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No. 5, AKS Nagar, Near Gandhi Park, Coimbatore - 641 001

GS Paper II – Polity

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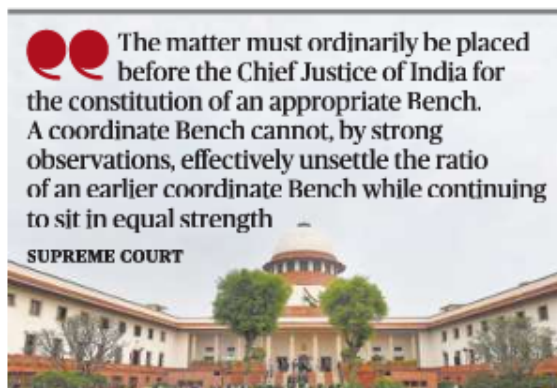
## SC refers UAPA bail curbs question to larger Bench

The court says the reference is needed to ensure 'parity, consistency and institutional fidelity' in applying binding precedents; it also grants six months of interim bail to two Delhi riots accused

**Aaratrika Bhaumik**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Supreme Court on Friday granted six months of interim bail to two accused in the 2020 Delhi riots case while referring to a larger Bench the question of whether prolonged incarceration and delay in trial can override the stringent bail curbs under anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).

The court said the reference was necessary to ensure "parity, consistency and institutional fidelity" in the application of binding precedents by coordinate Benches. The reference was made by a Bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and P.B. Varale during the hearing of bail



pleas filed by riots accused Abdul Khalid Saifi and Tasleem Ahmad, challenging a September 2, 2025 order of the Delhi High Court denying them bail.

"Where a coordinate Bench entertains reservations about the reasoning of an earlier coordinate Bench, particularly on the application of a binding

three-judge Bench decision, the proper course is well settled. The matter must ordinarily be placed before the Chief Justice of India for the constitution of an appropriate Bench. A coordinate Bench cannot, by strong observations, effectively unsettle the ratio of an earlier coordinate Bench while continuing to

sit in equal strength," the Bench observed.

The reference came in response to the Delhi police's contention that a May 18 judgment delivered by a coordinate Bench – which had expressed "serious reservations" about the Justice Kumar-headed Bench's January ruling refusing bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the Delhi riots "larger conspiracy" case – had proceeded on a "blanket generalisation" of Supreme Court precedents.

Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing for the Delhi police, told the Bench that the question of bail must turn on the facts and circumstances of each case.

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## GS Paper II – Polity

# Birth rate, infant deaths fall in India, finds survey

**Ramya Kannan**  
CHENNAI

The bulletin from the recent Sample Registration Survey (SRS) 2024 provides the sharpest picture yet of India in the throes of demographic transition.

As per the latest estimate, while the country's birth rate has fallen between 2014 and 2024 and the death rate is down marginally, good gains have been reported with the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), amid substantial progress made over the last decade. However, vast gaps persist between rural and urban areas and progress across the country is uneven, making the call for equitable growth and appropriate deployment of resources particularly sound.



### Changing trends

India's birth rate, death rate and infant mortality rate have fallen over the last decade, though vast rural-urban gaps and uneven progress persist



Indicator	2014	2024	Difference
Birth rate	21	18.3*	Down by 2.7 points
Death rate	6.7	6.4**	Down by 0.3 points
Infant mortality rate	39	24 <sup>†</sup>	Down by 15 points

■ Kerala has a single-digit IMR of 8, the lowest in the country

\*Births per population of 1,000

\*\*Deaths per population of 1,000

# Infant deaths per 1,000 live births

Source: SRS Bulletin 2024

The country's birth rate – live births per 1,000 population – fell from 21 in 2014 to 18.3 in 2024, while the death rate (deaths per 1,000 people) is down from 6.7 to 6.4. The IMR, recorded as the number of deaths per thousand live births, has dropped from 39 to 24. While the overall

performance is creditable, indicating several measures being launched by the Centre and States to improve healthcare outcomes, the disappointment is in the relatively worse performance in rural areas. In fact, they drag the country's averages down substantially.

For instance, while the rural birth rate fell from 22.7 to 20.2 in the given decade, the simultaneous decadal performance in the urban areas was better – the birth rate fell from 17.4 to 14.7. In the rural areas, the death rate fell from 7.3 to 6.8 between 2014 and 2024, and in the urban segment, it was at 5.5 in 2014 and went up marginally to 5.6 – still a better performance than in rural areas.

The gains of urban areas in this bulletin are probably the most appreciable result in the field of IMR, dropping from 26 to 17 by nine points. While it has dropped 16 points from 43 to 27 in the rural areas during the same period, it is still further away from the national target to reduce the IMR to single digits.

The differences are also stark, with some States way ahead of the rest. Kerala and Tamil Nadu lead the way with better statistics in all sectors. Kerala has the lowest natural growth rate (NGR) of 3.9, the rate at which a population increases or decreases due to births and deaths, excluding migration, expressed as a percentage. It is also a crucial indicator of demographic transition.

Kerala also has a single-digit IMR (8), the lowest in the country. Tamil Nadu brings up the second position among larger States, with an NGR of 4.8 and an IMR of 11. Among the smaller States, Goa (4.2 NGR and 11 IMR) and among Union Territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands (4.1 NGR and 9 IMR) show the way.



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## GS Paper III – Economy

### Alarm bells

#### The Index of Eight Core Industries underscores economic distress

India's economy seems to have begun the financial year 2026-27 on a decidedly tepid note, going by the data released so far for April 2026. The latest of these, the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI), shows that growth in these key sectors stood at a modest 1.7% in April. It would be easy to attribute this to the ongoing crisis in West Asia, and that is certainly a factor, but the slowdown started well before the war broke out. Growth in the ICI averaged just 2.8% in the entire financial year 2025-26, down from the 4.5% average for 2024-25 and significantly slower than the growth in the previous three years, each of which was above 7%. This suggests a more systemic domestic issue rather than an externally driven transient phase. Of the eight sectors, only three – steel, cement, and electricity – grew at all in April 2026. The rest contracted. The crude oil and natural gas sectors have, in fact, contracted for 16 and 22 consecutive months, respectively. This should be of particular concern. Energy output cannot be ramped up overnight, but falling output for such long stretches should have raised some policy alarm bells even before the current energy crisis began. Separate data from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas show that domestic consumption of natural gas fell in April. Had India installed long-term gas storage facilities, as it should have, this fall in consumption would have provided a window to fill those reserves. Since such reserves do not exist, LNG imports in April were cut by 30%, likely in a bid to slow the forex outflow. The volume of both oil imports and domestic production fell in April.

This lower fuel consumption could be a result of government curbs on commercial usage. Nevertheless, the implications for growth are severe and are likely to play out over the next few months. Fertilizer output contracted in April after a brief return to growth in March. The only mitigating factor for lower fertilizer output is that demand is likely to be lower this year as farmers grapple with a below-normal monsoon and above-normal El Niño. This is, however, far from comforting. The resultant dip in output and rural demand is a grave prospect for the Indian economy. Steel and cement are the only sectors to have grown consistently, indicating sustained construction activity likely propelled by government expenditure. It remains to be seen how long this push can last amid the fiscal strain brought on by the current crisis. It is also not just the core sector data that is concerning. PMI data is close to four-year lows and GST collections from domestic sales are growing only slightly faster than inflation. The alarm bells are now difficult to ignore.

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## GS Paper III – Environment

# Centre asks States, U.T.s to step up Ebola surveillance

**Health Secretary says growing international trade and travel necessitated adequate preparedness; States directed to reinforce infection prevention and control practices in healthcare facilities**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Following the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, the Centre has directed all States and Union Territories to strengthen surveillance, hospital preparedness, and rapid response systems.

Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava, in a letter to States and Union Territories, said countries bordering the affected regions, including South Sudan, were at high risk of transmission, though the present risk to countries outside the affected African region remained low.

The Health Secretary, however, cautioned that growing international trade and travel necessitated "adequate preparedness and response capacities at all levels of the health system".

The States have been asked to intensify surveillance under the Integrated



Red Cross workers gather to disinfect a hospital before handling the body of a person who died of Ebola in DRC. REUTERS

Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) for unusual clusters of fever and symptoms suggestive of Ebola disease, particularly among individuals with recent travel history to affected regions.

The advisory listed symptoms such as fever, weakness, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain, rash, and red eyes as warning signs requiring close monitoring.

The Ministry has also circulated a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) covering disease surveillance, sample collection,

storage and referral mechanisms for suspected Ebola cases.

### Isolation facilities

The States have been instructed to identify designated isolation facilities and dedicated ambulances with infection prevention and control measures in place. The advisory also called for ensuring adequate availability of trained healthcare personnel, personal protective equipment (PPE), logistics support, laboratory facilities, and critical care infrastructure.

The Health Secretary

said the Indian Council of Medical Research's National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, remained fully equipped to test samples from suspected Ebola cases identified either at Points of Entry or within communities.

The communication stressed the need for establishing coordination mechanisms between NIV Pune, airport, and port health authorities; State Surveillance Units; and District Surveillance Units for timely referral and testing of samples.

### Infection prevention

The States have further been asked to reinforce infection prevention and control practices in healthcare facilities, including triage systems, isolation protocols, hand hygiene, environmental cleaning, and biomedical waste management.

The States and districts have been asked to keep multidisciplinary Rapid Response Teams in readiness for disease surveillance, outbreak control, and clinical management of suspected cases.



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## GS Paper III – Economy

### Demand driving growth, but economic outlook somewhat clouded: RBI report

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

While India's domestic demand remains a key driver of growth, the near-term outlook for the economy is "somewhat clouded" due to supply side pressures brought on by the West Asia crisis, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a new report.

"Domestic demand continues to be the key driver of growth," the central bank said in its latest State of the Economy report as a part of its monthly bulletin for April 2026.

"Although headline inflation remains firmly within the tolerance band, the pass through to domestic prices needs to be monitored," it added.

"The financial conditions, crude oil prices and capital flows continue to pose challenges to the external sector outlook."

The central bank noted that while e-way bills continued to hit double-digit growth, and petrol and diesel consumption continued to grow, overall petroleum consumption fell in April due to a sharp fall in the consumption of naphtha, LPG and other petroleum products.

Similarly, higher temperatures led to a sharp increase in electricity demand. "Demand remained broad-based and supported by rural markets," the RBI noted. "Automobile sales in rural areas conti-

**'Pace of export orders displayed weakness, hit by the war and on subdued inbound tourism'**

nued to grow at double digit in April, although showing some sequential moderation."

It added that due to the increase in prices of aviation turbine fuel, the air passenger traffic declined further in April.

Labour market conditions witnessed some moderation in the January-March 2026 quarter, with the labour force participation rate and worker population ratio declining alongside a rise in the unemployment rate.

On the supply side, the RBI said that sowing in the summer season has been "progressing well", surpassing the full season normal acreage and is higher than the previous year. It added that the acreage under all major crops is higher, except for rice.

On the services front, RBI said that the sector remained resilient in April.

However, it added that while the Services PMI accelerated, supported by a boost in transportation activity enabled by domestic suppliers and new business orders, the pace of export orders "displayed weakness", hit by the war in West Asia and subdued inbound tourism.