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Indian Express - 28 June 2026

7 exam-relevant stories distilled for UPSC aspirants.
Paper-wise tags, static linkage, real PYQs per article.

UPSC Daily Digest

Indian Express - 28 June 2026 - for Civil Services aspirants

This digest filters today's issue of *Indian Express* down to **7 exam-relevant stories** — each with paper-wise tags, static linkage, key facts, a critical lens, two Prelims-style MCQs, one Mains-style question, and **real PYQ links** from the UPSC archive.

REVISE IN 60 SECONDS - Must-read three

1. **Gaganyaan uncrewed test flight may slip to Q3 2027: ISRO chief** — GS-3. The first uncrewed test flight for the Gaganyaan mission could be pushed back to the third quarter of 2027, ISRO chairman V Narayanan indicated on Saturday, eve
2. **Minister who received Rs 1 crore subsidy under own ministry's scheme defends action** — GS-4. Following an Indian Express investigation into Union Minister of State for Agriculture Bhagirath Choudhary lifting a subsidy of nearly Rs 1 crore from a scheme
3. **Red Fort blast: NIA files supplementary chargesheet, names absconding Al-Qaeda offshoot member** — GS-3. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a supplementary chargesheet against three more accused, including an absconding prime suspect, in the car blas

1. Gaganyaan Uncrewed Test Flight May Slip to Q3 2027: ISRO Chief

WHY IN NEWS

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan indicated at the Air Marshal L M Katre Memorial Lecture in Bengaluru that Gaganyaan's first uncrewed test flight, targeted for 2026, could slip to Q3 2027, pushing the crewed mission to 2028.

Paper / GS: GS-3 (Science & Technology) - **Static link:** Gaganyaan is India's maiden human spaceflight programme; its timeline, human-rating of rockets, and crew safety systems are recurring GS-3 S&T syllabus topics and feature in ISRO-related questions.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Programme	Gaganyaan — India's maiden human spaceflight mission
ISRO Chairman	V Narayanan
Revised uncrewed flight window	Q3 2027 (earlier target: end-2026)
Revised crewed flight target	2028 (earlier target: end-2027)
Uncrewed missions planned	3, before the first crewed flight
Key safety feature	Human-rated LVM3 rocket + crew escape system
Approval status	Government has approved Gaganyaan continuation programme, including crewed missions

Critical lens

- **For:** Prioritising crew safety through exhaustive human-rating and multiple uncrewed flights reflects responsible programme management; a single failure on a crewed mission would set India's space ambitions back by a decade.
- **Against:** Successive timeline slippages erode institutional credibility, raise programme costs, and widen India's gap with China, which has already operated a crewed space station.
- **Way forward:** ISRO should anchor milestones to a firm, publicly committed schedule with parliamentary oversight; parallel-track development of the crew module and life-support systems can prevent cascading delays.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. Which of the following correctly describes a feature of India's Gaganyaan programme?

(a) It will use the PSLV-XL rocket in human-rated configuration (b) It plans three uncrewed missions before the first crewed flight (c) The programme was approved exclusively for crewed missions from inception (d) It aims to establish a permanent Indian space station by 2030

1. "Human-rating" of a launch vehicle primarily refers to:

(a) Training astronauts to manually pilot the rocket (b) Certifying the rocket and crew systems to safely carry human beings (c) Reducing the rocket's payload capacity to accommodate a crew cabin (d) Qualifying the vehicle for reuse after each crewed mission

QUESTION - Mains practice (150 marks)

"Repeated delays in the Gaganyaan programme raise questions about India's readiness for human spaceflight. Examine the technical and institutional challenges ISRO faces, and suggest measures to strengthen India's crewed space capabilities."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

2. Minister who received Rs 1 crore subsidy under own ministry's scheme defends action

WHY IN NEWS

An Indian Express investigation revealed that Union MoS Agriculture Bhagirath Choudhary received Rs 99.60 lakh in subsidy from a scheme administered by his own ministry and approved by a board on which he holds ex officio vice-president status. The minister defended the action citing rule-compliance and farmer-training.

Paper / GS: GS-4 (Ethics, Probity) - **Static link:** A minister drawing financial benefit from a scheme under his own administrative control and approved by a board where he is ex officio vice-president is a textbook GS-4 conflict-of-interest case; MIDH and NHB also feature in GS-3 agricultural development topics.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Minister	Bhagirath Choudhary, MoS Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare
Subsidy received	Rs 99.60 lakh (approx. Rs 1 crore), received ~3 months ago
Scheme	Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), launched 2014-15
Implementing body	National Horticulture Board (NHB) — autonomous body under MoS's own ministry
Minister's board role	Ex officio Vice-President, NHB (the approving authority)
Project	Commercial-scale cucumber cultivation
Minister's defence	Full rule compliance; public disclosure; farm used to train other farmers

Critical lens

- **For:** Minister publicly disclosed the subsidy and invited district officials; aligns with the PM's stated goal of making farming commercially viable; the farm demonstrably serves as a training site for neighbouring farmers.
- **Against:** The approver and the beneficiary are institutionally the same person — a structural conflict of interest that cannot be cured by post-facto disclosure; it corrodes public trust in government schemes and sets a precedent that ministers may self-direct public resources.
- **Way forward:** Mandatory recusal and independent scrutiny when elected officials or their family members apply to schemes under their administrative portfolio; a statutory conflict-of-interest code for ministers, akin to model codes in several parliamentary democracies.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. Which of the following statements about the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) is correct?

(a) It is implemented directly by the Ministry of Finance (b) It was launched in 2018-19 as part of the PM-KISAN package (c) **It is administered through the National Horticulture Board under the Ministry of Agriculture** (d) It covers only fruit crops, excluding vegetables and flowers

1. In the context of public ethics, a 'conflict of interest' arises when a public servant's:

(a) personal opinion differs from government policy (b) **private interests could improperly influence their official duties** (c) family member is employed in the private sector (d) decisions are challenged in a court of law

QUESTION - Mains practice (250 marks)

"Procedural compliance does not eliminate conflict of interest." In light of the principle of probity in public life, examine whether a minister benefiting from a scheme under their own administrative control constitutes a breach of public trust, and suggest structural safeguards to prevent such situations.

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

3. Red Fort blast: NIA files supplementary chargesheet, names absconding Al-Qaeda offshoot member

WHY IN NEWS

The NIA filed a supplementary chargesheet naming three more accused — including absconding paediatrician Muzafar Ahmad, a founding member of Al-Qaeda offshoot AGuH Interim — in the car bomb blast near Red Fort, Delhi, that killed 11 people on 10 November last year, taking the total chargesheeted to 13.

Paper / GS: GS-3 (Internal Security) - **Static link:** NIA investigations into VBIED attacks, Al-Qaeda offshoots operating in J&K, and TATP-based IED manufacture are directly relevant to GS-3 internal security; the NIA's role as a statutory body also features in GS-2 polity.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Incident	VBIED blast near Red Fort, Delhi — 11 killed (10 November)
Investigating agency	National Investigation Agency (NIA)
Total chargesheeted	13 persons (after supplementary chargesheet)
New accused	Zameer Ahmad Ahanger, Tufail Ahmad Bhat, Muzafar Ahmad (alias Faraz / Zafar)
Absconding accused	Muzafar Ahmad — paediatrician (MBBS, MD); elder brother of co-accused Dr Adeel Ahmed Rather
Terror outfit	AGuH Interim — NIA-designated Al-Qaeda offshoot
Formation event	Secret meeting at Eidgah, Srinagar, June 2022
Explosive type	TATP (triacetone triperoxide)-based IEDs, manufactured at a clandestine facility
Prime accused	Dr Umar Un Nabi — drove the car; died in the blast

Critical lens

- **For:** The NIA's ability to chargesheet absconding suspects — including a medically-qualified Al-Qaeda affiliate — demonstrates the agency's evolving counter-terror capacity and the reach of the UAPA framework in dismantling cross-border conspiracies.
- **Against:** A key conspirator and founding member of AGuH Interim remains absconding, signalling gaps in inter-agency coordination and border surveillance despite J&K's high-security profile.
- **Way forward:** Strengthen real-time intelligence sharing between NIA, IB, and J&K Police; fast-track UAPA designation of AGuH Interim as a banned organisation; and enhance technical surveillance of precursor chemicals used in TATP fabrication.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) was established under which legislation?

(a) The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (b) **The National Investigation Agency Act, 2008** (c) The Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (d) The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958

1. TATP-based IEDs pose a distinctive counter-terror challenge primarily because:

(a) They require military-grade detonators available only through state channels (b) They are detectable only through specialised gamma-ray scanners (c) They rely exclusively on chemicals imported from conflict zones (d) **They can be synthesised from commercially available household chemicals, making supply-chain interdiction difficult**

QUESTION - Mains practice (10 marks)

"Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) deployed by domestic Al-Qaeda affiliates represent an evolving asymmetric threat to India's internal security. Analyse the investigative and prosecutorial challenges such attacks pose, and suggest measures to strengthen India's counter-terror architecture."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

4. US partially lifts Anthropic AI export ban, allows Claude Mythos 5 access for select trusted firms

WHY IN NEWS

Two weeks after a sweeping June 12 export control order forced Anthropic to disable its most advanced AI models globally, the US government partially reversed course, restoring Claude Mythos 5 access to 100+ vetted US organisations — underscoring Washington's tightening grip on frontier AI as a national security asset.

Paper / GS: GS-3 (Emerging Technologies & Internal Security) - **Static link:** US export controls on frontier AI models connect to GS-3 cybersecurity and emerging technologies, and to GS-2 IR themes of technology decoupling and US–China strategic competition.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Export control order date	12 June 2026
Models originally suspended	Claude Mythos 5 and Fable 5 (Anthropic)
Organisations restored access	100+ US entities, including many Fortune 500 companies
Stated rationale	Prevent misuse by military intelligence users in China, Russia, or "countries of concern"
Mythos 5 description	Anthropic's "strongest cybersecurity model"
Scope of restoration	Organisations that operate and defend critical infrastructure
OpenAI parallel	GPT-5.6 full public launch delayed at US government request; access limited to vetted partners

Critical lens

- **For:** Restricting frontier AI models from adversarial actors addresses real dual-use risks — a cybersecurity-optimised model in hostile state hands could accelerate offensive capabilities against democratic infrastructure.
- **Against:** Blanket export controls harm allied nations, legitimate global research, and fragment the AI ecosystem; selective access for Fortune 500 firms risks entrenching corporate gatekeeping over public-interest deployment.
- **Way forward:** Adopt tiered access frameworks with multilateral verification (akin to Wassenaar Arrangement for dual-use goods); India should actively engage in shaping AI governance norms at forums like G20 and GPAI to avoid being locked out of frontier models.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. With reference to US export controls on frontier AI models, consider the following statements:

(1) The June 2026 order initially suspended access to Anthropic's models for all users worldwide. (2) Claude Mythos 5 was specifically described as Anthropic's strongest cybersecurity model. (3) OpenAI voluntarily delayed GPT-5.6 without any government directive. Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 3 only (b) 2 and 3 only **(c) 1 and 2 only** (d) 1, 2 and 3

1. The Wassenaar Arrangement, sometimes seen in the news, is related to:

(a) Nuclear non-proliferation treaties between P5 nations **(b) Export controls on conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies** (c) Multilateral sanctions on state-sponsored cyber actors (d) Trade regulations governing satellite and space technology transfers

QUESTION - Mains practice (250 marks)

"Frontier AI models are increasingly being treated as strategic national assets subject to export controls. Examine the implications of this trend for global AI governance and India's access to critical emerging technologies."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

5. Australia Doubles Social-Media Penalty; Serbia's Vucic to Resign; Karachi Rangers Compound Stormed

WHY IN NEWS

Australia has doubled the maximum fine for platforms that allow under-16s to register, to A\$99 million. Serbia's president Aleksandar Vucic announced resignation and early elections after 18 months of student-led anti-corruption protests. Terrorists rammed and stormed a Pakistan Rangers compound in Karachi, killing at least four paramilitary personnel; Europe's record heat is simultaneously straining nuclear plants, railways, and industry.

Paper / GS: GS-2 (Digital Governance, Civil Society, IR) - **Static link:** Child protection in digital space; civil society and democratic transitions; cross-border terrorism (GS-3 overlap); climate-infrastructure stress (GS-3 Environment)

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Australia — previous maximum penalty	A\$49.5 million
Australia — revised maximum penalty	A\$99 million (~US\$68 million)
Age threshold (Australia ban)	Under 16 years
Serbia — proximate trigger	Awning collapse, Novi Sad railway station; 16 people killed (2024)
Serbia — protest character	~18 months; student-led, anti-corruption
Karachi attack site	Sindh Paramilitary Rangers compound, Gulistan-e-Jauhar
Karachi — casualties	At least 4 paramilitary personnel killed
Attack modus operandi	Vehicle rammed main gate; explosion at onset; no group claimed responsibility
Europe heat stress	Reactor cooling water too warm to discharge into rivers; track expansion cancels trains; European Environment Agency flags insufficient long-term adaptation funding

Critical lens

- **For (Australia ban):** Doubling the penalty creates meaningful deterrence for revenue-rich tech giants; age-gating aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and addresses documented links between early social-media exposure and adolescent mental-health harm.
- **Against:** Enforcement depends on age-verification mechanisms that introduce fresh privacy risks; technically adept minors can circumvent bans via VPNs or borrowed credentials, rendering steep fines symbolic without complementary design mandates.
- **Way forward:** Multilateral harmonisation of age-verification standards; couple financial penalties with default-safe platform-design requirements and school-level digital-literacy programmes.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. Australia recently revised the maximum penalty for social-media platforms that allow under-16s to register. What is the revised ceiling fine?

(a) A\$25 million (b) A\$49.5 million (c) **A\$99 million** (d) A\$150 million

1. The collapse of a railway-station awning in Novi Sad in 2024, which killed 16 people, became the catalyst for prolonged anti-corruption protests demanding the resignation of the president of which country?

(a) Hungary (b) Romania (c) **Serbia** (d) Bulgaria

QUESTION - Mains practice (15 marks)

"Governments worldwide are imposing minimum-age restrictions on social-media platforms. Critically examine the regulatory challenges and ethical trade-offs involved in enforcing such restrictions, with reference to child rights and data-privacy concerns."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

6. MNS Chief Slams Nagpur Police Commissioner for Publicly Praising RSS, Demands IPS Officer Remain Apolitical

WHY IN NEWS

MNS chief Raj Thackeray publicly criticised newly appointed Nagpur Police Commissioner Vishwas Nangare Patil for delivering a speech praising the RSS, asserting that a serving IPS officer's loyalty must be exclusively with the police force and not with any ideological or political organisation.

Paper / GS: GS-4 (Ethics/Impartiality) - **Static link:** A serving IPS officer publicly aligning with a political-ideological organisation raises GS-4 questions on impartiality, conflict of interest, and All India Services (Conduct) Rules; it also connects to GS-2 police reforms and constitutional obligations of public servants.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Officer in question	Vishwas Nangare Patil, IPS — newly appointed Nagpur Police Commissioner
Criticising party	MNS chief Raj Thackeray, via social media post
Alleged conduct	Public speech praising the RSS at a convention characterised as non-political
Thackeray's demand	Officer should either keep personal affiliations private or resign and join the RSS/BJP
Relevant rules	All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968 — prohibit AIS officers from public association with political parties or ideological bodies
Constitutional basis	Article 312 (All India Services); Rule of Law and impartiality as foundational civil service values

Critical lens

- **For:** A police commissioner's public endorsement of any ideological organisation — regardless of its nature — erodes public trust, creates perception of partisan policing, and directly violates the spirit of AIS Conduct Rules that demand political neutrality.
- **Against:** Critics argue that attending or speaking at civic/cultural gatherings is not per se political, and penalising officers for personal beliefs risks chilling legitimate expression; the line between cultural affiliation and political alignment is contested.
- **Way forward:** The DOPT and state governments must issue clearer guidelines defining what constitutes "political activity" under AIS Conduct Rules; internal departmental inquiry mechanisms should be activated for prima facie violations rather than leaving accountability to political rhetoric.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. Under the All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968, which of the following is PROHIBITED for an IPS officer?

(a) Voting in a general election (b) **Publicly expressing support for a political party or ideological organisation** (c) Writing academic articles on policing in peer-reviewed journals (d) Attending a state government function in official capacity

1. Which of the following best describes the constitutional provision governing the All India Services?

(a) Article 309 — Recruitment and conditions of service of persons serving the Union (b) Article 311 — Dismissal, removal or reduction in rank of persons employed in civil capacities (c) **Article 312 — Creation of All India Services common to the Union and States** (d) Article 315 — Public Service Commissions for the Union and States

QUESTION - Mains practice (250 marks)

"Impartiality and non-partisanship are non-negotiable attributes of a civil servant. In light of the All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968, examine whether a serving IPS officer's public expression of ideological affiliation constitutes a breach of constitutional ethics, and suggest institutional safeguards to prevent such conflicts of interest."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

7. HDFC Bank ex-chairman says board 'ignored' his queries on scope and legal basis of post-resignation review

WHY IN NEWS

Atanu Chakraborty, who resigned as HDFC Bank's non-executive chairman on 18 March citing practices "not in congruence with my personal values and ethics," publicly stated that the board never responded to his repeated requests for clarity on the scope and legal basis of the independent review initiated post his exit. The two law firms appointed by the board — Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, PC and Wadia Ghandy & Co — subsequently gave the bank a 'clean chit.'

Paper / GS: GS-3 (Banking governance) + GS-4 (Institutional ethics) - **Static link:** Corporate governance failures in a systemically important private bank — including board accountability, a senior functionary's ethics-based resignation, and independence of internal reviews — connect to GS-3 Indian economy (banking regulation) and GS-4 ethics in institutional conduct.

Key facts a UPSC answer must carry

Item	Value / Detail
Former chairman	Atanu Chakraborty
Resignation date	18 March (immediate effect)
Stated reason	Practices "not in congruence with my personal values and ethics"
Board response	Appointed two external law firms six days after resignation
Law firms	Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, PC and Wadia Ghandy & Co
Review duration	Three months; covered thousands of documents + interviews of independent directors
Outcome	'Clean chit' — contemporaneous evidence inconsistent with Chakraborty's statement
Chakraborty's participation	Did not interact with the appointed law firms
Chakraborty's concern	Board treated the matter as a "compliance exercise" rather than a genuine reflection

Critical lens

- **For (accountability):** An ethics-based resignation by a senior fiduciary at India's largest private-sector bank warrants a genuinely independent probe — one in which the concerned party is heard — to uphold depositor confidence and RBI's governance expectations for systemically important banks.
- **Against (process):** The board followed standard corporate-law procedure by commissioning external legal firms; a clean chit based on thousands of documents and independent-director interviews carries evidentiary weight, and the resigned chairman's non-participation limits the counterclaim.

- **Way forward:** SEBI and RBI should codify whistleblower-equivalent protections for non-executive directors, mandate that internal reviews afford the complainant a formal hearing, and require disclosure of the review's terms of reference to stock exchanges.

QUESTION - Prelims practice

1. With reference to corporate governance in Indian private banks, which of the following bodies issues guidelines on the appointment and removal of non-executive chairmen?
(a) Ministry of Corporate Affairs (b) Securities and Exchange Board of India (c) **Reserve Bank of India** (d) Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India
1. Which of the following best describes a 'systemically important bank' (D-SIB) in India?
(a) A bank that operates in more than ten states (b) A bank whose failure would have minimal impact on financial stability (c) **A bank whose distress or failure could cause significant disruption to the financial system** (d) A bank that holds more than 25% of government securities

QUESTION - Mains practice (15 marks)

"An ethics-driven resignation by a board-level fiduciary exposes the tension between procedural compliance and substantive accountability in corporate governance. Critically examine this tension in the context of India's banking sector, suggesting structural reforms to strengthen board independence."

NOTE - PYQ links

No close PYQ in archive — broader topic last asked recently.

Annexure - Static + current linkage table

| Static topic | Today's anchor | UPSC paper |

|---|---|---|

| Science & Technology/Space | Gaganyaan uncrewed test flight may slip to Q3 2027: ISRO chi | GS-3 |

| Ethics/Conflict of Interest | Minister who received Rs 1 crore subsidy under own ministry' | GS-4 |

| Internal Security/Terrorism | Red Fort blast: NIA files supplementary chargesheet, names a | GS-3 |

| Science & Technology/Artificial Intelligence | US partially lifts Anthropic AI export ban, allows Claude My | GS-3 |

| International Relations/Digital Governance | Australia raises penalty for social media platforms failing | GS-2 |

| Ethics/Neutrality of Civil Servants | MNS chief slams Nagpur Police Commissioner for publicly prai | GS-4 |

| Economy/Banking Sector Governance | HDFC Bank ex-chairman says board 'ignored' his queries on sc | GS-3 |

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