



# Daily PIB Summary

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24<sup>th</sup> February

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## 1. SUPREME COURT CRITICIZES FREEBIES, QUESTIONS APPEASEMENT IN WELFARE POLITICS



- The Supreme Court expressed concern over the growing trend of electoral promises involving free goods and services.
- It questioned whether such measures undermine fiscal discipline and responsible governance.
- The issue brings into focus the distinction between welfare schemes and politically motivated freebies.
- The debate intersects with federal fiscal responsibility and state budget constraints.
- The Court's remarks highlight the need for institutional mechanisms to evaluate economic viability.
- It also raises constitutional questions regarding equality, public expenditure, and democratic accountability.
- The development has implications for public finance management and electoral reforms discourse.

## BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

### Freebies vs Welfare

- **Welfare Schemes:** Targeted interventions aimed at

socio-economic upliftment (education, health, food security).

- **Freebies:** Non-merit subsidies or goods distributed without clear long-term productivity or welfare rationale.

The classification remains politically and legally contested.

### Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 14:** Equality before law.
- **Article 38:** State to promote welfare of people (DPSP).
- **Article 39(b):** Distribution of material resources for common good.
- **Article 266:** Consolidated Fund of India/States (public expenditure source).

### Fiscal Responsibility Framework

- Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Acts aim to ensure fiscal prudence.
- Rising subsidy burdens may affect capital expenditure and development priorities.

### Electoral Context

The **Election Commission of India** has previously discussed regulating election manifestos to ensure fiscal transparency.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Judicial Concern:** Court questions sustainability of freebie culture.
- **Fiscal Discipline:** Emphasis on responsible public expenditure.
- **Governance Debate:** Distinction between welfare and appeasement.

- **Constitutional Balance:** DPSPs vs fiscal prudence.
- **Electoral Integrity:** Manifesto promises under scrutiny.
- **Economic Impact:** Potential strain on state finances.
- **Way Forward:** Independent fiscal assessment of major welfare promises and enhanced transparency norms.

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

**Answer: (a)**

## 2.INDIA AND ISRAEL LAUNCH FIRST ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS FOR FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)



## PRELIMS BOOSTER BOX

- **Article 14:** Equality before law.
- **Article 38 & 39:** Directive Principles on welfare and resource distribution.
- **Article 266:** Consolidated Fund provisions.
- **FRBM Act (2003):** Framework for fiscal deficit control.
- **Subsidy vs Freebie:** Subsidy may have economic rationale; freebie may lack productivity linkage.
- **Election Commission:** Regulates conduct of elections under Article 324.

## PadhAI-GENERATED UPSC MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. Article 38 of the Constitution directs the State to promote the welfare of the people.
2. The FRBM Act seeks to ensure fiscal discipline in public finances.
3. The Supreme Court has the power to regulate election manifestos directly under Article 324.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only  
(b) 2 only

- India and Israel have initiated formal negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.
- The FTA is expected to reduce tariffs, ease market access, and streamline trade regulations.
- It will likely cover goods, services, investment protection, and digital trade provisions.
- The move builds upon strong cooperation in defence, agriculture, innovation, and technology.
- The agreement may enhance India's access to advanced technologies and high-value exports.
- Strategically, it strengthens India's West Asia engagement and diversification of trade partners.
- From a governance lens, it reflects India's proactive trade diplomacy amid global supply chain realignments.

# BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

## India–Israel Relations

India established full diplomatic relations with **Israel** in 1992.

Bilateral ties have expanded significantly in:

- Defence cooperation
- Agriculture (Centre of Excellence model)
- Water management
- Cybersecurity and innovation

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**'s 2017 visit marked a major diplomatic milestone.

## Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

An FTA typically includes:

- Tariff elimination or reduction
- Non-tariff barrier rationalization
- Rules of origin
- Trade facilitation measures

India has signed FTAs with UAE, Australia, and ASEAN, among others.

## Strategic Economic Context

- Diversification of export markets
- Integration into Global Value Chains (GVCs)
- Strengthening technology partnerships
- Enhancing resilience in supply chains

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Formal Negotiations:** First round of FTA talks initiated.
- **Tariff Rationalization:** Potential reduction of customs duties.
- **Technology Access:** Boost to innovation-driven sectors.

- **Trade Diversification:** Reduces overdependence on select markets.
- **Strategic Partnership:** Reinforces India's West Asia outreach.
- **Supply Chain Integration:** Facilitates participation in GVCs.
- **Way Forward:** Balanced negotiation ensuring domestic industry protection and export expansion.

## PRELIMS BOOSTER BOX

- **FTA:** Agreement reducing or eliminating trade barriers between countries.
- **Rules of Origin:** Criteria to determine national source of a product.
- **Tariff vs Non-Tariff Barrier:** Customs duty vs regulatory restrictions.
- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** Broader trade pact including services and investment.
- **West Asia:** Strategic region for energy, trade, and diaspora links.
- **Global Value Chains (GVCs):** Cross-border production networks.

## PadhAI-GENERATED UPSC

### MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. A Free Trade Agreement typically includes provisions on tariff reduction and rules of origin.
2. India established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992.
3. Non-tariff barriers refer exclusively to customs duties imposed on imports.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Answer: (a)**

### 3. MEITY LAUNCHES 'BLOCKCHAIN INDIA CHALLENGE' TO ADVANCE BLOCKCHAIN-BASED DIGITAL GOVERNANCE



इलेक्ट्रॉनिकी एवं  
सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF  
**ELECTRONICS AND  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

सत्यमेव जयते

- The Blockchain India Challenge is designed to harness blockchain technology for public administration.
- It focuses on enhancing transparency, security, and efficiency in government processes.
- The initiative encourages participation from startups, academia, and industry innovators.
- Potential applications include land records, supply chain management, identity systems, and grievance redressal.
- The move aligns with India's broader Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) framework.
- Strategically, it strengthens India's leadership in emerging technologies and e-governance reforms.
- From a governance perspective, blockchain can reduce fraud, ensure data integrity, and improve citizen trust.

## BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

### MeitY's Role

The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** is responsible for:

- Digital governance policies
- Cybersecurity frameworks
- Promotion of emerging technologies
- Implementation of Digital India initiatives

### Blockchain Technology

Blockchain is a:

- Distributed ledger technology
- Decentralized and immutable database
- System ensuring transparency and tamper resistance

Key features:

- Cryptographic security
- Consensus mechanisms
- Smart contracts

### Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

India's DPI ecosystem includes:

- Aadhaar (digital identity)
- UPI (digital payments)
- DigiLocker (document storage)

Blockchain integration can enhance auditability and data security.

### Governance Relevance

- Prevents record tampering (e.g., land titles).
- Enhances transparency in procurement.
- Reduces intermediary corruption.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Innovation Platform:** Nationwide challenge to promote blockchain adoption.
- **Startup Engagement:** Encourages tech-driven public solutions.
- **Transparency Tool:** Reduces data manipulation risks.
- **Digital Governance Reform:** Strengthens e-service delivery.
- **Cybersecurity Enhancement:** Improves trust and resilience.
- **Strategic Technology Push:** Positions India in global blockchain ecosystem.
- **Way Forward:** Regulatory clarity, interoperability standards, and capacity building.

## PRELIMS BOOSTER BOX

- **Blockchain:** Distributed ledger technology ensuring immutable records.
- **Smart Contracts:** Self-executing digital contracts on blockchain.
- **Digital India:** Launched in 2015.
- **DPI:** Digital Public Infrastructure model of India.
- **Cryptographic Hash:** Unique digital fingerprint of data block.
- **Consensus Mechanism:** Method to validate transactions (e.g., Proof of Work, Proof of Stake).
- **Cybersecurity:** Protection of digital systems from unauthorized access.

## PadhAI-GENERATED UPSC

### MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. Blockchain technology operates on a decentralized and distributed ledger system.
2. Smart contracts are self-executing agreements embedded in blockchain networks.
3. Blockchain databases can be altered easily without detection once data is recorded.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Answer: (a)**

## 4.MOEFCC TO ORGANIZE 'HIM-CONNECT' ON SIDELINES OF WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2026



- 'Him-CONNECT' is envisioned as a dedicated platform focusing on the ecological and developmental concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

- It will facilitate dialogue among policymakers, scientists, and stakeholders on climate resilience and sustainable mountain development.
- The initiative aligns with India's climate commitments and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- The Himalayas are ecologically fragile and critical for water security and biodiversity.
- The event is expected to promote inter-state coordination across Himalayan states.
- Strategically, it enhances India's leadership in mountain ecosystem governance.
- From a policy perspective, it integrates environmental sustainability with regional development planning.

## BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

### Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)

The IHR spans 13 states/UTs and is:

- A biodiversity hotspot
- Source of major river systems (Ganga, Brahmaputra, Indus)
- Highly vulnerable to climate change impacts

### Climate Vulnerability

- Glacier retreat
- Increased frequency of landslides
- Extreme rainfall events
- Seismic sensitivity

### Institutional Framework

The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**:

- Formulates climate policy

- Implements National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)
- Oversees biodiversity conservation

TERI organizes the annual World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), a major global sustainability forum.

### Policy Linkages

- National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE)
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Paris Agreement commitments

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Focused Dialogue:** Dedicated platform for Himalayan sustainability.
- **Climate Resilience:** Emphasis on glacier protection and disaster mitigation.
- **Water Security:** Himalayas as "Water Towers of Asia."
- **Inter-State Coordination:** Strengthening cooperative federalism.
- **Global Platform:** Leveraging WSDS for international collaboration.
- **Biodiversity Protection:** Conservation of fragile ecosystems.
- **Way Forward:** Data-driven mountain governance and community participation.

## PRELIMS BOOSTER BOX

- **Indian Himalayan Region (IHR):** Covers ~2,500 km mountain arc.
- **NMSHE:** One of the eight missions under NAPCC.
- **NAPCC (2008):** Framework for climate adaptation and mitigation.

- **Sendai Framework (2015–2030):** Global disaster risk reduction framework.
- **Paris Agreement (2015):** Global climate treaty under UNFCCC.
- **Himalayas:** Source of major perennial river systems in South Asia.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Himalayas included in global biodiversity hotspot list.

## PadhAI-GENERATED UPSC

### MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. The National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem is part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change.
2. The Himalayas are the source of major river systems such as the Ganga and Brahmaputra.
3. The Sendai Framework is a legally binding climate treaty under the UNFCCC.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Answer: (a)**

## 5.ESIC COMMENCES 75TH FOUNDATION YEAR CELEBRATIONS



- ESIC has completed 75 years of providing social security protection to organized sector workers.
- The scheme offers medical care, cash benefits, maternity coverage, disability compensation, and dependent benefits.
- Over time, coverage has expanded in terms of wage ceilings and geographic outreach.
- The foundation year underscores the strengthening of labour welfare architecture in India.
- ESIC plays a critical role in formal workforce protection and industrial relations stability.
- The development aligns with broader labour reforms and universal social security goals.
- From a governance perspective, it reflects institutional continuity in welfare administration.

## BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

### Legal Framework

ESIC operates under the **Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948**.

The Act provides for:

- Health insurance
- Sickness benefits
- Maternity benefits
- Employment injury compensation

### Institutional Structure

The **Employees' State Insurance Corporation** is an autonomous body under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment**.

It administers:

- ESIC hospitals

- Dispensaries
- Medical colleges

## Coverage

- Applicable to establishments employing 10 or more persons (threshold varies by state).
- Wage ceiling periodically revised (currently ₹21,000 per month for eligibility, subject to notification updates).

## Social Security Context

- Linked to Code on Social Security, 2020.
- Supports transition toward universal and portable social protection.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **75-Year Milestone:** Institutional longevity in worker welfare.
- **Comprehensive Benefits:** Medical, maternity, disability, and dependent support.
- **Expanded Coverage:** Increased wage ceilings and territorial expansion.
- **Tripartite Governance:** Employer, employee, and government representation.
- **Healthcare Infrastructure:** Dedicated ESIC hospitals and dispensaries.
- **Labour Reform Linkage:** Integrated into Social Security Code framework.
- **Way Forward:** Digital integration, portability of benefits, and coverage of gig workers.

## PRELIMS BOOSTER BOX

- **Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948:** Legal basis of ESIC.
- **Article 41:** Right to work, education, and public assistance (DPSP).

- **Article 42:** Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Consolidates nine labour laws.
- **Tripartite Body:** Representation from employers, employees, and government.
- **Wage Ceiling:** ₹21,000/month (subject to revision).
- **Social Insurance:** Contribution-based welfare system.

## PadhAI-GENERATED UPSC

### MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. The Employees' State Insurance Act was enacted in 1948.
2. ESIC functions under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
3. The Employees' State Insurance Scheme is a non-contributory social assistance program.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Answer: (a)**