political engagements, including meetings of top leaders in Kazan and Tianjin, have sought to stabilise ties.



Features

Trust-building with Vigilance

- Recent engagements have generated “urgency and mutual acceptance” to keep the border calm.
- Open communication channels help resolve minor issues locally before they escalate.

Firm Stand on Territorial Sovereignty

- India reiterated its long-standing position that the 1963 Pakistan–China agreement on the Shaksgam Valley is illegal.
- Any activity by China or Pakistan in the region is not recognised by India.

Rejection of CPEC 2.0

- India does not accept the joint China–Pakistan statement on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) 2.0, as it violates Indian sovereignty.

Capability Development

- Emphasis on creating a dedicated rocket-missile force.
- Successful testing and expansion of the Pinaka system (120 km → 150 km, with plans up to 300–450 km).
- Reference to advanced strike systems like Pralay and BrahMos.

Challenges

Fragile Border Stability

- Absence of a mutually accepted boundary along the LAC.

Trust Deficit

- Past agreements have not fully prevented face-offs.

Two-front Security Concerns

- Strategic coordination between China and Pakistan.

Evolving Nature of Warfare

- Increasing importance of long-range precision strikes and missile forces.

Way Forward

Sustained Diplomatic Engagement

- Regular political and military dialogue to institutionalise crisis management.

Military Preparedness with Restraint

- Vigilance along the LAC without provoking escalation.

Capability Modernisation

- Creation of a rocket-missile force integrating rockets and missiles for deterrence.

Clear Signalling on Sovereignty

- Consistent articulation of India's position on territories like the Shaksgam Valley.

Border Infrastructure & Surveillance

- Enhanced logistics, ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance), and rapid response capabilities.

Conclusion

The Army Chief's remarks reflect India's dual-track approach towards China - engagement without complacency. While trust-building measures and communication mechanisms are essential to maintain peace along the LAC, India remains clear-eyed about geopolitical realities, territorial sovereignty, and military preparedness. In an era of complex, multi-domain threats, vigilance combined with credible deterrence will remain the cornerstone of India's China policy.

5. T.N. Close to Eradicating Malaria as 33 Districts Report Nil Indigenous Cases

Why in the News?

Tamil Nadu is on the brink of malaria eradication, with 33 of its 38 districts reporting zero indigenous cases over the last three years. The achievement aligns with India's national commitment to eliminate malaria by 2030, set in coordination with the World Health Organization.

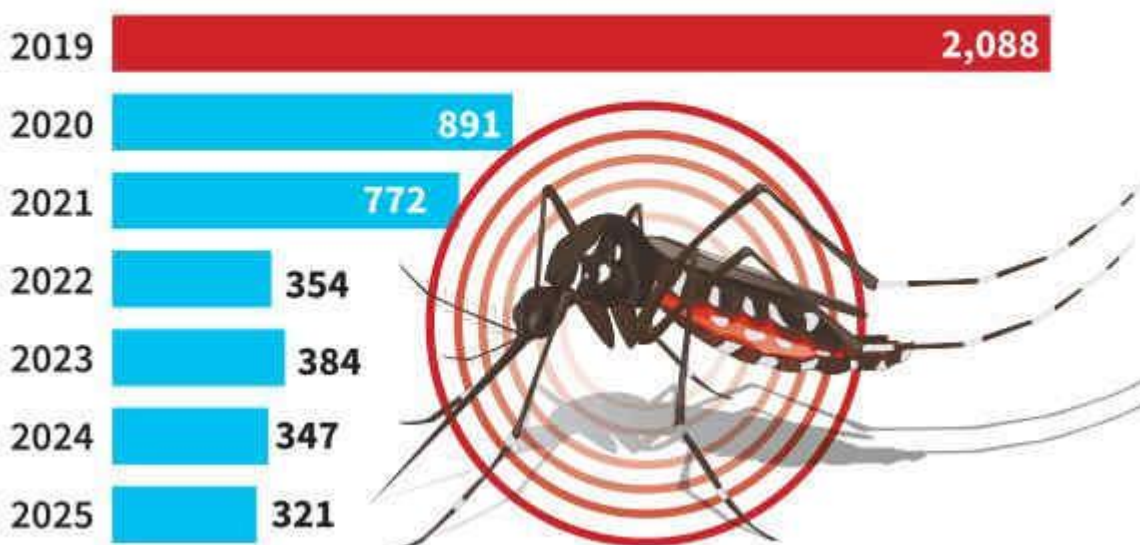
Background

- In 2015, Tamil Nadu recorded 5,587 malaria cases, which fell sharply to 321 cases in 2025, reflecting a decade-long decline.
- Annual Parasite Incidence (API) has dropped below 1%, indicating very low local transmission.

- The State's efforts are part of the National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) led by the National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases Control (NCVBDC).

On the wane

Malaria cases in Tamil Nadu between 2019 and 2025



Source : Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine

Features

- Malaria-free districts: 33 districts have achieved Category 0 status (no indigenous cases).
- Residual transmission areas:
 - Chennai, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Chengalpattu, and Salem continue to report cases.
- Urban challenge:
 - Chennai alone accounts for 37%–45% of State cases, though numbers fell from 173 (2023) to 121 (2025).

Surveillance strategy:

- Active surveillance: Monthly blood smear testing by field workers.
- Passive surveillance: Monitoring fever cases at PHCs and Government Hospitals.
- Cluster detection and early warning systems to prevent outbreaks.
- No outbreaks reported in the past three years.

Challenges

Imported Malaria

A majority of recent cases are imported, not locally transmitted:

- 2023: 330 of 384 cases
- 2024: 208 of 347 cases
- 2025: 203 of 321 cases

Migration and Mobility

- Influx of migrant labourers from malaria-endemic regions.
- Risk of asymptomatic carriers who have not completed treatment.

Urban Vector Control

- Construction sites and dense urban settlements pose breeding risks.

Sustaining Gains

- Risk of complacency as case numbers decline.

Way Forward

Targeted Surveillance in Hotspots

- Focus on Chennai and the four remaining districts with residual cases.

Migrant-focused Interventions

- Screening, treatment completion, and monitoring at construction zones and transit points.

Integrated Vector Management

- Larval source reduction, fogging, and environmental sanitation.

Certification and Validation

- Independent verification of zero-case status by NCVBDC's Central Monitoring Team.

Sustained Financing & Capacity Building

- Continued funding and training to prevent resurgence post-elimination.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's progress places it among India's leading States in malaria elimination, demonstrating the effectiveness of robust surveillance, early detection, and sustained public health investment. However, the final stretch, marked by imported cases and urban vulnerabilities, will be decisive. Maintaining vigilance,

especially in high-mobility urban settings, will determine whether Tamil Nadu can transition from near-elimination to certified malaria-free status, contributing decisively to India's 2030 malaria elimination goal.

6. India Must Focus on AI and Its Environmental Impact

Why in the News?

A growing global debate has emerged on the environmental costs of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly its carbon footprint, water consumption, and energy intensity. Recent studies by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have highlighted that large-scale AI deployment can significantly exacerbate climate change and resource stress.

Background

- AI systems, especially Large Language Models (LLMs), require massive computational power for training and deployment.
- The global ICT sector contributes roughly 1.8%–2.8% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with some estimates going up to 3.9%.
- UNEP estimates that AI-related data centres may consume 4.2–6.6 billion cubic metres of water annually by 2027, largely for cooling.

- Training a single large AI model can emit hundreds of thousands of kilograms of CO₂, comparable to the lifetime emissions of multiple cars.
- Despite these costs, reliable and transparent data on AI's environmental footprint remains limited, with conflicting claims from technology companies.

Features

Carbon Footprint of AI

- High energy demand during model training and inference.
- Increased reliance on fossil-fuel-based electricity grids in many countries.

Water and Resource Stress

- Heavy water usage for cooling hyperscale data centres.
- Land-use pressures due to data centre expansion.

Opacity and Under-reporting

- Lack of standardised metrics for AI-specific emissions.
- Selective disclosure by private companies.

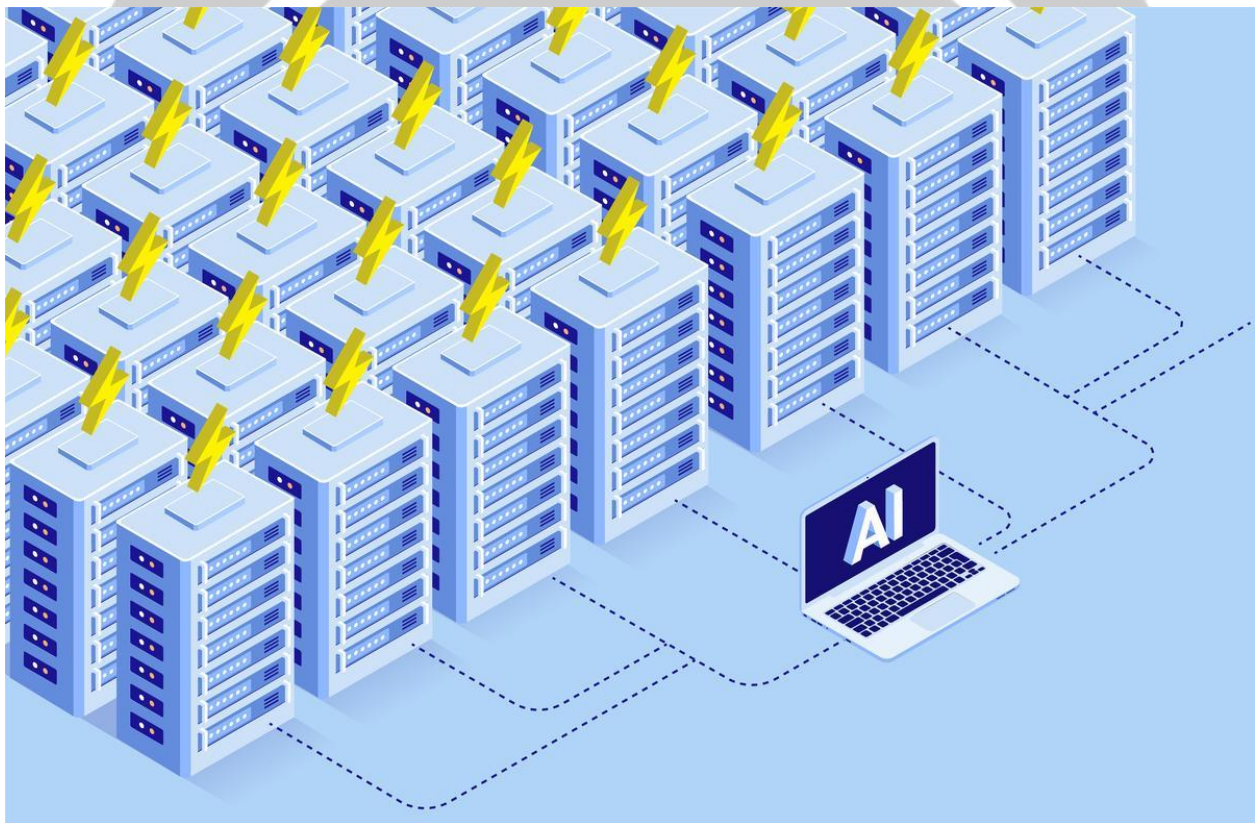
Global Policy Momentum

- UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021) recognises AI's environmental harms.
- The European Union is moving towards mandatory sustainability disclosures for high-compute activities under its

regulatory framework.

Challenges for India

- **Policy Blind Spot:** Indian AI discourse largely focuses on how AI can help climate action, not how it may harm the environment.
- **Absence of Measurement Standards:** No nationally accepted methodology to calculate AI-related emissions, water use, or energy intensity.



- **Rapid Digital Expansion:** India's fast-growing digital economy could lock in high-emission infrastructure.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** Existing tools like the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework do not explicitly cover digital or algorithmic activities.

- Data Deficit: Limited public data on energy and water use by AI data centres.

Way Forward

Extend Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Framework

- Include AI model development and large data centres within the scope of the EIA Notification, 2006.

Develop AI-Specific Sustainability Metrics

- Measure GHG emissions, electricity usage, water consumption, and land-use impacts of AI systems.

Multi-Stakeholder Standard Setting

- Involve tech firms, think tanks, academia, and civil society to create uniform reporting standards.

ESG Disclosure Integration

- Mandate disclosure of AI-related environmental impacts under ESG norms through bodies like the Securities and Exchange Board of India and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Promote Sustainable AI Practices

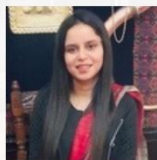
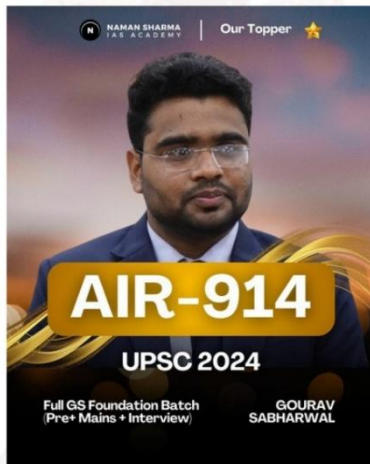
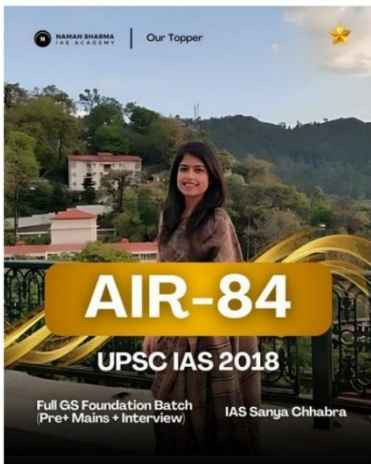
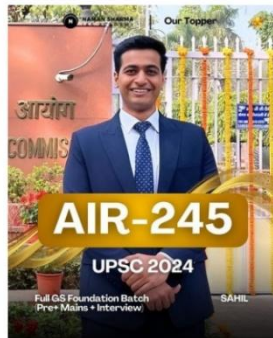
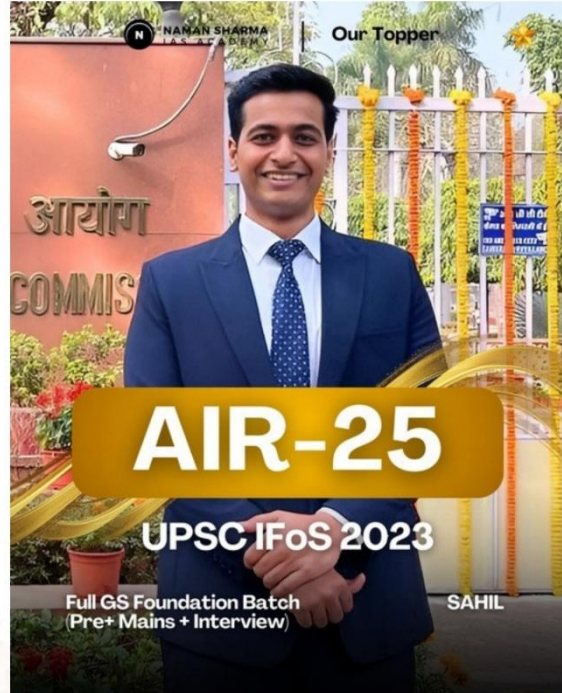
- Use pre-trained and efficient models.
- Power data centres with renewable energy.
- Encourage “compute-efficient” AI research.

Conclusion

As India positions itself as a global AI hub, it must avoid repeating the mistakes of carbon-intensive industrialisation. Sustainable AI governance, rooted in transparency, measurement, and accountability, is essential to align technological progress with climate commitments. By integrating environmental safeguards into AI policy today, India can ensure that digital innovation strengthens, rather than undermines, its long-term sustainability and development goals.



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