Topic 1: Creamy Layer Determination in OBC Reservation (GS Paper II – Social Justice & Polity)

Context & Background

The Supreme Court reaffirmed its March 2026 judgment holding that for Other Backward Classes (OBC) candidates whose parents work outside government, **creamy layer status cannot be decided on parental salary alone; the category and rank of the parent's post must also be taken into account**.

The Supreme Court rejected the Union Government's plea seeking a two-year deferral to settle post equivalences.

Key Legal Evolution & Criteria

Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992): A nine-judge Constitution Bench introduced the creamy layer concept as a means-test mechanism to exclude advanced sections of backward classes from reservation benefits.

1993 Office Memorandum (OM): Explicitly kept agricultural income and government salaries out of the income/wealth test. Parents in government service were evaluated based on the **category of their post** (Group A, Group B, constitutional post-holders, armed forces officers above Lieutenant Colonel, etc.), rather than gross income.

The Post-2004 Distortion: A Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) clarification on October 14, 2004 applied the pure income test to Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) and private sector employees where equivalence with government posts had not been formally notified. This was applied strictly from the Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2015, resulting in

approximately 100 successful candidates being denied OBC reservation benefits.

Income Ceilings: The income limit was originally set at ₹1 lakh per annum in 1993, and subsequently revised in 2004, 2008, 2013, and fixed at **₹8 lakh per annum in 2017**.

Key Highlights of the Supreme Court Ruling

Principle of Hostile Discrimination: The Court held that judging non-government salaried parents exclusively by pay while judging government parents by rank constitutes hostile discrimination, unfairly penalising children of lower-level staff in private/PSU sectors whose gross pay crosses the monetary threshold but whose social status does not match Group A or B officers.

Prospective Scope & Non-Reopening: Under **Article 141**, the legal ratio serves as binding precedent across all courts. However, completed selections and settled seniority will **not be reopened** to avoid administrative disruptions. The CSE-2025 batch's service allocation (which had been put on hold) will adhere to this ruling.

Executive Prerogative: The Court underscored that framing creamy layer policy and establishing post equivalences remains squarely within the domain of the executive and legislature.

Topic 2: Electoral Roll Revision & ECI's ASDD Remedial Window (GS Paper II – Elections & RPA)

Context

The Election Commission of India (ECI) reopened a remedial window for electors marked as **"Absent, Shifted, Dead, or Duplicate" (ASDD)** during the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** in six States and the UT of Delhi. This allows **4.51 crore dropped electors** to resubmit their original enumeration forms rather than applying from scratch as new voters.

Salient Features & Mechanism

Special Intensive Revision (SIR): A house-to-house enumeration exercise requiring every existing registered voter to submit an enumeration form within a one-month phase. Missing the deadline automatically resulted in deletion and an ASDD designation.

Removal of the Form 6 Barrier: Previously, deleted electors were forced to apply through **Form 6** (the statutory form meant exclusively for first-time / new voter registrations).

Restoration of Identity: Under the revised directive, electors submitting original enumeration forms to the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) or Assistant ERO (AERO) retain their original **Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers**.

State-Wise Deletions: The seven jurisdictions covered include Maharashtra (2.06 crore deletions), Telangana (73.39 lakh), Delhi (47.56 lakh), Andhra Pradesh (44.89 lakh), Jharkhand (43.61 lakh), Haryana (33.83 lakh), and Nagaland (1.57 lakh).

Outreach: ASDD lists are re-displayed at polling stations, panchayat bhawans, urban local body offices, and Block Development Officer (BDO)

offices, supported by joint field visits by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and political party Booth Level Agents (BLAs).

Topic 3: Youth Demographic and the Politics of Spontaneity (GS Paper II – Political Dynamics)

Context & Key Dimensions

Gen Z (voters aged 18–29) will constitute **at least one in four eligible voters in India by 2029**.

Politics of Spontaneity: Defined as unscripted, fast-paced, non-hierarchical, horizontal political communication—akin to an interactive digital group chat rather than an orchestrated public address or monologue.

Core Drivers:

- **Disintermediation via Digital Media:** Short-form video platforms and social networks allow direct communication without traditional institutional gatekeepers.
- **Cross-Cutting Youth Issues:** Focus on competitive examination integrity (e.g., NEET paper leaks), employment creation, and freedom of expression, transcending traditional caste and religious divides.
- **Demographic Asymmetry:** Contrast between leadership aging (e.g., Prime Minister aged 76 with only one Union Cabinet minister under 40) and an increasingly vocal youth base.

Challenges & Limitations: Meme-driven and spontaneous mobilisations face volatility and lack permanent grassroots organizational structures necessary to convert online outrage into electoral victories.

Topic 4: Liberalisation of Direct Overseas Listing Norms (GS Paper III – Economy & Capital Markets)

Context

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) notified amendments to the **Companies (Listing of Equity Instruments in Permissible Jurisdictions) Rules, 2026**.

Major Regulatory Changes

Shift from Equity Shares to Equity Instruments: Indian companies listing directly on permissible foreign bourses can now issue broad **equity instruments**—including **convertible debentures** and **preference shares**—aligning MCA rules with International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) regulations.

IFSC Entities Eligible: Unlisted public companies incorporated in International Financial Services Centres (e.g., GIFT City, Gandhinagar) are permitted to access overseas bourses under IFSCA regulatory compliance.

Cooling-Off Period Slashed: Companies that have cleared overdue debts with banks and financial institutions now face a waiting period of **over six months** before listing abroad, substantially reduced from the earlier **two-year** requirement.

Negative Net Worth Safeguard: Companies whose accumulated losses have fully wiped out their net worth can list abroad only if a minimum of **75% of the net offer is allotted to Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs)**.

Institutional Role of IFSCA: Established in **2020** under the **IFSCA Act, 2019**, headquartered at GIFT City, it functions as a unified statutory regulator replacing multiple domestic sectoral regulators (RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, PFRDA) within IFSC jurisdictions.

Topic 5: Agnipath Scheme Revision & Institutional Dynamics (GS Paper III – Defence & Internal Security)

Context

The Union Cabinet approved a **second, two-year engagement** for the 75% of Agniveers who are not absorbed into regular military service at the end of their initial four-year tenure.

Original Core Assumptions of Agnipath

Youthful Force Profile: Rapid rotation to decrease the average age across the armed forces.

Fiscal Discipline: Capping permanent retention at 25% to rein in ballooning military pension liabilities.

Civilian Absorption: Transition of the remaining 75% into the civilian workforce aided by severance corpus (Seva Nidhi), technical skills, and earmarked recruitment quotas.

Strategic & Institutional Concerns

Dilution of Fiscal and Age Calculus: Extending pre-absorption service to six years recalibrates both the intended age structure and expected pension savings.

Creation of a Two-Tier Cadre: Agniveers serving the second engagement will rank below batchmates selected directly after four years; their progression, pay parity, and course attendance remain stalled compared to those already absorbed.

The Technical Cadre Vulnerability: Technical specialist streams—such as the Navy's **artificer cadre** (who traditionally underwent a four-year rigorous naval apprenticeship)—cannot be easily replaced by short-tenure entrants

holding generic civilian diplomas, given the operational complexity of modern naval radars, avionics, and marine engineering systems.

Pension Computation Uncertainty: In Ex Navy Direct Entry Artificers Association v Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court noted that pre-enrolment naval apprenticeships counted towards qualifying pension service. The question of whether pre-absorption Agnipath service qualifies for regular pension benefits remains unresolved.

Topic 6: India-China Border Management & Asymmetric Capabilities (GS Paper III – Border Security & Defence Tech)

Context

Disclosures by the outgoing Chief of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) highlighted ongoing ground face-offs in Arunachal Pradesh and cautioned against relying on conventional military parity to counter China's technological advancements.

Key Strategic Realities

Nature of the LAC: The 4,057-km Line of Actual Control remains undemarcated, leading to overlapping perceptions and frequent transgressions (over 600 recorded between 2010 and 2013 alone).

Doctrinal Shift Post-2014 & Doklam (2017): India transitioned from routine tactical disengagements to **"proactive diplomacy combined with strong ground posturing"**.

The Technological Challenge:

Modern border management is transformed by weaponised drones and drone swarms.

Firing expensive air-defence missiles to counter cheap, mass-produced drones creates an unsustainable cost-exchange ratio.

Asymmetric Capability Over Numeric Parity:

Matching adversaries platform-for-platform is less effective than deploying targeted, cost-effective counters (e.g., ground-based lasers to blind satellites, or sea-skimming anti-ship missiles rendering expensive carrier platforms "wasted assets").

India's Countermeasures: Development of indigenous high-power laser **Directed-Energy Weapons (DEWs)** by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) capable of neutralizing drone swarms.

Institutional Anchor – ITBP: Raised on **24 October 1962** under the Ministry of Home Affairs; mandated to guard the LAC from **Karakoram Pass (Ladakh) to Jachep La (Arunachal Pradesh)**.

Topic 7: Air Pollution in Delhi-NCR: Beyond Emergency Responses (GS Paper III – Environment & Ecology)

Context

Delhi initiated its Winter Action Plan and enforced Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) curbs (e.g., "No PUCC, No Fuel"), yet the Air Quality Index (AQI) plunged to "Very Poor" on the very first day.

Shortcomings of the Existing Paradigm

GRAP as Palliative Care: GRAP serves as an emergency episodic mitigation mechanism rather than a structural, source-targeted preventive framework.

Meteorological Drivers: The seasonal pollution peak was delayed by nearly two weeks due to a **Super El Niño** and late precipitation from **Cyclone Arnab**, combined with delayed harvest cycles in Punjab and Haryana.

Satellite Detection Gaps:

NASA's **MODIS sensors** aboard low-Earth polar-orbiting **Terra and Aqua** satellites pass over northwest India at fixed morning and midday hours.

Farmers have shifted over 90% of stubble burning to late afternoons (post-3:00 PM), bypassing MODIS overpass times.

Geostationary instruments like South Korea's **KOMPSAT-2A (Advanced Meteorological Imager)** provide continuous real-time monitoring and capture significantly higher fire counts.

The Proposed Airshed Framework (AIRSHEDEM)

The Airshed Concept: An airshed represents the complete geographical region whose common meteorological and emission patterns determine air quality across administrative borders.

AIRSHEDEM Framework: Formulated by the **National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS)** for the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

Source Coverage Efficiency: An administrative Delhi-NCT plan covers only 50% to 70% of pollution sources affecting the capital, whereas an airshed-based boundary captures nearly 100% of contributors while remaining administratively viable.

Institutional Mechanisms: NCAP (launched in 2019) targets non-attainment cities, while the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** operates under statutory authority (2021 Act) to enforce inter-state coordination in the NCR.

UPSC-Style Practice MCQs

Q1. With reference to the determination of the 'Creamy Layer' among Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India, consider the following statements:

The concept of the creamy layer was introduced by a Constitution Bench in the Indra Sawhney judgment.

Under the foundational 1993 Office Memorandum, agricultural income and government salaries were excluded from the income/wealth test.

The Supreme Court has mandated that all concluded selections and settled seniority lists in central services since 2016 must be reopened to correct non-governmental post equivalences.

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

Q2. Under the Companies (Listing of Equity Instruments in Permissible Jurisdictions) Rules, amended by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, consider the following:

Companies are now permitted to issue convertible debentures and preference shares for direct listing on foreign exchanges.

A company that has repaid overdue loans to banks must wait for a minimum cooling-off period of two years before listing abroad.

Companies whose accumulated losses have fully eroded their net worth must allocate at least 75% of the net offer to Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Q3. Regarding the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA), consider the following statements:

It is a statutory body established under the International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019.

It acts as a unified regulator replacing RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA for financial entities operating within IFSCs.

Its statutory headquarters is located in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q4. With reference to the electoral administration in India, what does the acronym "ASDD" stand for in the context of electoral roll preparation by the Election Commission of India?

(a) Absent, Shifted, Dead or Duplicate
(b) Adjudicated, Suspended, Disenfranchised or Disputed
(c) Annulled, Settled, Documented or Delimited
(d) Absent, Stateless, Displaced or Dual-citizen

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and voter registration procedures:

Form 6 under the Registration of Electors Rules is the statutory form used for first-time voter enrolment.

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is the statutory authority responsible for preparing and correcting electoral rolls within a constituency.

Electors restored from the ASDD list are mandated to surrender their prior EPIC numbers and register under newly generated EPIC credentials.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q6. With reference to the Agnipath Scheme and its recent modifications, consider the following statements:

Under the original scheme, 25% of Agniveers were to be absorbed into regular service after four years, while 75% were discharged.

The revised policy enables the 75% unabsorbed Agniveers to serve a second engagement of two additional years.

In Ex Navy Direct Entry Artificers Association v Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court conclusively held that the Agnipath scheme violates Article 14 of the Constitution.

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

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP):

It was raised in the aftermath of the 1962 India-China war.
It functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence.
Its operational deployment spans the Line of Actual Control from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q8. In military and strategic terminology, how is a Directed-Energy Weapon (DEW) best described?

(a) A kinetic warhead delivered via hypersonic glide vehicles.
(b) A weapon system using concentrated electromagnetic energy or lasers to blind, degrade, or destroy targets such as drone swarms.
(c) A sonar-guided torpedo designed to detonate acoustic sea mines.
(d) An electronic warfare suite dedicated exclusively to jamming ground-wave radio communication.

Q9. With reference to air pollution monitoring in the National Capital Region (NCR), why have low-Earth orbiting satellites (such as Terra and Aqua using MODIS) often underreported paddy stubble fires?

(a) MODIS sensors cannot detect thermal anomalies caused by agricultural biomass.

(b) The satellite sensors are obscured by stratospheric ozone layers during October and November.

(c) The satellites have fixed midday overpass times, whereas farm burning has predominantly shifted to late afternoon hours.

(d) The National Green Tribunal has restricted the sharing of foreign Earth observation data.

Q10. Consider the following statements regarding the "AIRSHEDEM" framework:

It is a regional air quality management model conceptualised by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) for the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

It argues that a purely administrative boundary approach (such as Delhi NCT) fails to capture up to 30% to 50% of pollution sources affecting the city.

It mandates that the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain from Punjab to West Bengal must be designated under a single unified municipal administrative council.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q11. Which statutory body is responsible for coordinating and enforcing the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across the National Capital Region and adjoining states?

(a) Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)
(b) National Green Tribunal (NGT)
(c) Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)
(d) Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA)

Q12. Under the current income ceiling criterion for the non-governmental creamy layer test in OBC reservations (in place since 2017), what is the gross annual income threshold?

(a) ₹4.5 lakh per annum
(b) ₹6.0 lakh per annum
(c) ₹8.0 lakh per annum
(d) ₹12.0 lakh per annum

Q13. With reference to recent voter trends in Indian democracy, consider the following statements:

By the 2029 general election, eligible voters aged 18 to 29 are estimated to represent at least one in every four electors.

The voting age in India was lowered from 21 years to 18 years under the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q14. In the context of national defence modernization, which of the following best exemplifies an "asymmetric capability" deployed by an adversary?

(a) Expanding the absolute number of conventional infantry rifle regiments.
(b) Constructing identical supercarrier vessels to match an opponent's naval battle group hull for hull.
(c) Deploying relatively low-cost sea-skimming supersonic missiles and ground-based counter-space lasers to neutralize expensive capital assets.
(d) Standardizing small arms calibres across allied armed forces.

Q15. With reference to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, consider the following statements:

The LAC is a mutually delineated, demarcated, and ratified international boundary agreed upon in 1962.

The total length of the Line of Actual Control is approximately 4,057 kilometres.

Following face-offs such as Doklam (2017), India adopted an operational approach combining proactive diplomacy with firm ground posturing.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

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Answer Key & Explanations

Question	Correct Option
Q1	(a)
Q2	(c)
Q3	(b)
Q4	(a)
Q5	(a)
Q6	(a)
Q7	(b)
Q8	(b)
Q9	(c)
Q10	(b)
Q11	(c)
Q12	(c)
Q13	(c)
Q14	(c)

RAHUL SIR'S IAS ACADEMY

Q15 **(b)**

Explanations

Q1: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: The concept of creamy layer was introduced by a 9-judge Constitution Bench in Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992).

Statement 2 is correct: The September 1993 Office Memorandum excluded agricultural income and government salaries from the income/wealth test; government employees were evaluated by rank/post category.

Statement 3 is incorrect: The Supreme Court held that concluded selections and settled seniority will **not** be reopened to avoid administrative dislocation.

Q2: (c)

Statement 1 is correct: Amendments to the Companies Rules allow Indian firms to issue equity instruments, including convertible debentures and preference shares, rather than equity shares alone.

Statement 2 is incorrect: The mandatory waiting period for companies that cleared overdue debts was reduced from two years to **more than six months**.

Statement 3 is correct: Firms whose losses have fully eroded their net worth must allocate at least 75% of the net offer to Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs).

Q3: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: IFSCA was established under the International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019.
Statement 2 is correct: IFSCA serves as a unified regulator for financial products, services, and institutions within IFSCs, replacing sector-specific domestic regulators.
Statement 3 is incorrect: Its headquarters is located at **GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat**, not Mumbai.

Q4: (a)

During the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), electors who missed the enumeration deadline or could not be verified were catalogued as **"Absent, Shifted, Dead or Duplicate" (ASDD)**.

Q5: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: Form 6 is the statutory form under election rules meant for new/first-time elector registration.
Statement 2 is correct: The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) or Assistant ERO (AERO) has statutory responsibility to prepare and maintain the constituency's electoral rolls.
Statement 3 is incorrect: Electors restored from the ASDD roll do not get new numbers; they are reassigned their **original EPIC numbers**.

Q6: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: Under the original scheme design, regular absorption was capped at 25%, with 75% exiting after 4 years.
Statement 2 is correct: The Union Cabinet approved a second, two-year engagement for the 75% who are not retained, bringing relief to approximately 18,000 personnel nearing discharge.

Statement 3 is incorrect: Ex Navy Direct Entry Artificers Association v Union of India (2018) dealt with whether pre-enrolment apprenticeships counted towards pension eligibility, not the constitutionality of the Agnipath scheme (which was introduced years later).

Q7: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: The ITBP was raised on 24 October 1962 during the Sino-Indian border conflict.

Statement 2 is incorrect: ITBP is a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, not the Ministry of Defence.

Statement 3 is correct: Its operational mandate is guarding the border from Karakoram Pass (Ladakh) to Jachep La (Arunachal Pradesh).

Q8: (b)

Directed-Energy Weapons (DEWs), such as high-power lasers developed by DRDO, fire focused electromagnetic or laser beams to disable or neutralize targets including drones and drone swarms.

Q9: (c)

NASA's polar-orbiting MODIS sensors on Terra and Aqua pass over northwest India at fixed early times, while farm stubble burning in Punjab has overwhelmingly (over 90% in 2024–2025) shifted to late afternoons after 3:00 PM, evading detection.

Q10: (b)

Statement 1 is correct: AIRSHEDEM is an indigenous framework proposed by NIAS for the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

Statement 2 is correct: A Delhi-only boundary addresses only 50% to 70% of contributing emission sources, whereas an airshed-based model reaches near 100%.

Statement 3 is incorrect: The airshed framework proposes a scientifically grounded and administratively viable boundary that is neither restricted to Delhi-NCT nor inflated to the entire broader region.

Q11: (c)

The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) is the statutory body established under the 2021 Act responsible for enforcing GRAP across NCR and adjoining states.

Q12: (c)

The income ceiling was set at ₹1 lakh in 1993, revised progressively in 2004, 2008, 2013, and has stood at **₹8 lakh per annum since 2017**.

Q13: (c)

Statement 1 is correct: Projections indicate that in 2029, at least one in four eligible voters in India will be aged 18 to 29.

Statement 2 is correct: The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 years under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Q14: (c)

Asymmetric capability relies on cost-effective, innovative mechanisms (such as sea-skimming anti-ship missiles or ground lasers targeting satellites) to blunt or neutralize an adversary's significantly more expensive conventional capital platforms without matching their numbers directly.

Q15: (b)

Statement 1 is incorrect: The LAC is not an agreed international boundary; it remains undemarcated and subject to differing perceptions.

Statement 2 is correct: The LAC stretches approximately 4,057 km.

Statement 3 is correct: Following standoffs in 2014 and Doklam in 2017, India shifted toward proactive diplomacy backed by firm ground posturing