UPSC Concept Glossary – Mains keywords (26 terms)

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1. Ageing in place

வாழ்ந்த இடத்திலேயே முதுமை · GS-II, GS-I · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/ageing-in-place

Helping older people live safely and independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

Instead of moving the elderly to institutions, ageing in place brings care to them: home-based health and nursing care, trained caregivers, day-care centres, accessible housing and streets, and digital and emergency support. It is usually cheaper than institutional care, keeps family and community bonds, and creates local care jobs. Kerala's Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026 lists ageing in place with home-based care among its guiding principles.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on the elderly, population ageing, the care economy, health systems or urban design: "India's elder-care policy must enable ageing in place – care at home, not just homes for the aged."

2. Assured access to space

விண்வெளிக்கு உறுதியான அணுகல் · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/assured-access-to-space

A country's ability to put the satellites it needs into orbit whenever it needs them, without depending on luck or on others.

It is more than having a rocket. It means reliable launchers with a backup, more than one usable launch pad, spare satellites ready on the ground, a steady industrial supply chain and enough trained people – so that a single failure does not stop critical services. India's NavIC shows the gap: the system fell to three working satellites in 2026 because replacements came late and one failed, while two PSLV failures (2025, 2026) grounded the busiest launcher. More launch pads, industry-built PSLV/SSLV, private launchers such as Vikram-1 and advance planning of spares are the ways to build it.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on ISRO, NavIC, defence space, private launchers or space policy: "India has proved it can reach space; the next goal is assured access to space – rockets, pads, spares and people for continuity, not just for launch day."

3. Authorised push payment (APP) fraud

அங்கீகரிக்கப்பட்ட பணப் பரிமாற்ற மோசடி (APP மோசடி) · GS-III, GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/authorised-push-payment-fraud

A fraud in which the victim is tricked or frightened into sending money himself, so the payment looks "authorised" to the bank.

In most card or account frauds the criminal steals credentials and makes an unauthorised payment, and banking rules (such as the RBI's 2017 limited-liability circular) protect the customer. In APP fraud the customer personally approves the transfer – after a fake investment pitch, a romance scam or a "digital arrest" call – so the bank says it only followed instructions and the victim carries the loss. Regulators are now changing this: the UK introduced mandatory reimbursement of APP fraud victims in October 2024, shared between sending and receiving banks; India's RBI has proposed a one-hour delay on such payments of Rs 10,000 or more, and the Supreme Court is considering making banks compensate victims when they failed in due diligence.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on cyber fraud, digital payments, consumer protection or bank regulation: "When fear makes the victim press 'pay', the law must look at who could have stopped the payment – APP fraud needs shared liability, not victim-blaming."

4. Build Back Better

முன்னிலும் சிறப்பாக மீளக் கட்டுதல் · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/build-back-better

Using recovery after a disaster to rebuild homes, infrastructure and livelihoods stronger and safer than before.

A principle in Priority 4 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030). Instead of restoring the same weak house, power pole or embankment, recovery should add resilience – cyclone-resistant housing, underground or hardened power lines, raised roads, mangrove belts – so that the next disaster causes less loss. It moves disaster management beyond saving lives (where India, after Phailin, Fani and Arnab, has done well) to reducing economic and livelihood losses.

Use it in your answer: Use it in disaster-management answers on cyclones, floods or earthquakes: "India has learnt to save lives from cyclones; to Build Back Better it must now save livelihoods, power lines and mangroves with the same urgency."

5. Calibrated engagement

அளவறிந்த உறவு · GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/calibrated-engagement

Working with whoever holds power in a country, while matching the depth of ties to concrete results and keeping channels open to other stakeholders.

It sits between two extremes: isolating a government one disapproves of, and embracing it without conditions. A country practising calibrated engagement keeps official channels for vital interests – border security, projects, humanitarian access – but steps up or slows down cooperation depending on what the other side delivers, and also talks to opposition and ethnic groups that control territory. India's policy towards Myanmar after the 2021 coup is the classic test case: strong ties with Naypyitaw, while Kaladan, rare earths and the border depend on areas held by armed groups.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on India's neighbourhood (Myanmar, Afghanistan, Bangladesh) or on democracy vs national interest: "India's answer to regime change next door is neither isolation nor endorsement but calibrated engagement."

6. Commercial determinants of health

சுகாதாரத்தின் வணிகக் காரணிகள் · GS-II, Essay · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/commercial-determinants-of-health

The ways in which business products, marketing, pricing and lobbying shape people's health.

Health is affected not only by income, education or sanitation but also by what companies sell and how they sell it – sugary foods, tobacco, alcohol, infant formula. WHO uses this idea to argue that public-health policy must also regulate markets, for example through labelling, marketing limits and taxes.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on non-communicable diseases, food regulation, obesity or tobacco control: "Regulating the commercial determinants of health is as important as building hospitals."

7. Compartmentalised partnership

பிரிவுபடுத்திய கூட்டாண்மை · GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/compartmentalised-partnership

Two countries keep a disagreement in one area from blocking cooperation in others.

Partners "ring-fence" a dispute – for example India and Poland differ on Russia but cooperate on trade, technology and counter-terrorism. It is a practical tool of India's multi-alignment with middle powers.

Use it in your answer: Use it in international-relations answers where ties are good despite differences (India–Poland, India–Turkey, India–China trade): "India increasingly practises compartmentalised partnerships."

8. Continuing mandamus

தொடர் கட்டளை நீதிப்பேராணை · GS-II, GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/continuing-mandamus

A court keeps a case open and supervises the government through step-by-step orders and regular compliance reports.

Mandamus is a writ ordering a public authority to do its duty. In "continuing mandamus" the court does not close the case with one judgment; it issues directions over months or years, appoints committees and asks for periodic reports. Indian courts have used it in environmental and governance cases, such as the Jojari river case in Rajasthan (2025–26). It fills gaps when institutions fail, but critics say it stretches the separation of powers and cannot replace a capable regulator.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on judicial activism, pollution control or regulatory bodies: "Courts can rescue a river through continuing mandamus, but only capable pollution control boards can keep it clean."

9. Double burden of malnutrition

ஊட்டச்சத்தின் இரட்டைச் சுமை · GS-II, GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/double-burden-of-malnutrition

Under-nutrition and overweight/obesity existing together in the same country, community or household.

India still has high stunting and anaemia, while overweight among children and adults is rising (NFHS-5). Policy must therefore fight hunger and unhealthy diets at the same time.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on nutrition, food processing, public distribution or NCDs, with an NFHS-5 data point.

10. Exclusion error

விலக்கல் பிழை · GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/exclusion-error

When a system wrongly leaves out people who are fully eligible – for the voter roll, a ration card or a welfare scheme.

Any list or targeting system can fail in two ways: an inclusion error keeps people who should not be there (dead, duplicate or ineligible entries), and an exclusion error drops people who have every right to be there. Tightening checks to cut inclusion errors usually raises exclusion errors, especially for the poor, migrants and women who lack documents. In voter rolls the cost is heavy: a genuine citizen removed before polling day loses the vote for that election. The 2025–26 Special Intensive Revision debate in the Supreme Court is largely about controlling exclusion errors.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on electoral rolls, PDS, Aadhaar-based welfare or targeting of subsidies: "A clean roll is measured by the eligible citizens it keeps – in a democracy, an exclusion error costs more than an inclusion error."

11. First 1,000 days

முதல் 1,000 நாட்கள் · GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/first-1000-days

The period from conception to a child's second birthday, when nutrition shapes lifelong health.

About 270 days of pregnancy plus the first two years of life. Under-nutrition or poor feeding in this window can cause stunting and affect learning and earning later. India's POSHAN Abhiyaan and maternity schemes focus on this window.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on malnutrition, stunting, breastfeeding or child-care policy: "Investment in the first 1,000 days gives the highest return in human capital."

12. Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)

சுதந்திரமான, முன்கூட்டிய, தகவலறிந்த ஒப்புதல் (FPIC) · GS-III, GS-II, GS-I · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/free-prior-informed-consent

The principle that communities affected by a project must agree to it without pressure, before decisions are taken, and with full information in their own language.

FPIC goes beyond "consultation": the community can say no. The World Commission on Dams (2000) recommended it for decisions affecting indigenous peoples, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) uses it. India has no single FPIC law, but parts of it exist: Gram Sabha consultation under PESA (1996), the Gram Sabha's role under the Forest Rights Act (2006, upheld in the Niyamgiri case, 2013), and Section 41 of the RFCTLARR Act (2013), which requires the prior consent of the Gram Sabha, Panchayat or Autonomous District Council for acquisition in Scheduled Areas. The 2026 Siang protests show that the "prior" part matters most – people want to be asked before the first survey.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on dams, mining, displacement, tribal rights or land acquisition: "Development becomes legitimate when it is built on free, prior and informed consent, not on compensation paid after the fact."

13. Impact-based forecasting

தாக்க அடிப்படையிலான கணிப்பு · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/impact-based-

forecasting

Weather warnings that say what the weather will do to people and places, not only what the weather will be.

Instead of "150 mm of rain", the warning says which roads may flood, which crops are at risk and what people should do. IMD has been moving to this approach, in line with WMO guidance, to make warnings easier to act on.

Use it in your answer: Use it in disaster-management answers: "The shift from weather-based to impact-based forecasting turns information into action."

14. Impossible trinity

சாத்தியமற்ற மும்முனை · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/impossible-trinity

The principle that a country cannot at the same time have a fixed exchange rate, an independent monetary policy and free movement of capital – it can choose only two.

Also called the "trilemma", it comes from the Mundell–Fleming model of open economies. If capital moves freely and the central bank sets interest rates for domestic needs, the exchange rate must be allowed to move; if the currency is to be held steady, either interest rates must follow other countries or capital must be controlled. India runs a middle path: a managed float, an inflation-targeting RBI and a capital account that is open for most purposes but not fully convertible. In 2026, record FPI outflows forced choices at every corner – reserves were used, the repo rate was raised to 5.50% in October, and curbs on resident remittances under LRS were reportedly considered.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on the rupee, capital account convertibility, FPI volatility or RBI policy: "Under the impossible trinity, India must choose which corner to give up; a flexible rupee with trust-building reforms is better than closing the capital account step by step."

15. Lewis turning point

லூயிஸ் திருப்புமுனை · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/lewis-turning-point

The stage of development at which surplus labour in agriculture is used up, so that wages in the modern sector must rise to attract more workers.

In W. Arthur Lewis's 1954 model, a poor economy has "unlimited" surplus labour on farms, so factories and services can hire at a near-constant low wage. As workers move out, the surplus shrinks; at the turning point labour becomes scarce and real wages start rising across the economy. India has not reached it: about 43% of workers were still in agriculture in 2025 (PLFS) and the World Bank's October 2026 brief found real earnings broadly flat even as employment grew. The goal of policy is to reach this point through productive non-farm jobs, especially in the Gangetic states where most of the remaining poor live.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on employment, structural transformation, poverty or regional disparity: "India will have truly beaten poverty when it crosses the Lewis turning point – when wages rise because labour has become scarce, not because transfers have grown."

16. Multi-alignment

பல்முனை அணிசேர்வு · GS-II, Essay · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/multi-alignment

India's approach of working with many powers at once, on different issues, without joining any bloc.

Unlike non-alignment (keeping away from blocs), multi-alignment means active engagement with all sides – the US and Russia, the Quad and BRICS, the EU and the Global South – based on issue-by-issue interest. It protects strategic autonomy.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on India's foreign policy, strategic autonomy or groupings: "India's foreign policy has moved from non-alignment to multi-alignment."

17. Network-centric enforcement

வலைப்பின்னல் மைய அமலாக்கம் · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/network-centric-enforcement

Fighting organised crime by dismantling the whole network and its money, not just seizing goods and arresting carriers.

Seizure-centric policing counts kilograms seized and persons arrested, mostly couriers and street peddlers who are quickly replaced. Network-centric enforcement maps the full chain – source, transport, distribution, finance – using financial profiling, digital forensics and inter-agency intelligence, and targets the financiers through freezing and forfeiture of assets (NDPS Section 27A, Chapter VA, PMLA). India's Vision Document on Narcotics Control 2026–2029 and NCB's Operation Trident (October 2026) follow this approach.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on drug trafficking, narco-terrorism, organised crime, money laundering and border management: "India must shift from seizure-centric to network-centric enforcement – follow the money, not just the mule."

18. Nutrient-neutral subsidy

ஊட்டச்சத்து-நடுநிலை மானியம் · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/nutrient-neutral-subsidy

A fertiliser subsidy that supports each kg of nutrient (N, P, K, S) on a comparable footing, so that no single nutrient is made artificially cheap.

India runs two systems: urea (nitrogen) has a fixed retail price of Rs 242 per 45-kg bag with an open-ended subsidy, while phosphatic and potassic fertilisers get a fixed per-kg Nutrient Based Subsidy (since 2010) and companies set prices. The gap makes nitrogen far cheaper and pushes the N:P:K ratio to about 10.9:4.4:1 against the ideal 4:2:1, harming soil health. A nutrient-neutral subsidy would bring urea into a nutrient-based framework step by step, link quantities to soil-test needs and protect farm income through direct support, as the Standing Committee (2024) and CACP (2025) concerns on price distortion suggest.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on farm subsidies, soil health, fertiliser imports, fiscal reform or sustainable agriculture: "A subsidy that makes one nutrient cheap makes the soil poor – India must move to a nutrient-neutral subsidy that pays for balance."

19. Outcome-based regulation

விளைவு அடிப்படையிலான ஒழுங்குமுறை · GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/outcome-based-regulation

Judging an institution by the results it produces rather than only by the inputs it has.

Traditional regulation of colleges counts inputs – beds, teachers, buildings, equipment. Outcome-based regulation also measures results: the competence of graduates (e.g. licensing exam results), the quality of patient care and student feedback, backed by public data and independent verification. It reduces paperwork and the incentive to fake inputs (ghost faculty, dummy patients).

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on the NMC, higher-education regulators (UGC/HECI), school quality or any regulator: "India must shift from input-based to outcome-based regulation, with public data and independent verification."

20. Portable social security

கையடக்கச் சமூகப் பாதுகாப்பு · GS-II, GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/portable-social-security

Social security benefits linked to the worker, not to one employer, so that they follow the worker across jobs, platforms and States.

Traditional social insurance (PF, ESI, gratuity) is built around a fixed employer. Gig, platform and migrant workers move between apps, employers and cities, so employer-linked cover breaks every time they move. Portable social security keeps contributions and entitlements in the worker's own account – in India through the e-Shram Universal Account Number and the Social Security Fund under the Code on Social Security, 2020, into which aggregators contribute 1–2% of turnover. ILO Convention No. 193 (2026) on the platform economy also calls for social protection for platform workers regardless of how their work is classified.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on gig workers, Labour Codes, migrant workers, informal sector or welfare schemes: "In a world where work moves from app to app, social security must move with the worker – portability, not paperwork, is the test."

21. Pre-arranged finance

முன்கூட்டியே ஏற்பாடு செய்யப்பட்ட நிதி · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/pre-arranged-finance

Disaster money whose amount, triggers and delivery channel are agreed before a disaster strikes.

Instead of appealing for help after a flood or cyclone and waiting for donors or boards to decide, a country agrees in advance how much money will be released, on what trigger (for example rainfall level, wind speed or a declared emergency) and through which channel. Insurance pools, contingency credit lines and trigger-based funding windows are examples. It cuts delays and makes relief predictable.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on the Loss and Damage Fund, climate finance or disaster management: "Climate justice needs pre-arranged finance that reaches victims in days, not years."

22. Public interest override

பொது நல மேலோங்கு விதி · GS-II, GS-IV · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/public-interest-override

A rule that allows information otherwise exempt from disclosure to be released when the public interest in it outweighs the harm.

Transparency laws list exemptions (security, commercial secrets, personal information), but an override lets the authority disclose exempt information when the public good is greater – for example, an official's assets or a corruption inquiry. India's RTI Act had it inside Section 8(1)(j) for personal information and, more generally, in Section 8(2). Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023 removed it from clause (j), which is now under challenge in the Supreme Court. It is the practical tool for balancing privacy and the right to know under the Puttaswamy proportionality test.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on RTI, privacy, data protection, transparency or accountability: "A democracy needs privacy for its citizens and transparency for its rulers – a public interest override is how the law can give both."

23. Same activity, same risk, same regulation

ஒரே செயல், ஒரே அபாயம், ஒரே ஒழுங்குமுறை · GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/same-activity-same-risk-same-regulation

A regulatory principle: rules should follow what a firm does and the risk it creates, not the label or technology it uses.

If a crypto exchange holds customers' assets, it is doing what a custodian or broker does, and it creates the same risks – loss, theft, misuse and failure. The principle says it should then face the same kind of duties: licensing, segregation of client assets, capital, audits and grievance redressal. The Financial Stability Board built its July 2023 crypto framework on this idea, and the G20 New Delhi Declaration (September 2023) endorsed that framework. It allows a country to protect investors without declaring crypto to be money.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on crypto, fintech or regulatory gaps: "India should apply the principle of same activity, same risk, same regulation – regulate the vault, not the coin."

24. Secondary sanctions

இரண்டாம் நிலைத் தடைகள் · GS-II, GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/secondary-sanctions

Penalties imposed not on the target country itself but on third countries, companies or banks that do business with it.

Primary sanctions stop a country's own citizens and firms from dealing with a target. Secondary sanctions go further: they threaten outsiders – for example by cutting them off from the U.S. market or dollar system – if they keep trading with the target. The U.S. embargo on Cuba uses them through the Helms-Burton Act (lawsuits and visa bans against foreign firms) and, since January 2026, through a framework for tariffs on any country that supplies oil to Cuba. India has faced the same tool: CAATSA over Russian arms, the revoked Chabahar waiver (2025) and the 25% Russian-oil tariff (August 2025 – February 2026). Because such measures are not decided by the UN Security Council, India says it is bound only by UN sanctions.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on India–US relations, energy security, strategic autonomy or UN reform: "Secondary sanctions turn one country's foreign policy into every country's compliance burden – which is why India defends the principle of UN-only sanctions."

25. Sponge city

பஞ்சு நகரம் · GS-I, GS-III · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/sponge-city

A city designed to absorb, store and reuse rainwater instead of draining it away quickly.

It uses wetlands, lakes, parks, permeable pavements, rain gardens and recharge wells so that heavy rain soaks into the ground or is stored. The idea reduces urban flooding and also improves water supply in dry months.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on urban flooding, the northeast monsoon, water security or smart cities: "Chennai needs to become a sponge city, not just a drained city."

26. Strategic decarbonisation

உத்திசார் கார்பன் குறைப்பு · GS-III, GS-II · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-glossary/strategic-decarbonisation

Cutting greenhouse-gas emissions mainly because it strengthens a country's own energy security, industry and resilience, not only because an international treaty requires it.

Climate negotiations have long been framed as burden-sharing between the developed North and the developing South (CBDR-RC, finance, loss and damage). Strategic decarbonisation adds a second logic: clean energy reduces oil imports, low-carbon industry keeps export markets open under measures like the EU CBAM, adaptation protects labour productivity from heat, and cleaner air improves health. Because the benefits come at home, such policies stay credible even when international finance falls short or a major emitter leaves the Paris Agreement. It complements, not replaces, the demand for climate justice.

Use it in your answer: Use it in answers on India's climate diplomacy, NDCs, CBAM, energy security or green industrial policy: "India should argue for climate justice abroad and practise strategic decarbonisation at home."

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