

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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—It's about quality—

- ▶ Playback singer P. Jayachandran, renowned for his soulful voice and over 16,000 songs, passed away in Thrissur.

Singer P. Jayachandran passes away

The Hindu Bureau
THRISSUR

Playback singer P. Jayachandran, known for his expressive singing and magical voice that captivated music lovers for over six decades, passed away at a private hospital in Thrissur on Thursday. He was 81. He had been undergoing treatment for cancer for some time.

Having sung over 16,000 songs that have touched generations, Jayachandran's voice transcended boundaries, resonating in Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi. Despite the challenges of age, his voice



P. Jayachandran

possessed the youthful charm capable of stirring romantic hearts, till the end.

Jayachandran became the beloved playback singer of Malayalam through his soulful renditions that

speak directly to the heart. With songs filled with every emotion he became the voice that resonated with the very essence of life for music lovers.

Born at Ravipuram in Ernakulam, to renowned musician Tripunithura Ravi Varma Kochaniyan Thampuram and Subhadra Kunjamma, he was raised at Irinjalakkuda, Thrissur. Jayachandran developed an early passion for various forms of art, including Kathakali, and playing the mridangam and chenda.

His musical journey in films began with a song in the film *Kunjali Marakkar*. While *Oru Mullappoo Ma-*

layumayi was his first song recorded, in 1965, the song *Manjalayil Mungithorthi...* in the film *Kalithozhan* was the one that marked the start of his incredible career.

His contributions were recognised with prestigious awards, including the J.C. Daniel Award and the Kalaimamani Award, making him a celebrated figure in Indian music. In 1985 he received the National Film Award for Best Male Playback Singer for the song *Sivasankara Sarva Saranya Vibho* from the film *Sree Narayana Guru*. He also won five Kerala State awards, and four Tamil Nadu State awards.

Personalities in News: P. Jayachandran

- ▶ P. Jayachandran was a renowned Indian playback singer, widely recognized for his soulful voice and expressive singing.
- ▶ He was born in Ravipuram, Ernakulam, and hailed from a family with strong musical roots.
- ▶ Over his six-decade-long career, he recorded more than 16,000 songs in multiple languages, including Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi.
- ▶ His voice became iconic in Malayalam cinema, with songs that resonated deeply with listeners across generations.
- ▶ Despite his age and health challenges, his voice maintained a youthful charm and emotional depth.
- ▶ He passed away at the age of 81, after battling cancer.

The Z-Morh tunnel, set to open in January 13, will boost year-round tourism and provide strategic access to Ladakh.

PM to open Z-Morh tunnel, a key part of Kashmir-Ladakh corridor

To be inaugurated on January 13, the tunnel, in Ganderbal district, is key to keeping the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year; it is touted as a milestone in building the strategic corridor between Kashmir and Ladakh

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Z-Morh tunnel is set to become the first major milestone in the effort to build a strategic corridor between Kashmir and Ladakh which is open all through the year, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi slated to inaugurate it on January 13.

The tunnel, in Ganderbal district, is key to keeping the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year. Earlier, snowfall and avalanches would cut off the tourist spot every winter.

This will be Mr. Modi's first visit to Kashmir since an elected government took over the reins in the Union Territory. A security assessment of the project was done on Thursday to set up foolproof security arrangements ahead of the PM's visit. Security across the Valley, especially in Srinagar, has been stepped up and additional checkpoints set up on the main roads.

Hoteliers are enthusiastic about the tunnel. "It was much needed to have Sonamarg on the winter tourism map of Kashmir.



A view of the Z-Morh tunnel that connects Gagangir and Sonamarg. FILE PHOTO

There is a need to open up new winter destinations in Kashmir given the growing footfall. It would be safe to drive to Sonamarg in winter now," said Sajid Majeed, a hotelier.

At present, most hotels remain closed because of unreliable road access and infrastructure problems.

Built under the mountain glacier of Thajiwas Glacier between Gagangir and Sonamarg, the tunnel bypasses the landslide- and avalanche-prone pockets of the road, officials

said. An intelligent traffic management system will make it easier to control the flow of vehicles and will also open up the Thajiwas Glacier and Sindh River for adventure tourism, an official added.

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also welcomed the tunnel. "J&K, especially central Kashmir, looks forward to the inauguration of a vital piece of infrastructure in the coming days. This asset will be a game changer for the expansion of winter tourism

in the valley," Mr. Abdullah said in a post on X.

Strategic route

Built at a cost of ₹2,680 crore, the 6.5-km long two-lane tunnel is a key feature of the strategic access route to Ladakh. The main tunnel is 10.8 metres long, with a modified horseshoe-shaped escape tunnel of 7.5 metres, D-shaped ventilation tunnel of 8.3 metres, two major culverts of 110 metres and 270 metres, and one small culvert which is 30 metres long.

The project faced a major militant attack on October 21 last year, which left seven APCO Infratech workers, including a doctor, dead at the construction site.

The Z-Morh will lead towards the Zojila tunnel, which is being constructed nearby. The Zojila, Asia's longest tunnel will cut through the Himalayan range at Zojila Pass to reach the Kargil district in Ladakh. The 13.14-km long tunnel is coming up at a cost of ₹6,800 crore. Officials said a 7.57-metre long horseshoe-shaped single-tube, two-lane tunnel will pass under the Zojila Pass between Ganderbal in Kashmir and Drass town in Kargil.

"It will bring the travel time from three hours to 20 minutes between Ganderbal and Kargil," officials said. Ladakh is currently cut off during winter, as the Zojila Pass, the only road that connects Kashmir with Ladakh, is closed in December, with its reopening dependent on the melting of snow at mountain passes along its route. At times, the road would stay closed till April.

Analysis of the news:

- **Location and Purpose:** The Z-Morh tunnel is located in Ganderbal district, Jammu & Kashmir, and is part of a strategic corridor linking Kashmir and Ladakh.
- **Tourism Benefits:** The tunnel will keep Sonamarg open for year-round tourism, preventing closures due to snowfall and avalanches.
- **Strategic Importance:** It provides continuous access to Ladakh and enhances connectivity, crucial for both civilian and military purposes.
- **Construction:** Built at a cost of ₹2,680 crore, the tunnel is 6.5 km long with advanced features, including a modified escape tunnel and ventilation systems.
- **Economic Impact:** It is expected to boost winter tourism and adventure tourism in the region.

USPC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding the Z-Morh Tunnel:

1. The Z-Morh Tunnel is located in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
2. It provides year-round connectivity to Sonamarg, which remains inaccessible during winter.
3. The Z-Morh Tunnel is part of the strategic infrastructure development under the Bharatmala Pariyojana.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b)

India's Genome India project compiles 10,000 genomes from 83 population groups to advance disease research, precision medicine, and biotechnology, housed at the IBDC.

India releases compilation of 10,000 human genomes from 83 population groups

The 'Genome India' database will be available to researchers across the world; it will serve as a template for investigations into disease, drug therapy; PM says it will strengthen biotech economy

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India has completed and made available a year-long compilation of 10,000 human genomes representing 83 population groups, making up about 2% of the country's 4,600 population groups, as a database. This collection will serve as a template of future investigations into disease and drug therapy.

The 'Genome India' database, as it is known, will now be available to researchers across the world for investigation and is housed at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC), in Faridabad, Haryana.

A first analysis of the genomes estimates around 27 million low-frequency (or relatively rare) variants, with 7 million of them not found in similar reference databases around the world. Certain population groups show higher frequencies of alleles, or different versions of the same gene. Over the last two de-



A major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. GETTY IMAGES

cadec, many countries have created databases of the genomes of their population – for a variety of purposes including estimating disease risks, adverse drug reactions, establishing genealogy and DNA-profiling databases.

However, a major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. "The discoveries from Genome India are not just scientific

– they hold the potential for targeted clinical interventions, advancing precision medicine for better healthcare," said Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh, at an event here to announce the project.

Researchers wishing to access the genomes must send in a proposal that will be perused by an independent panel with a commit-

ment that will adhere to data sharing and privacy policies. Though the database stores information on population groups, this data will not be classified by the names of castes or tribes but will be numerically coded, Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, told *The Hindu*.

Describing the project as "historic", Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a video address, said this paved the way for India strengthening the biotechnology economy as well as biotechnology-based manufacturing.

Experts said that while only a small fraction of India's population groups were studied, the door was open to expanding the database to a million genomes. "Though costs are a limiting factor, a million would dramatically scale insight into India's genetic diversity," said Kumaraswamy Thangaraj of the Centre for Cellular Microbiology, Hyderabad and one of the project leaders.

Genome India Project:

- **Objective:** The Genome India project aims to create a comprehensive database of human genomes from various population groups across India, focusing on disease research and drug therapy development.
- **Scope:** It includes 10,000 human genomes representing 83 population groups, covering about 2% of India's 4,600 population groups.
- **Database Availability:** The database is housed at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) in Faridabad, Haryana, and is accessible to researchers globally.
- **Genomic Insights:** The project reveals around 27 million low-frequency variants, including 7 million not found in other global databases.
- **Precision Medicine:** Genome India focuses on enabling targeted clinical interventions for better healthcare and advancing precision medicine.
- **Privacy Measures:** Data is anonymized with numeric codes, and access requires proposals vetted by an independent panel.
- **Future Potential:** While it currently covers a small portion of India's genetic diversity, plans exist to expand it to a million genomes.

USPC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding the Genome India Project:

1. The Genome India Project aims to sequence the entire genome of every citizen of India.
2. It is implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
3. The project will help in the development of personalized medicine tailored to Indian genetic diversity.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: c)

➔ India's real GDP growth rate for 2024-25 is forecasted to drop to 6.4% from 8.2% in 2023-24.

Decoding India's growth slowdown

The official diminution of India's projected GDP growth rate may still be an underestimation of the extent of economic slowdown. The revenue mobilisation strategy needs to be reworked to enhance taxation on wealth and profits in order to enhance capex and welfare spending

ECONOMIC NOTES

Prasenjit Bose
Soumyadeep Biswas

The first advance estimates of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024-25, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) this week, shows a decline in the real GDP growth rate to 6.4% from 8.2% registered in 2023-24. This is lower than the 6.5 to 7% range projected by the Economic Survey in July 2024. The growth rate of nominal GDP, which is the sum of the real GDP growth rate and the overall inflation rate, is estimated at 9.7% in 2024-25 – significantly lower than the 10.5% growth rate projected in the last Union Budget.

Data discrepancies
The official diminution of India's projected GDP growth rate may still be an underestimation of the extent of economic slowdown. Academics and institutional experts have consistently pointed out serious defects in the official GDP estimates, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommending an upgrade of the real sector statistics. An "Informational Annex" to the 2023 IMF Staff consultation report on India had later also noted that, "...the compilation of constant price GDP deviate from the conceptual requirements of the national accounts, in part due to the use of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a deflator for many economic activities. The appropriate price to deflate GDP by type of activity is the Producer Price Index (PPI), which is under development. Large revisions to historical series, the relatively short time span of the revised series, major discrepancies between GDP by activity and GDP by expenditure, and the lack of official seasonally-adjusted quarterly GDP series complicate analysis. Together, these weaknesses make it challenging to monitor high frequency trends in India's economy through official statistics, particularly from the demand side." The estimation of real or constant price GDP requires the use of a GDP deflator to estimate values of GDP components in constant prices. The GDP deflator being used in India's official estimates is a weighted average of wholesale and retail price indices. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI), 2011-12 series has shown high volatility over the past decade, leading to inexplicably large divergences between the WPI and CPI inflation rates (Chart 1). This has had serious implications for the accuracy of the GDP deflator and real GDP estimates.

For instance, the nominal GDP growth rate was estimated at 14.2% in 2022-23 and 9.6% in 2023-24, which indicated a sharp decline in growth. However, the real GDP growth rate was estimated to have grown from 7.0% to 8.2%, indicating growth acceleration. This implied that the GDP deflator was only 1.4% in 2023-24, even as retail inflation was at 5.4%, because the WPI inflation rate was estimated to have fallen from a high of 9.4% in 2022-23 to a negative of -0.7% in 2023-24. In short, because of high volatility in the WPI, the nominal GDP estimate showed a growth deceleration in 2023-24 but the real GDP estimate reflected growth acceleration. Such anomalous and confounding data on macroeconomic fundamentals invariably lead to delusions and policy errors.

Elusive private investment
Tabled a day ahead of the Union Budget last July, the Economic Survey 2023-24 had taken comfort in the 8.2% growth in

Economic blues

From 2022-23 to 2024-25, real GDP and investment have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2% each and private consumption at 6%. Post-pandemic, there has been one percentage point increase in the annual average growth rate of real investment. Therefore, there is absolutely no indication of any structural break in the investment behaviour of the private corporate sector so far under the 11 years of NDA rule

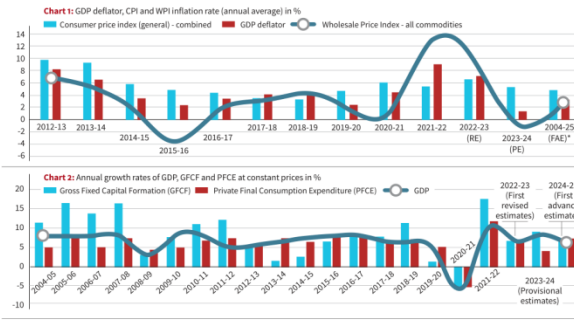


Table 1: Union Government's accounts: revenue and expenditure heads at the end of November 2023 and 2024

	Centre's net tax revenue				Centre's non-tax revenue				Capital expenditure				Revenue expenditure			
	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25		
Budget estimates (BE) (₹ crore)	23,30,631	26,84,999	3,01,650	5,45,701	10,00,961	11,11,111	35,02,136	37,09,401								
April to November (₹ crore)	14,35,755	14,43,435	2,84,365	4,27,020	5,85,645	5,13,500	20,66,522	22,27,502								
% of Budget estimate (April to November)	61.6	55.9	94.3	78.3	58.5	46.2	59.0	60.1								
% of Budget estimate (April to March)	99.8	n.a.	133.2	n.a.	94.8	n.a.	99.76	n.a.								

Source: Source: Controller General of Accounts (CGA), Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, NSO, MoSFAI, GGI, DPET, MoCA, National Accounts Statistics 2024 & First Advance Estimates of GDP for 2024-25.

real GDP and indicated a vigorous expansion of investment by the private sector. Yet, the Chief Economic Advisor had asked whether the corporate sector responded positively to the tax cuts of September 2019, and complained about sluggish corporate investments in machinery and equipment and intellectual property products. He criticised the disproportionate allocation of gross fixed capital formation (investment) in the private sector to "dwellings, other buildings and structures" as an unhealthy mix. Throwing such caution to the wind, the Union Budget relied entirely on a revival of the private corporate capex cycle to announce the "Prime Minister's Package for Employment and Skillings" with an outlay of ₹2 trillion, aimed at benefiting 41 million youth over a five-year period. The employment linked incentive/subsidy scheme and the internship programme for one crore youth in five years, were premised on the expectation of massive job creation, consequent to an acceleration of private corporate

investment. The fiscal consolidation roadmap, whereby the fiscal deficit was projected to decline from 5.6% of GDP in 2023-24, to 4.5% in 2024-25 and 4.5% in 2025-26, was also announced with the budgetary expectation of the private sector taking a lead in the capital formation process. However, the latest GDP estimates have shown a significant decline in the growth of real gross fixed capital formation from 9% in 2023-24 to 6.4% in 2024-25. A longer view of India's growth trajectory over the past decade, even on the basis of exaggerated official national account estimates, shows the irrationality of official expectations. During the 10 years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule, between 2004-05 and 2013-14, the average annual growth of real GDP was at 6.8%, investment 10% and private consumption 6% (Chart 1). Between the onset of the present regime till the outbreak of the pandemic, that is, between 2014-15 and 2019-20, real GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.8% (exactly similar to UPA), but real investment growth fell to

6.3% while private consumption growth increased to 6.8%. Thus, economic growth under NDA was not investment led, as was the case under UPA. Moreover, during the UPA period, real growth in private investment was over 10%, above the growth of public sector investment at around 9% (Chart 2). Under NDA rule, till the pandemic, public investment in real terms grew faster at an average of 6.6% per year, than private investment which grew by 6.3%. Investment, consumption and output had collapsed in 2020-21 owing to the lockdown induced recession. The recovery in 2022-23 was indeed led by private investment, but the spikes in the growth rates of investment, consumption and output were on account of base effect – it was simply a return to normalcy after the collapse in the preceding year. From 2022-23 to 2024-25, real GDP and investment have grown at an annual average rate of 7.2% each and private consumption at 6%. Post-pandemic there has been one percentage point increase in the annual average growth rate of real

investment, and 0.8 percentage point decline in the annual average growth rate of private consumption.

Therefore, there is absolutely no indication of any structural break in the investment behaviour of the private corporate sector so far under the 11 years of NDA rule. The deep corporate tax cuts in September 2023 have failed to spur capital formation and real economic activity; rather it has only helped a short lived spurt in corporate earnings and fuelled a post-pandemic bubble in the equity market. In contrast, the advent of the UPA regime had led to a real investment and exports boom between 2004-05 till the financial crisis and global recession of 2008-09, which was facilitated both by a massive increase in industrial bank credit and significant foreign capital inflows. A similar private investment led boom has remained elusive under the NDA regime.

This testifies to the forgotten truth of political economy, that supposedly business friendly governments can deliver much wealth and profits for their cronies but are incapable of bringing about economy-wide structural changes and common prosperity.

Fiscal strains

The more reliable supply side data on the Indian economy reflects a more sober picture of economic recovery since the pandemic and the nature of the slowdown that has set in. Quarterly Gross Value Added (GVA) growth on a year-on-year basis has been on a downward slide since 2023-24 (Chart 3). The agriculture sector continues to show cyclical fluctuations. After showing double-digit growth in the two quarters of 2023-24, the growth rate of manufacturing GVA has been on a downside. Slowdown is visible not only in the mining, power and construction sectors but also in services like retail trade, transport, communications, finance and real estate.

The only sector where GVA is projected to grow at a higher pace in 2024-25 than the previous year is public administration, defence and other services. This shows the crucial role of public spending in sustaining economic growth in the Indian economy. In this context, the monthly accounts of the Union Government further indicate that crucial revenue and expenditure targets set in the last Union Budget are likely to remain unachieved. While the windfall of a ₹2.11 trillion surplus transfer from the Reserve Bank of India has enabled the Union Government to mobilise over 78% of its non-tax revenue target for 2024-25 by November 2024, mobilisation of the Centre's net tax revenues between April to November 2024 was only 56% of the budgetary target of ₹25.83 trillion (Table 1). This has led to spending less than half of the ₹11.11 trillion, budgeted as capex for 2024-25 till November 2024.

It is clear that economic slowdown has disrupted budgetary plans by slowing down tax revenue growth. Adhering to the fiscal consolidation path would imply a squeeze on public spending, including capital expenditure, which in turn would further aggravate the slowdown. Jettisoning fiscal rectitude altogether is also not feasible, given the already elevated levels of public debt and interest payments. The only way out appears to be a reworking of the revenue mobilisation strategy by enhancing taxation on wealth and profits in order to enhance capex and welfare spending.

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Decline in GDP Growth

- ➔ This estimate is below the 6.5% to 7% range projected in the Economic Survey of July 2024.
- ➔ The nominal GDP growth rate, which accounts for inflation, is expected to be 9.7%, lower than the 10.5% projected in the Union Budget.

Discrepancies in Data Estimation

- Experts, including the IMF, have criticized the official GDP estimates, particularly the use of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a deflator.
- The IMF has suggested using the Producer Price Index (PPI) instead of WPI for more accurate GDP deflation.
- Data issues such as revisions to historical series and discrepancies between GDP by activity and expenditure complicate monitoring of India's economy.

What is GDP Deflation?

- GDP deflation is the process of adjusting nominal GDP (which includes inflation) to real GDP by removing the effects of price changes over time.
- This is done using a deflator, typically the GDP deflator, which reflects changes in the prices of goods and services.
- It allows for a more accurate comparison of economic output across different periods by focusing on the actual growth in volume rather than price fluctuations.

Impact of Volatility in WPI

- WPI has shown significant volatility over the years, which has caused discrepancies between the WPI and the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- For example, in 2023-24, the nominal GDP showed a deceleration, while real GDP growth indicated acceleration due to discrepancies in the GDP deflator, which misrepresents economic conditions.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

- The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) measures the average change in prices of goods at the wholesale level, before they reach consumers.
- It includes the prices of goods such as raw materials, intermediate goods, and finished products.
- WPI is used to track inflation trends in the economy, providing insights into price changes at an early stage of production.
- It is published by the Office of Economic Advisor (Ministry of Commerce and Industry).
- WPI does not include services or products purchased directly by consumers, unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- A high WPI indicates inflationary pressures in the economy.

Private Investment Challenges

- Despite the Economic Survey highlighting the private sector's slow response to tax cuts, the Union Budget projected a revival in private corporate investment to fund the 'Prime Minister's Package for Employment and Skilling.'
- However, the latest GDP estimates show a decline in real gross fixed capital formation from 9% in 2023-24 to 6.4% in 2024-25, signaling weak investment performance.

Investment and Consumption Trends

- During the UPA era, real private investment growth was over 10%, significantly higher than under the NDA regime, where private investment growth stagnated.
- Despite tax cuts in 2019, corporate investment has failed to drive substantial economic activity, highlighting the lack of a private investment-led recovery in the post-pandemic period.

Fiscal Strain and Budgetary Challenges

- Tax revenue growth is below target, with only 56% of the net tax revenue goal met by November 2024.
- Capital expenditure has been underutilized, with less than half of the projected ₹11.11 trillion capex spent by November.
- The government faces the dilemma of maintaining fiscal discipline while addressing the economic slowdown, requiring adjustments to revenue mobilization strategies, such as increasing taxation on wealth and profits.

Conclusion

- The ongoing economic slowdown is evident, affecting key sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
- To avoid worsening the fiscal situation, the government must reassess its revenue mobilization strategy and prioritize spending on capital and welfare.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Examine the challenges in estimating India's GDP growth, particularly focusing on the issues with the use of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as a deflator. Discuss the implications of the declining private investment and fiscal constraints on the economy. **(250 Words /15 marks)**

- ▶ Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated annually on January 9 since 2003 to honor the contributions of the Overseas Indian community to India's development.
- ▶ The date commemorates Mahatma Gandhi's return to India from South Africa in 1915, marking the beginning of his pivotal role in India's freedom struggle. Since 2015, the event has been held biennially.

Historical Background

- ▶ The initiative stemmed from the recommendations of a High-Level Committee on Indian Diaspora led by LM Singhvi in 2002.
- ▶ The committee emphasized the need to strengthen ties with the Indian diaspora and proposed the establishment of a Pravasi Bharatiya Bhavan for networking and preserving the diaspora's history.
- ▶ The first PBD was held in 2003 to implement these ideas.

PBD 2025 in Odisha

- ▶ The 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention is scheduled from January 8–10, 2025, in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, under the theme "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat".
- ▶ The event celebrates India's bond with its global diaspora and showcases Odisha's economic opportunities, especially in the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific regions.
- ▶ Known for its strengths in mining, steel manufacturing, marine economy, IT, and sports, Odisha will leverage the event to attract investments and partnerships.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA)

- ▶ The PBSA is the highest honor for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs). It recognizes contributions to India's global image, local Indian communities' welfare, and promoting India's causes abroad.
- ▶ **2025 Awards:** 27 individuals and organizations from countries like the US, Fiji, Mauritius, and Russia will be honored.

Conferment: President Droupadi Murmu will present the awards during the valedictory session..

USPC Mains PYQ : 2020

Ques : "Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European countries." Comment. (250 Words /15 marks)

We need accessibility rules that are based on principles

The Supreme Court, in *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India* (2024), held Rule 15 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Rules, 2017, violative of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

The Court reasoned that the Rule was drafted in a discretionary tone whereas the corresponding provisions (Sections 40, 44, 45, 46, 89) in the Act imposed a mandatory obligation for the government. This was significant as Rule 15 was a statutory provision under which the accessibility guidelines of respective departments and ministries were notified. Key examples include the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' guidelines for creating barrier-free environments, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' bus body code, and other accessibility standards established by the Ministries of Sports, Culture, and Information and Broadcasting.

The Court observed that these guidelines allowed discretion to the ministries and departments, which is antithetical to the mandatory language of the Act. Moreover, striking down Rule 15 also meant that the accessibility guidelines notified under the Rule lost their statutory authority. As a result, the Court gave the government three months to develop minimum mandatory accessibility requirements to govern all the sectors.

The judgment is a stark reminder of how accessibility guidelines have been created in silos without the identification of normative principles that will ensure universality and intersectionality to those guidelines. Thus, while formulating new guidelines, there needs to be a shift towards a principle-based framework on accessibility rules.

The idea of accessibility

The Court deliberated in detail on the difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation. Accessibility and reasonable accommodation both originate within the principles of substantive equality of the Constitution. Accessibility is now accepted as a right woven throughout the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Conversely, reasonable accommodation is a facilitator of substantive equality where specific challenges are dealt with in a specific context. Therefore, both concepts should be understood as interdependent and complementary to each other, where accessibility builds the edifice through standardised accessibility standards from the outset, while reasonable accommodation ensures tailored solutions for those individuals who might still face inaccessibility in a specific context.

The idea of accessibility is not static, and the conceptual contours and corresponding tools



Shashank Pandey

Lawyer and founder of the Politics and Disability Forum



Nayan Chandra Mishra

Law student at Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow

The new accessibility rules must be direct, understandable, and practical to ensure effective implementation

have evolved regularly. For instance, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things and their incorporation into social interactions, the understanding of digital accessibility has evolved simultaneously. This makes it necessary to modify the nature, extent, and type of digitally accessible tools that can ensure broader inclusivity.

The shifting threshold also needs to be understood in the context of phased realisation of accessibility. The Court in *Rajive Raturi* observed that the existing guidelines are framed in a way that establishes long-term goals of accessibility without setting the minimum standards requiring immediate implementation. Hence, the minimum accessibility threshold shall be envisaged on a sliding scale wherein the baseline moves forward at periodical intervals. Canada has developed a comprehensive road map to achieve full accessibility by 2040, focusing on harmonising standards across the country through two work streams, with periodic reviews every five years to adapt to changing needs.

The RPwD Act defines barriers in the broadest form possible, wherein intangible barriers such as attitudinal barriers are recognised in addition to tangible barriers such as infrastructure. This has modified how accessibility is viewed and understood within physical and digital ecosystems. Thus, it is necessary to evolve accessibility parameters in theory and practice to overcome tangible and intangible barriers. For instance, the evolving understanding of disability is an aspect that informs the attitude of society and, hence, directly relates to the attitudinal barrier. Thus, accessibility must also align with this evolution of disability understanding to be truly inclusive.

The understanding of universal design has also evolved over time. It is not just limited to persons with disabilities but also includes every vulnerable community, such as women, children, and the elderly. This reflects a tacit recognition of the universality of disability, which is not identified as an individual's incapacity to perform but rather the composition of the environment in which one operates. Disability may arise from a high cognitive workload causing an inability to focus and control emotions, temporarily broken limbs, unavailability of ramps to a pregnant mother, age-related complications, etc. Thus, the rules should be applicable across groups, providing accessibility in the general sense and not exclusive to persons with disabilities.

Compliance with social audit

Section 48 of the RPwD Act mandates the Central and State governments to regularly undertake social audits of all general schemes and programmes to ensure they do not have an

adverse impact on the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities. Social audits play a vital role in developing and strengthening the accountability of the government and service providers. For instance, regular social audits of schemes providing assistance technologies to persons with disabilities can assess the bottlenecks in the delivery of services, identify the changing needs of individuals, and provide better devices.

However, due to the lack of standardised guidelines under the RPwD Rules, there is no clarity on the scope and methodology of social audits. This might lead to inconsistencies among the Centre and the States, lack of awareness, and insufficient training for auditors. Therefore, clear guidelines and operationalisation of social audits at a larger scale will help identify the changing nature of disability-related challenges and make targeted interventions to enhance service delivery through concerned schemes and programmes.

Rules have to be understandable

The earlier accessibility rules across departments and ministries suffered from bureaucratic complexity regarding their mandate. There were too many technicalities and often contradictory accessibility mandates from multiple ministries that confused the complying entities. For instance, a sporting complex has multiple guidelines for accessibility from the Ministry of Urban Affairs and Housing, Sports, Transport, and others. This led to not just a failure to provide objective parameters but also increased the compliance cost for such establishments. During the proceeding under the redressal mechanism, the complex and overlapping guidelines also delayed the relief sought by persons with disabilities.

The new accessibility rules must be direct, understandable, and practical to ensure effective implementation. The ambiguity in department/ministry jurisdiction that plagued the earlier rules should also be addressed by having a nodal authority, ideally, the sector regulators, and in the absence of it, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment should adjudicate on rules.

The deadline for releasing the new accessibility guidelines is February, subject to extension. Thus, there is a necessity for diverse sectors, both private and public, beyond social services such as financial, technological, transport, to deliberate upon the minimum rules of accessibility. This isn't just warranted by the legislative mandate of the RPwD Act but also a market incentive to tap into the large population base by providing accessible products and services.

GS Paper 02 : Social Justice

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Discuss the significance of the Supreme Court's judgment in *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India (2024)* in reinforcing mandatory accessibility standards under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. **(150 Words /10 marks)**

Context :

- The Supreme Court in *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India (2024)* held Rule 15 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Rules, 2017, violative of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

Supreme Court's Judgment on Rule 15 of RPwD Rules, 2017

- The Court highlighted that Rule 15 was discretionary, whereas the Act's provisions (Sections 40, 44, 45, 46, 89) mandated strict obligations on the government.
- Accessibility guidelines issued under Rule 15, such as those by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, lost statutory authority after the Rule was struck down.
- The Court gave the government three months to draft mandatory minimum accessibility standards for all sectors.

Accessibility: A Principle-Based Approach

- The judgment underlined the fragmented approach to accessibility guidelines, urging a shift to a principle-based framework.
- Accessibility should ensure universality and intersectionality to address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.

Differentiating Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation

- Accessibility builds a foundation for inclusion through standardised measures, while reasonable accommodation tailors solutions for specific challenges.
- Both are interdependent, fostering substantive equality as recognised by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Evolution of Accessibility Standards

- Accessibility is dynamic, evolving with advancements like AI and the Internet of Things.
- Minimum standards must adopt a phased realisation approach with periodic updates, inspired by countries like Canada, which aims for full accessibility by 2040.

Broadening the Concept of Barriers

- The RPwD Act identifies both tangible barriers (e.g., infrastructure) and intangible barriers (e.g., societal attitudes).
- Accessibility guidelines should address these challenges to ensure inclusivity for all, including women, children, and the elderly.
- Disability is increasingly seen as arising from environmental factors rather than individual incapacity.

Compliance Through Social Audits

- Section 48 of the RPwD Act mandates social audits to ensure schemes and programs meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Lack of standardised guidelines for these audits leads to inconsistencies across states, limited awareness, and insufficient training for auditors.
- Clear audit frameworks can help identify changing disability-related challenges and enhance service delivery.

Simplifying Accessibility Rules

- Earlier rules suffered from bureaucratic complexity and overlapping mandates from various ministries, leading to confusion and high compliance costs.
- New guidelines should be direct, practical, and easy to implement with a nodal authority for adjudication, such as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Conclusion

- The deadline for the new guidelines is February, with the possibility of an extension.
- Both public and private sectors must collaborate to create inclusive financial, technological, and transport systems.
- Accessible products and services are not just a legislative mandate but also a market opportunity to cater to a larger population base..