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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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## Topics Covered

- Cabinet nod to job-linked incentive scheme
- Costly Lapses
- A look at India's sports policy journey
- Groundwater crises deepens in Karnataka's hard rock terrain
- Reserved faculty posts are still vacant and out of reach
- Using Tech to empower women and children

### Cabinet nod to job-linked incentive scheme

## Syllabus :

### GS 3 Economy

# Cabinet nod to job-linked incentive scheme

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved an Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme with an allocation of ₹99,446 crore to support employment generation, primarily in the manufacturing sector.

“Under the scheme, while the first-time employees will get one month's wage [up to ₹15,000], the employers will be given incentives for a period up to two years for generating additional employment, with extended benefits for another two years for the manufacturing sector,” Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwani Vaishnav told presspersons after the Cabinet meeting.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the ELI Scheme would boost job

### Incentive boost

The ELI scheme will provide incentives to employees as well as employers to improve creation of job opportunities

▪ Around **1.92 crore beneficiaries** will be first-time employees

▪ Scheme offers one-month wage up to **₹15,000 in two instalments**

▪ Benefits applicable to jobs created **between August 1, 2025 and July 31, 2027**



creation. “The focus on manufacturing and incen-

tives for first-time employees will greatly benefit our youth,” he said.

Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the scheme was aimed at providing jobs for 3.5 crore youth. The government said in a statement that the ELI scheme was announced in the Union Budget of 2024-25 as part of the Prime Minister's package of five schemes to facilitate employment, skilling, and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth with a total budget outlay of ₹2 lakh crore.

“With an outlay of ₹99,446 crore, the ELI Scheme aims at incentivising the creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs over two years. Out of these, 1.92 crore beneficiaries will be first-timers, entering the workforce. The benefits of the scheme will be applicable to jobs created

between August 1, 2025 and July 31, 2027,” the release said, adding employees with salaries up to ₹1 lakh would be eligible for the scheme. “The government will incentivise employers, up to ₹3,000 per month, for two years, for each additional employee with sustained employment for at least six months. For the manufacturing sector, incentives will be extended to the third and fourth years as well,” the release added.

### Unions sceptical

While the industries have welcomed the announcement, trade unions are looking at it with suspicion. Tapan Sen, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) general secretary, said the move was a deceptive scheme for transferring public funds to the employers' class.





### Key points from article

The **Union Cabinet** has cleared a significant **Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme** with a financial outlay of ₹99,446 crore. This initiative is aimed at fostering large-scale job creation, particularly within the manufacturing sector, and forms a core component of the broader **employment and skilling initiative** announced in the **Union Budget 2024–25**.

- The **ELI scheme** targets the creation of **3.5 crore new jobs** over two years, with a special focus on **first-time entrants** to the workforce.
- It will apply to **additional employment generated** between **August 1, 2025**, and **July 31, 2027**.
- Of the total jobs created, **1.92 crore** are expected to be **first-time workers**.
- **Employers** will receive an incentive of up to ₹3,000 per month for each new hire, for a duration of **two years**, provided the job is sustained for at least **six months**.
- For jobs in the **manufacturing sector**, these benefits will be **extended to the 3rd and 4th years** as well
- 
- Employees with **monthly earnings up to ₹1 lakh** will be eligible under the scheme.
- A **one-month wage (up to ₹15,000)** will be provided to first-time employees as part of the benefits.
- The scheme is nested within a larger **₹2 lakh crore youth employment package**, which aims to benefit **4.1 crore individuals**.
- The incentive structure is tightly linked to **job retention** and sustained employment over a minimum period of **six months**.
- However, organizations such as the **Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)** have raised objections, alleging that the scheme is a way to **divert public funds towards** employers without ensuring proportional benefits to workers.

### Strategic Shift in Policy

- Marks a **transition from capital-linked to employment-linked incentives**.
- Focuses on **labour-intensive economic growth** rather than investment-heavy models.

### Sectoral Priority

- **Manufacturing sector** receives **extended benefits**.
- Aligned with national strategies like: **Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat**

### Tackling Youth Unemployment

- Targets **first-time employment** – crucial for the **18–29 age group**.
- Addresses India's **rising youth unemployment crisis** directly.

### Targeted Wage Band

- Covers jobs with salaries **up to ₹1 lakh/month**.
- Ensures inclusion of **low- and mid-income formal sector** workers.





### Workforce Formalization

- Encourages employers to **hire formally** with **EPFO, ESIC** and other benefits.
- Aims at reducing informal employment through **incentivized hiring**

### Retention-Based Incentive

- Incentives tied to **minimum 6-month employment** duration.
- Promotes **job stability** and discourages **shortterm, exploitative contracts**

### Contextual Relevance

- Scheme comes amid:
  - ♦ Persistent **underemployment**
  - ♦ Low **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)**
  - ♦ High **gender disparity** in jobs

### Criticism & Concerns

- **Trade unions fear:**
  - ♦ Disproportionate benefit to **corporates**
  - ♦ Weak emphasis on **worker rights and empowerment**
- **Calls for:**
  - ♦ **Transparent monitoring**
  - ♦ **Effective grievance redressal mechanisms**

### Broader Implications:

- If implemented effectively, the scheme could play a pivotal role in reducing **urban unemployment**, promoting **labour-intensive exports**, and tackling the issue of **jobless growth**.
- It may also enhance the **tax base** and widen **social security coverage** by encouraging **formal registration** of employees.
- The scheme invites **private sector participation** in the national employment mission, but its **success will hinge** on:
  - ♦ Transparent tracking of employment data
  - ♦ Ensuring genuine and sustained hires
  - ♦ Preventing misuse of funds
  - ♦ Regular monitoring and evaluation

### Costly Lapses

### Syllabus :

GS 2 :Governance

GS 3 :Disaster Management





### Costly lapses

Pharma plants should have a high level of safety culture

**M**icrocrystalline Cellulose (MCC) is chemically inert. The human body does not absorb it. The skin does not react to it. But it has several useful physical properties such as being a binder and texturiser, which is why it has varied applications in the pharmaceutical, food, cosmetics and other industries. MCC can add weight to a drug and facilitate the active ingredients to function effectively while making the drug conform to weight specifications. On Monday, however, the pharma unit of Sigachi Industries in Hyderabad, which makes this benign substance, was the scene of a lethal accident, with the toll rising to 36 on Tuesday. The making of this safe substance does involve risky processes, which can, however, be safe if appropriate procedures are followed by trained personnel. Most of the dead are young, poor, migrant workers from northern and eastern India who often lack social support. The Telangana government has announced an ex gratia of ₹1 crore and efforts must be made to ensure it reaches the families. It does seem that the response of mitigation agencies was timely and is ongoing.

The blast, however, puts the spotlight back on the pharma manufacturing industry, which has been a foreign exchange earner for India. Such accidents have been frequent, sadly. In August last year, there was a major accident at a pharma unit in Anakapalli near Visakhapatnam. Months earlier, in April, there was another accident in Hyderabad. Officials suspect that Monday's accident happened due to equipment malfunction, likely due to poor maintenance. It could have led to an abnormal build-up of temperature, leading to the blast. Key aspects of operating such hazardous units safely are that HAZOP, or a form of process hazard analysis, should be carried out by competent and knowledgeable staff. The data that individual units generate, that would indicate any abnormality, should be seamlessly integrated into operation control, again manned by competent staff. Operators should be trained, constantly aware of safety issues and implement steps that can ensure safety. While these are recommended practices, what is crucial is that such plants should have a high level of safety culture. Operators, managers and workers should be conscious of the ever-present risks. In this era of heightened scrutiny of industrial accidents by proactive media, manufacturing units are expected to conform to global norms especially regarding safety. Major slip-ups, such as this accident in Hyderabad, are likely to have a negative bearing on this key source of trade for India.

### Key points from article

A devastating blast at a **pharmaceutical manufacturing unit of Sigachi Industries in Hyderabad** resulted in the death of **36 people**, mostly poor migrant workers. The plant was involved in the production of **Microcrystalline Cellulose (MCC)** — a generally inert and safe compound widely used in pharma and food industries.

#### What is Microcrystalline Cellulose (MCC)?

- A **chemically inert** compound, non-reactive with human skin or body.
- Used in **pharma, food, and cosmetic industries**

as:

- ◆ Binder
- ◆ Texturizer
- ◆ **Weight-adjusting agent** for dosage formulations.
- Despite being a benign substance, its manufacturing involves **potentially hazardous processes** if safety norms are not followed.







### Accident Details:

- Explosion occurred due to **suspected equipment malfunction**.
- Possibly triggered by **temperature buildup** due to **poor maintenance**.
- Victims were mostly **young, poor, migrant labourers** from North and East India.
- Telangana government announced **₹1 crore ex-gratia**, but disbursement and support mechanisms need follow-up.

### Recurring Nature of Accidents:

- Similar incidents have occurred:
  - ◆ **August 2024** – Pharma blast in **Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh**.
  - ◆ **April 2024** – Another pharma accident in Hyderabad.
- Indicates a pattern of **systemic negligence** in industrial safety in the pharma sector.

### Industrial Safety Failures:

- **HAZOP (Hazard and Operability Analysis)** often neglected.
- **Lack of qualified personnel** to conduct regular risk assessments.
- **Insufficient training** and **low safety consciousness** among operators and management.
- Poor integration of **real-time monitoring systems** to flag abnormalities.

### Structural Concerns:

- Lack of a **robust safety culture** in Indian manufacturing plants.
- Inadequate **regulatory oversight** and **enforcement of norms**.
- Companies often ignore safety protocols to **cut costs**, compromising lives.

### Broader Implications:

- **Reputational Damage:** Frequent industrial accidents could harm India's global pharmaceutical export image.
- **Worker Rights:** Highlights the need for stronger labour protection for migrant workers in hazardous industries.
- **Governance Gaps:** Reinforces the urgency for state-level industrial inspections, better ESIC coverage, and accountability mechanisms.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Accidents also risk **chemical leaks, contamination**, and **local ecosystem damage**.





- While **ex-gratia relief** is necessary, systemic reforms in factory safety are urgent.
- The **media and civil society** must continue scrutiny to pressure industries and regulators to uphold **safety standards**.
- **Industrial growth** should not come at the cost of **human lives** — the **ethical dimension** of governance and corporate responsibility must be enforced.

### A look at India's sports policy journey

#### Syllabus : GS 2 Governance

# A look at India's sports policy journey

When was a dedicated Department of Sports created? Why did India's sports policy remain tepid while the global sport ecosystem thrived in the 1980s to 2000s? How have Indian athletes fared over the decades? Does India have a chance to host the Olympics?

#### EXPLAINER

**Malathi Renati**

#### The story so far:

**S**port in India can trace its roots back to pre-historic times, when physical skills that are now foundational to modern sports were then integral to daily life. As hunters and gatherers, humans relied on abilities like archery, wrestling, swimming, and climbing, not for recreation, but for survival. These have now evolved into the individual and team sports that we are familiar with today.

#### How did sports do post 1947?

India's sports policy journey since 1947 must be seen in the context of the nation's broader socio-economic development. Post the British Raj, India's prime focus was on rebuilding the nation by addressing poverty, health, and education. It is therefore understandable that sectors like sports did not feature prominently in the national agenda. Even so, India hosted the first Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951, a bold assertion of the country's regional aspirations and soft power. In 1954, the government set up the All-India Council of Sports (AICS) to advise on sports matters, support federations, and fund elite athletes.

However, allocations were modest, resulting in athletes missing international competitions due to a lack of financial support. For nearly three decades, nothing notable transpired on the policy front. Yet, India's men's hockey team dominated the Olympics from 1920 to 1980. And Indian athletics saw stars emerge such as Milkha Singh (200/400m), Gurbachan Singh (decathlon), Praveen Kumar Sobti (discus and hammer throw), and Kamaljeet Sandhu, the first Indian woman to win an individual gold medal at the Asian Games.

**When did India's sports policy begin?**  
The 1982 Asian Games catalysed change.



**Over the ages:** Russian coach Imant Kuklich and Uday Prabhu (sprints coach) giving a pep talk to the 'athletics probables' at the SAI camp, Kengeri in 1990. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

The government created a dedicated Department of Sports under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Riding the post-Games momentum, India finally unveiled its first National Sports Policy (NSP) in 1984. The NSP 1984 aimed to improve infrastructure, promote mass participation, and raise standards in elite sports. It also stressed the importance of integrating sports with education, which was formalised in the 1986 National Education Policy. That same year, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) was established to implement policy, and athlete development programs.

While global sports ecosystems evolved rapidly between 1986 and 2000, they remained tepid in India. Sports is a 'State' subject in the Constitution and though the Union government had earmarked it a modest budget, the involvement of society and markets were minimal. Policies remained weak, and

implementation inconsistent. India's economy too remained sluggish through the 1980s. However, 1991 marked a turning point, with the emergence of liberalisation. This economic shift coincided with cultural changes. Cable television, global exposure, and a rising middle class brought greater visibility and aspiration for sports. A Draft NSP in 1997 recognised this, proposing that States focus on broadbasing, while the Union concentrated on elite excellence. But it never went beyond the draft stage.

#### How has sports evolved post-2000?

In 2000, India created a dedicated Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS). A revised National Sports Policy was launched in 2001, setting clearer goals for mass participation and international excellence. This period also saw sports feature in the Union Budget, albeit with a small allocation. India's

Olympic medal tally remained modest, with Rajyavardhan Rathore's silver (2004), Abhinav Bindra's gold (2008) and bronzes in boxing from Vijender Singh (2008) and Mary Kom (2012).

In 2011, the National Sports Development Code (NSDC) was introduced, aiming to regulate and professionalise National Sports Federations (NSFs). It addressed governance, anti-doping, age fraud, betting, gender issues etc. but as always, implementation remained the hurdle.

However, several impactful schemes were launched over the years – TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme 2014) provided elite athletes with coaching, nutrition, and infrastructure support; Khelo India (2017) conducted youth talent identification across schools and universities; and the Fit India Movement (2019) promoted physical activity and fitness as a public health priority.

#### Can India host the Olympics?

India's intent to host the 2036 Olympics has ignited momentum. In 2024, the government released both the Draft National Sports Policy and the Draft National Sports Governance Bill for public feedback. Whether these make it to law remains to be seen. The good news is that yesterday the NSP 2025 was announced, unveiled as "Khelo Bharat Niti - 2025", reinforcing India's 2036 Olympic bid.

Similarly, measures that have been deliberated for a while, like the Draft National Code for Good Governance in Sports, 2017 should be given the go-ahead. India had the ignominious distinction of topping the latest global doping list released by WADA. It's about time for all stakeholders to move beyond self-interest and enforce reforms for the larger good of Indian sport. We must now prioritise scientific coaching, physical literacy, and sports in education. Lasting change demands sustained action. Building a 'sporting nation' doesn't happen overnight.

Malathi Renati is Head of Policy School at the Takshashila Institution.

#### THE GIST

India hosted the first Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951, a bold assertion of the country's regional aspirations and soft power.

In 2000, India created a dedicated Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. A revised National Sports Policy was launched in 2001, setting clearer goals for mass participation and international excellence.

India's intent to host the 2036 Olympics has ignited momentum.





### Key points from article

India's evolution in sports policy mirrors its broader socio-economic journey—from the early ostindependence neglect of sports to current efforts aimed at mainstreaming it as a national priority. These efforts now include a formal bid to host the **2036 Olympics** and the unveiling of the Khelo Bharat Niti (**NSP 2025**).

- Historically, Indian sports were rooted in survival-oriented skills like wrestling, swimming, and archery.
- After independence, national attention remained focused on poverty alleviation, education, and health, pushing sports to the margins.
- The **first National Sports Policy (NSP)** was introduced in 1984, following the momentum of the 1982 Asian Games.
- The Sports Authority of India (SAI) was established in 1986.
- A dedicated Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) was set up in 2000.
- Key post-2000 initiatives include:
  - ♦ **NSP 2001**,
  - ♦ **National Sports Development Code (2011)**,
- **TOPS – Target Olympic Podium Scheme (2014)**,
  - ♦ **Khelo India (2017)**, and
  - ♦ **Fit India Movement (2019)**.

To back its **2036 Olympic aspirations**, India has released a new sports policy: **NSP 2025 – “Khelo Bharat Niti”**.

#### 1. Pre-1980s: The Era of Policy Apathy

- Sports received low policy and budget priority due to the nation's focus on development basics.
- The All-India Council of Sports (AICS), created in 1954, provided limited institutional support.
- Despite underfunding, India's men's hockey team dominated the Olympics until 1980.

#### 2. 1982–2000: Institutional Beginnings

- The 1982 Asian Games acted as a catalyst, leading to the creation of a Department of Sports.
- NSP 1984 aimed to build infrastructure and nurture elite athletes.
- NEP 1986 formally integrated sports into the education system.
- However, weak private involvement and lack of federal coherence (sports being a State Subject) led to uneven progress.
- The Draft NSP 1997 proposed clearer division of responsibilities between Centre and States but was never finalised.

#### 3. Post-2000: Reforms and Rising Aspirations

- **MYAS was established in 2000**, and NSP 2001 focused on both mass participation and excellence.
- The **2011 NSDC** brought governance reform in National Sports Federations, targeting doping, gender bias, and accountability.
- India's Olympic achievements modestly improved:
- **Rajyavardhan Rathore (2004)**,







- **Abhinav Bindra (2008),**
- **Vijender Singh and Mary Kom (2008–2012).**
- Flagship schemes like:
- **TOPS (2014)** enabled high-performance support,
- **Khelo India (2017)** enhanced youth talent scouting,
- **Fit India (2019)** promoted fitness and health culture.

#### **Critical Issues Identified:**

- **Policy inconsistency and weak execution** across levels.
- Persistent issues of **bureaucratic interference, age fraud, and doping scandals.**
- India ranks among the **top offenders in WADA's doping violations**, damaging global credibility.
- **National Sports Federations** lack professional standards despite the NSDC framework.
- **Insufficient public-private partnerships** and minimal grassroots infrastructure.

#### **Way Forward:**

- **Effective Implementation of NSP 2025** with builtin mechanisms for **audits and performance tracking.**
- **Expedite the passage of the National Sports Governance Bill** and the **2017 Good Governance Code.**
- Integrate **scientific coaching** across disciplines and align sports promotion with **NEP 2020.**
- Develop **long-term sports infrastructure**, not just for events, but for **public and school access.**
- Strengthen the fight against doping through **education, rigorous testing, and strict penalties.**
- Promote a **sports culture at the grassroots level** through school-based physical literacy and community sports engagement.



To realize this vision, the policy focuses on several key objectives, which are given below:

- Establish comprehensive sports programs for all participation groups, from grassroots to elite levels.
- Organize sports competitions and leagues at various levels, creating a robust competitive structure.
- Implement physical literacy initiatives to promote a culture of sports and physical activity.
- Develop a robust talent identification and development system to nurture future champions.
- Ensure equitable access to sports infrastructure across the country.
- Provide athlete-centric support systems for the holistic development of sportspersons.
- Promote sports science, medicine and innovation to enhance performance and well-being.
- Strengthen governance and institutional frameworks in the sports sector.
- Revamp funding mechanisms to ensure sustainable development of sports.
- Foster economic growth through sports-related industries and activities.
- Promote social development and inclusion through sports.
- Establish sports as a viable career option for youth.
- Encourage mass participation in sports and fitness activities for a healthier nation.
- Develop a robust mechanism to reward and recognize champion athletes as well as retired athletes.
- Develop a framework and guidelines for educational institutions to act as feeder institutes to impart sporting culture.





## Groundwater crises deepens in Karnataka's hard rock terrain

### Syllabus :

#### GS 1: Geopgraphy

# Groundwater crisis deepens in Karnataka's hard rock terrain

In the Upper Arkavathy watershed, farmers drill borewells into the granite bedrock, creating microfractures that fast-track rainwater deep underground. As a result, instead of recharging shallow aquifers, water bypasses them entirely, disrupting local hydrology, weakening long-term water retention, and causing the water table to drop every year

Neelanjana Rai

**S**tretching across much of peninsular India, the Deccan Plateau hides a silent, subterranean struggle. Beneath its sun-baked soil lie ancient, fractured layers of basalt and granite – hard rock aquifers that dominate the region's groundwater story.

In Karnataka, this rocky reality is nearly absolute: about 99% of the State relies on these stubbornly unyielding formations for its water needs. With limited porosity and a dependence on narrow fractures and weathered pockets to store and move water, these geological formations offer far less than they promise, unlike the generous flow of sedimentary aquifers.

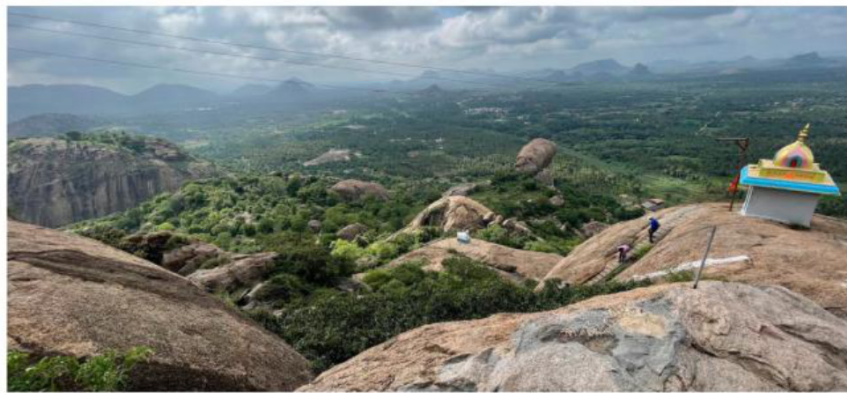
In a new study, researchers from the Water, Environment, Land and Livelihoods (WELL) Labs in Chennai examined Aralumallige and Doddathumakuru gram panchayats in the Upper Arkavathy watershed near Bengaluru, revealing a sharp decline in groundwater levels driven by intensive agricultural practices.

These areas supply vegetables, exotic crops, and flowers to Bengaluru, banking on water-intensive farming. While monsoon rains offer seasonal relief, farmers depend on deep borewells for the rest of the year. Borewells drilled into granite bedrock alter the subsurface geology, creating microfractures that fast-track rainwater deep underground. As a result, instead of recharging shallow aquifers, water bypasses them entirely, disrupting the local hydrology and weakening long-term water retention.

Every year, the water table continues to drop. According to the study, published recently in *PLoS Water*, the average depth of gram panchayat drinking water borewells dramatically increased from 183 m during 2001-2011 to 321 m in 2011-2021. Thus almost 55% of all wells drilled in the Aralumallige sub-watershed have failed, with a staggering 70% of drinking water wells failing within a decade of their construction, primarily due to falling water tables.

The study also highlighted water quality issues. While nitrate levels in drinking water were often higher than the prescribed norm of 50 mg/l, people didn't abandon their wells. Interviews with gram panchayat officials revealed that only two of the 79 abandoned borewells were shut due to elevated fluoride concentrations.

The findings collectively suggest groundwater quality issues, while acknowledged, aren't the primary drivers of borewell abandonment. Instead, the overwhelming cause is the chronic and



Trekkers explore the Kunagalu Betta with the Arkavathy river flowing to one side, in Ramanagara district about 50 km from Bengaluru. Researchers recently conducted studies in Aralumallige and Doddathumakuru gram panchayats in the Upper Arkavathy watershed. MURALI KUMAR K./THE HINDU

severe depletion of the water table.

#### Mounting challenges

Electricity is free for farmers, but gram panchayats are grappling with a mounting economic crisis. The frequent drilling of deep borewells, which require powerful pumps, has pushed them into steep electrical debt. Revenue collection can't cover the ballooning annual power bills, directly affecting the ability of panchayats to maintain rural water infrastructure. Funds meant for development projects are being redirected to cover utility costs, stalling local progress. Meanwhile, the State government has begun pressuring panchayats to pay outstanding taxes despite their financial strain.

Borewell drilling costs are borne by individuals. For small farmers, this means investing ₹4-5 lakh in a single borewell, with no guarantee of success. Many end up leasing their land and migrating to urban areas for a stable income. Labour, pump installation, and infrastructure expenses have hit the rural economy hard.

Despite widespread awareness of water scarcity, there have been few efforts to educate farmers on the consequences of water-intensive cropping. The region's terrain limits greywater reuse and youth migrating away further disrupts sustainable practices.

While Karnataka banned eucalyptus farming due to the species' high-water use, its long-term impact on groundwater persists.

The new study also pointed to a broader concern: despite widespread groundwater overexploitation, there is very little quantitative evidence on the risks to water sustainability at the local level. This makes

**Panchayats are grappling with an economic crisis. Borewells that require powerful pumps have pushed them into electrical debt. Revenue collection cannot cover power bills, affecting the ability to maintain water infrastructure. Funds for development are being redirected to cover utility costs**

it difficult to predict borewell failures or estimate the true costs faced by drinking water authorities.

The researchers have argued that poor water resource management is the biggest threat to sustained rural drinking water access in India. While global "water, sanitation, and hygiene" initiatives focus on technical and financial infrastructure, they often overlook the foundational problem: neglected resource management.

#### Efforts in motion

In the study, the researchers used data from the Sujala Project, a key groundwater recharge initiative by the Karnataka government, to trace depletion trends. They also referenced the Jal Jeevan Mission, India's flagship programme for universal piped water access, which has funded new infrastructure and replaced failed borewells. While the study wasn't directly critical of these programmes, it argued that long-term success hinges on addressing the root crisis: groundwater depletion and the financial strain it imposes on local governance.

As Lakshminantha N.R., one of the study's authors, put it: "Until and unless

you change the farming technique of over-extraction, no amount of recharging will change the state of the groundwater" in Aralumallige, Doddathumakuru, and other rural parts of the Deccan Plateau. He also recommended that gram panchayats begin compensating farmers for using less electricity and extracting less water, encouraging more sustainable practices while reducing rising electricity bills.

"If such an initiative isn't taken," he warned, "within 3-4 years there will be no groundwater left to drink or use."

Until the 1970s, Bengaluru depended on tanks and reservoirs to replenish groundwater. But with the advent of borewells, which operate on shorter timescales, traditional systems were abandoned. In Aralumallige, the local lake, once a key recharge reservoir, has now been encroached upon, its soil dug up, its green cover denuded. Before borewells, the lake's discharge channels helped recharge surrounding areas. In 2022, despite heavy rainfall, the lake remained dry.

The findings paint a sobering picture: without urgent shifts in agricultural practices and stronger local governance, groundwater in the Deccan Plateau may slip beyond recovery. According to the researchers, sustainable farming, recharge infrastructure, and policy incentives must work in tandem and not as afterthoughts. The study recommends better policies and technologies to help rural farmers and governing bodies use their resources without inviting a crisis.

(Neelanjana Rai is a freelance journalist who writes about indigenous community, environment, science and health. neelanjana189@gmail.com)

### THE GIST

Karnataka's groundwater is based mostly in hard rock aquifers. About 99% of the State relies on the Deccan Plateau's unyielding formations for water. With limited porosity, these geological formations offer far less than they promise, unlike sedimentary aquifers

Researchers who studied Aralumallige and Doddathumakuru panchayats in the Upper Arkavathy watershed found that the average depth of drinking water borewells increased from 183 m to 321 m. Almost 55% of all wells have failed, with 70% failing within a decade

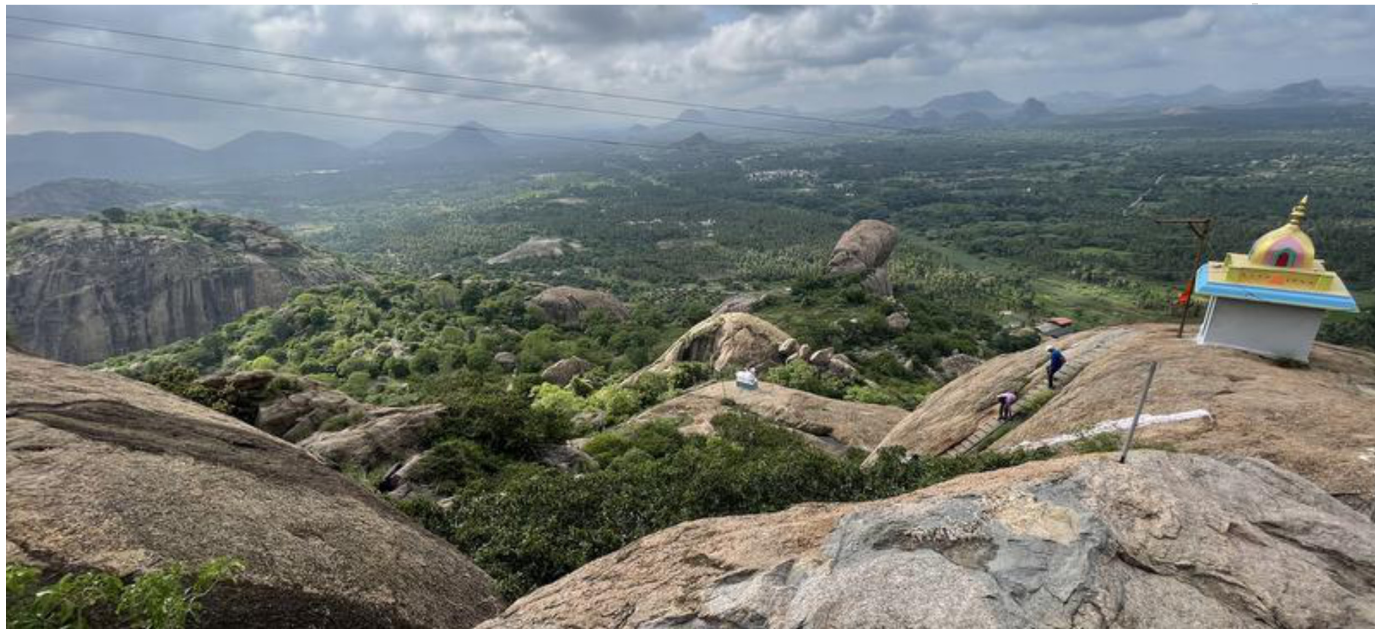
Researchers found that poor management is the biggest threat to drinking water access. The root issues are depletion and the financial strain on local bodies. They warn that unless farmers are compensated to use less water, within 3-4 years there will be no groundwater left





### Key points from article

A recent study by WELL Labs in the **Upper Arkavathy watershed** (Karnataka) has revealed alarming groundwater depletion trends in hard rock terrains due to over-extraction, flawed borewell practices, and unsustainable agricultural techniques. The findings underline a worsening **groundwater crisis** in India's Deccan Plateau.



### Key points from article

#### 1. Geological Reality of the Deccan Plateau

- Dominated by hard rock aquifers (granite and basalt).
- 99% of Karnataka depends on these formations for water.
- Limited porosity → water storage possible only in narrow fractures and weathered zones.
- Poor natural recharge capacity compared to sedimentary aquifers.

#### 2. Over-Extraction & Borewell Failures

- Farmers drill deep borewells (now up to 321 m), altering subsurface geology.
- Microfractures caused by drilling let rainwater bypass shallow aquifers, reducing local water retention.
- Result: annual drop in water table and failed borewells.

#### 3. Water Quality Issues

- Nitrate contamination in many borewells (above 50 mg/l norm).
- Fluoride contamination present but not the main reason for borewell abandonment.
- Primary driver: aquifer exhaustion, not water quality.

#### 4. Rural Infrastructure & Financial Stress

- Free electricity for farmers → overuse of groundwater via deep borewells.
- Gram panchayats now face massive electricity debts.



- Development funds diverted to pay power bills.
- State pressure to clear dues despite fiscal distress.
- **Private drilling costs (₹4–5 lakh)** fall on farmers → debt, distress, and migration.

- Average borewell depth increased from 183 m (2001–11) to 321 m (2011–21).
- 55% of borewells failed in Aralumallige sub-watershed.
- 70% of drinking water wells failed within 10 years.

### 5. Unsustainable Agriculture

- Region grows exotic vegetables and flowers for Bengaluru.
- High water-consuming crops worsen aquifer depletion.
- No significant promotion of water-saving irrigation, crop diversification, or farmer education.

### 6. Systemic and Governance Failures

- Panchayats lack capacity to manage groundwater as a common-pool resource.
- Urbanisation and lake encroachment have destroyed traditional recharge systems(e.g., tanks in Aralumallige).
- Water resource management is weak despite investments from:
  - Jal Jeevan Mission (piped water)
  - Sujala Watershed Programme (recharge efforts)

**“Until farming techniques change, no recharge effort can save the aquifers.”** – Lakshmikantha N.R.,  
Study Co-Author

### Broader Implications:

- **Local Governance at Risk:** Panchayats are financially overstretched → cannot maintain water infra. Policy disconnect between central schemes and local needs.
- **Rural Distress & Migration:** Small farmers face high costs and high failure risk → land leasing, migration. Erosion of rural economy due to unsustainable farming and resource scarcity.
- **Ecological Collapse in Waiting: Lakes and tanks encroached;** recharge capacity lost. Even heavy rainfall in 2022 failed to replenish local lakes.







## Reserved faculty posts are still vacant and out of reach

### Syllabus :

**GS 1: Indian Society**

**GS 2 :Social Justice**

**GS 2 :Governance**

# Reserved faculty posts are still vacant and out of reach

India's commitment to social justice, enshrined in the Constitution, mandates equitable representation to marginalised communities in public institutions. Reservation policies for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) aim to address historical inequalities with a quota of 15%, 7.5%, 27%, and 10% of posts, respectively. Yet, central universities and premier institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, the Indian Institutes of Management and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences consistently fail to fill reserved faculty positions, shifting the focus to this constitutional mandate. Importantly, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led political dispensation has often promised to abide by the agenda of social justice to make India's institutions more inclusive and democratic. In this case, what are the systemic barriers that prevent these institutions from enabling inclusive representation?

### A persistent gap

In data presented by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in the Lok Sabha in April 2021, there were significant vacancies in reserved faculty posts across 45 central universities: 2,389 for SCs, 1,199 for STs, and 4,251 for OBCs. More recent reports suggest that while some progress has been made with a special drive for recruitment in certain universities (Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Delhi), the gap persists. A University Grants Commission (UGC) report (2023) indicated that nearly 30% of reserved teaching posts in central universities remain unfilled, particularly at senior levels such as associate professor and professor.

This shortfall is in contrast to other public sectors (railways and banks), where reserved posts at the lower levels (Group C and D) are often filled. However, senior positions of power and privileges are still out of reach for marginalised social groups. In academia too, the senior positions (vice chancellors, directors, principals and professors) have been dominated



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Central universities and premier institutions must align their recruitment practices with the goal of social justice

by unreserved categories, highlighting a structural disparity in higher education.

### Systemic barriers

Several factors contribute to the non-fulfilment of reserved faculty posts. First, central universities and institutes of national importance operate with significant autonomy, sometimes insulating them from governmental oversight. While the UGC mandates adherence to reservation policies, enforcement varies. Vice-Chancellors and selection committees, often drawn from dominant social groups, show a lack of urgency or accountability to prioritise the social justice agenda.

Second, the UGC's shift in 2018 to the "13-point roster system" for faculty recruitment has been contentious. Unlike the earlier 200-point system, which treated the entire institution as a unit for calculating reservations, the new system considers individual departments as units. In smaller departments with limited posts (for example, six faculty positions), only one post may be reserved for OBCs, and none for STs until 14 posts are created. This has significantly reduced the number of reserved positions, particularly for STs, prompting legal challenges and protests.

Third, allegations of bias in the selection process persist. Qualified candidates from marginalised communities often face rejection under vague criteria such as "candidate not found suitable". Such practices can discourage talented academics from SC, ST, and OBC backgrounds from pursuing university careers, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion. A study by the Ambedkar University Faculty Association in 2022 highlighted that over 60% of reserved post vacancies in central universities were attributed to such discretionary rejections.

Finally, institutional practices sometimes undermine fairness. Reports of biased appointments influenced by political affiliations or ideological alignment raise concerns about transparency. Though successive governments, both Congress and BJP, have championed social

justice, the gap between policy rhetoric and implementation remains wide.

### Addressing the challenge

Filling reserved faculty posts requires a multi-pronged approach. First, stricter enforcement of UGC guidelines is essential, supplementing the values of social justice. Regular audits and public reporting of reservation compliance could hold institutions accountable. Second, revisiting the 13-point roster system to ensure that it aligns with constitutional mandates is critical. Hearings by the Supreme Court of India, that are ongoing on this issue, may provide clarity.

Third, universities must address biases in recruitment by enabling diversity in selection committees and standardising evaluation criteria. Training programmes to sensitise academic leaders to social justice principles could foster inclusivity. Finally, it requires proactive outreach and political enforcement. Social justice should not remain a mere political slogan. The ruling class must ensure its effective implementation in every institution.

The persistent vacancy of reserved faculty posts undermines India's vision of an inclusive education system. Universities are not merely centres of learning but also spaces for social transformation. Ensuring equitable representation in faculty positions is not just a legal obligation but also a moral imperative to reflect India's diverse society.

As the National Education Policy 2020 emphasises multidisciplinary and inclusive education, central universities must align their recruitment practices with the goals of ensuring more faculty members from the marginalised social groups. Only concerted action that combines substantive policy reform, greater institutional accountability towards social justice and political vision of the ruling class to make public institutions more inclusive can bridge the gap between the social justice mandate and the current hesitation of the academic institutions towards it.

### Key points from article

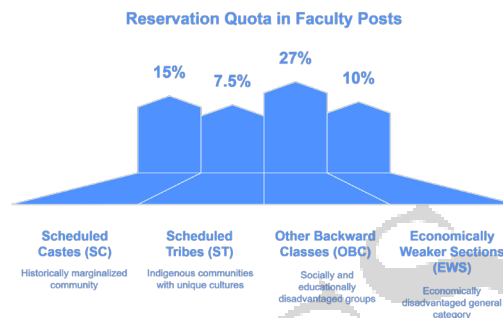
Despite constitutional and legal provisions for **reservation in faculty positions** for SCs, STs, OBCs, and EWS in central universities and premier institutions (IITs, IIMs, AIIMS), a **large number of these reserved posts remain unfilled**, especially at senior academic levels.





### Persistent Gaps:

- **Vacancies (as of 2021):**
  - ♦ SC: 2,389 posts
  - ♦ ST: 1,199 posts
  - ♦ OBC: 4,251 posts (across 45 central universities)
- **Recent UGC data (2023):**
  - ♦ Nearly **30% of reserved posts remain unfilled** in central universities.
  - ♦ Senior positions (Associate Professors, Professors) show greater shortfall.
- While **Group C and D positions** in other public sectors (like railways and banks) see better compliance, **higher academic roles** continue to be dominated by unreserved categories.



### Systemic Barriers Identified:

- **Autonomy of Institutions:**
  - ♦ Premier institutions enjoy **high autonomy**.
  - ♦ Lack of **stringent enforcement** of reservation compliance by UGC.
  - ♦ Selection bodies often lack diversity and accountability.
- **Controversial 13-point Roster System (2018):**
  - ♦ Treats **departments as individual units**, not the whole university.
  - ♦ Results in **very few or no reserved posts** in smaller departments.
  - ♦ Replaced the more inclusive **200-point roster**, leading to legal protests.
- **Bias in Selection:**
  - ♦ Use of vague rejection terms like **“not found suitable”**.
  - ♦ Many **qualified SC/ST/OBC candidates are rejected** arbitrarily.
  - ♦ 2022 Ambedkar University Faculty Association report: Over **60% of reserved post vacancies** were due to subjective or biased rejections.
- **Opaque and Partisan Practices:**
  - ♦ Recruitment influenced by **political alignment** or **ideological favoritism**.
  - ♦ Undermines meritocracy and perpetuates exclusion of marginalised communities.
- **Way Forward & Recommendations:**
  - ♦ **Strict Enforcement:**
    - ♦ UGC and MoE should conduct **periodic audits** of recruitment data.
    - ♦ Publish reservation implementation reports.
  - ♦ **Roster System Reform:**
    - ♦ Revert to **200-point roster system** or modify 13-point system for fairness.
    - ♦ Ensure equitable distribution across departments.
  - ♦ **Bias-free Selection:**
    - ♦ Introduce **transparent evaluation frameworks**.





- ◆ Diversify selection committees to reflect India's social composition.
- **Capacity Building & Sensitisation:**
  - ◆ Conduct **anti-discrimination training** for university administrators.
  - ◆ Foster awareness of **constitutional values** in academic hiring.
- **Political Will & Monitoring:**
  - ◆ Ruling governments must **translate rhetoric into real implementation**.
  - ◆ Proactively fill vacancies through **special recruitment drives**.

## Using Tech to empower women and children

### Syllabus :

#### GS 3: Science and Technology Welfare schemes

### *Using tech to empower women and children*

**E**mpowerment begins with access – access to rights, to services, to protection, and to opportunity. Over the past decade, this access has been redefined and democratised through the focused commitment of the Modi government to build a more inclusive and digitally empowered India. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been at the forefront of this transformation. Guided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, the Ministry has integrated technology into its programmes, ensuring that benefits reach the last mile swiftly, transparently, and efficiently.

What was once aspirational is now operational thanks to the government's emphasis on digital public infrastructure, real-time data systems, and responsive governance. With steadfast focus on care, protection, and empowerment, the Ministry has strengthened access to nutrition, education, legal safeguards, and essential entitlements, ensuring that women and children lead healthier, more secure lives, and also emerge as confident leaders and change makers of Amrit Kaal.

#### Transformative initiatives

A cornerstone of this transformation is the Saksham Anganwadi initiative, designed to modernise and empower over 2 lakh Anganwadi centres across India. These centres are being upgraded with smart infrastructure, digital devices, and innovative learning tools, enabling more effective delivery of nutrition, healthcare, and pre-school education services.

The integration of services provided by 14 lakh Anganwadi centres across the nation with the Poshan Tracker has enabled real-time data entry, performance monitoring, and evidence-based policy interventions. Over 10.14 crore beneficiaries, including pregnant women, lactating mothers, children under six, and adolescent girls, are now



**Annapurna Devi**  
Union Minister of  
Women and Child  
Development

Over the last decade, the Ministry has strengthened access to nutrition, education, legal safeguards, and essential entitlements

registered on Poshan Tracker. By equipping Anganwadi workers with smartphones and comprehensive training, the initiative ensures quality service delivery at the last mile.

At its core, Poshan Tracker is driving the national vision of a Swasth Bharat, Suposhit Bharat. It reimagines Anganwadi centres as digitally empowered community hubs that bridge the urban-rural divide. Recognised with the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration (2025), it also supports Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi, providing digital training modules to Anganwadi workers for early childhood education.

Further, to reduce leakages in the Supplementary Nutrition Programme, a facial recognition system has been introduced to ensure that eligible beneficiaries alone receive nutrition support.

Beyond nutrition, the Ministry is ensuring safety and support for women through technology-led platforms. The SHe-Box portal provides single-window access to every woman to lodge complaints under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. It enables online redressal and tracking. Meanwhile, the Mission Shakti dashboard and mobile app provide integrated assistance to women in distress, connecting them to the nearest one-stop centre, now operational in nearly every district. These interventions exemplify how technology is being used not just for efficiency, but for justice, dignity, and empowerment.

The Modi government has also operationalised the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) – a game changer in maternal welfare. Under the PMMVY Rules, 2022, pregnant women receive ₹5,000 for their first child. Under Mission Shakti, the benefit extends to ₹6,000 if the second child is a girl – promoting positive reinforcement for daughters. Delivered through a paperless Direct Benefit Transfer system, about ₹19,000 crore has

reached over 4 crore women beneficiaries since its inception.

PMMVY is a fully digital programme – leveraging Aadhaar-based authentication, mobile-based registration, doorstep assistance from Anganwadi/ASHA workers, and real-time dashboards. A dedicated grievance redressal module and citizen-facing portal ensure transparency, trust, and accountability, strengthening the government's commitment to Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao.

#### Tangible outcomes

These targeted efforts are delivering tangible outcomes. The latest reports from the Health Management Information System of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) reveal that the Sex Ratio at Birth has increased from 918 (2014-15) to 930 (2023-24). The Maternal Mortality Rate has declined to 97 per 1,000 births (2018-20) from 130 per 1,000 births (2014-16).

Digital transformation has played a key role in child protection and welfare. Under the Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the Ministry has strengthened the adoption ecosystem through the CARINGS portal (Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System). This ensures a more transparent, accessible, and efficient adoption process.

Digitisation has also improved monitoring of child care institutions, foster care placements, and statutory support structures under the Act. Platforms developed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights are tracking violations of child rights. The Mission Vatsalya dashboard strengthens convergence and coordination among various child welfare stakeholders.

This is New India where governance meets technology, and policy meets purpose. Over the last decade, the Ministry has not only adapted to digital change, but championed it.

