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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
INDRAPRASTHA ESTATE, RING ROAD, NEW DELHI

ANNUAL ESSAY PRIZE COMPETITION-2026

Entries are invited for the Annual Essay Prize Competition-2026.
The value of the prize for the competition will be as under:

First Prize	Rs. 10,000/-
Second Prize	Rs. 7,000/-
Third Prize	Rs. 5,000/-

Any competitor who has got a prize on one occasion will not, on any subsequent occasion, be eligible for an equivalent or lower prize. The joint authorship of essays shall not be allowed and any essay with joint authorship shall not be considered for competition.

The topics for the competition are:

Annual Essay Prize Competition 2026

- (i) Climate Change, EL Nino and India's Monsoon
- (ii) Easing the urban mobility conundrum in Indian cities: the way out
- (iii) Growing use of AI and receding creativity

The essay writers are expected to cover the following aspects in their respective entries:

Focus Area to be covered

TOPIC 1. Climate Change, EL Nino and India's Monsoon

Introduction

The Indian monsoon is the lifeline of the Indian Subcontinent. The southwest monsoon brings about **80% of India's annual rainfall between June and September**. Its importance for the country goes far beyond agriculture. It is deeply linked to the development of settlements and civilizations, water and energy security, infrastructure and economic development, ecosystems, and biodiversity. However, the monsoon is no longer operating under the same climatic conditions. Climate change is altering its background environment and increasing the uncertainty of rainfall patterns.

In the recent past, rainfall is increasingly becoming uneven in time and space. Long dry periods may be followed by intense rainfall. A city may face severe

flooding after a few hours of intense rain, while another region may experience a prolonged dry spell. Himalayan states face additional risks from landslides, cloudbursts, glacier and snow changes and flash floods. El Niño is another important influence. Historically, El Niño years have often been associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall over India, although the relationship is not the same in every year or region.

The challenge is therefore not simply less rainfall. It is **greater uncertainty, variability and intensity**. Understanding these changes is essential for India's food security, economy, cities and disaster resilience.

A. Understanding the Changing Dynamics of the Indian Monsoon

India's monsoon is shaped by land-sea temperature differences of in-around of Indian subcontinent, ocean conditions of Indian, Pacific and South Atlantic ocean, different mountains and atmospheric circulation. Along with that **El Niño and La Niña also** influence this system, but they do not determine rainfall alone. The Indian Ocean Dipole and other regional factors also matter. For all these reasons, there is a significant regional differences in rainfall in India. The Western Ghats receive heavy monsoon rain, while parts of northwest India are much drier. The eastern Himalayas are strongly influenced by the summer monsoon, whereas the western Himalayas receive important winter precipitation from western disturbances. Climate change is also making this system more complex. IPCC projections indicate that South Asian summer monsoon precipitation is likely to increase during this century. At the same time, **ENSO-related rainfall variability is projected to increase later in the century**. Understanding these regional differences is essential for future planning.

B. Changing Monsoons, Growing Disasters and Socio-Economic Vulnerability

The changes in monsoon behaviour is creating a multi-dimensional disaster risk in India. For example, a long dry spell can reduce crop yields, groundwater recharge and rural incomes. Simultaneously, a very heavy rainfall over a short period can cause floods, landslides and urban waterlogging. Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi and other cities have repeatedly experienced severe waterlogging after intense rainfall. IPCC assessments indicate that heavy and intense precipitation is likely to become more frequent in South Asia. This creates risks for agriculture, water supply, transport, housing and public infrastructure. Climate change also affects biodiversity. Changes in temperature and rainfall can disturb forests, wetlands, rivers and wildlife habitats. Agriculture is particularly vulnerable because a large part of Indian farming remains dependent on rainfall. Future climate risks can therefore affect food prices, employment and livelihoods. The challenge is not simply more or less rainfall. It

is increasingly greater variability, extreme events and uncertainty about when and where rainfall will occur.

C. Adopting Nature-Based Solutions, Building Climate-Resilient Economy, Cities, Communities, Ecosystems and Infrastructure

For a sustainable future, India needs a new approach to manage the growing risks from climate change and monsoon variability. We have to move from reactive disaster management towards climate-resilient development. In this context, nature-based solutions can play an important role. Restoring **wetlands, forests, rivers, lakes and watersheds** across the country can reduce flooding, improve groundwater recharge and protect biodiversity. Cities need better drainage, rainwater harvesting, permeable surfaces, urban forests and protection of natural drainage channels. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, dams and housing must be designed for future rainfall extremes, cloudbursts, floods and landslides. Similarly, Himalayan regions need special attention to flash floods, landslides and changing snow and glacier conditions. Agriculture should adopt climate-resilient crops, efficient irrigation and better weather advisories. Communities should be involved in local disaster preparedness and early-warning systems. At the economic level, climate-resilient investments, insurance and climate finance can reduce losses. Resilience must become a part of development planning, not only disaster response. Overall, adaptation, mitigation, technology, and community participation must work together.

D. The Way Forward

India's future climate strategy must move from responding to disasters to **anticipating and preventing risks**. Policymakers need better and more localised climate information. Large-scale data from satellites, weather radars, automatic weather stations, sensors and digital platforms can provide real-time information on rainfall, temperature, floods and droughts. Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and advanced climate models can improve the prediction of monsoon variability, cloudbursts and extreme weather events. Early-warning systems should convert these predictions into timely and simple alerts for governments, farmers, cities and communities. Climate projections must become an integral part of **urban planning, infrastructure design, water management, agriculture, disaster preparedness and public investment decisions**. India also needs stronger coordination among scientific institutions, governments and local authorities. Mitigation must remain equally important through renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean mobility, green buildings and low-carbon technologies. The way forward is to build a **data-driven, technology-enabled and climate-resilient India**, where scientific knowledge is converted into timely policy and action.

The essay writers may cover one or more areas. Some suggested themes and sub-themes are outlined below:

1. Changing Dynamics of the Indian Monsoon

- Projected Rainfall Patterns Under Climate Change
- Regional Variations Across Diverse Geographic Terrains
- Influence of Land Sea Temperature Differences
- Impact of Pacific and Indian Ocean Conditions

2. Oceanic Influences and Atmospheric Circulation Patterns

- Historic Linkages Between El Nino and Monsoons
- Role of La Nina and Dipole Factors
- Future Projections for ENSO Related Variability
- Shifting Dynamics of Complex Atmospheric Systems

3. Vulnerability of Agriculture and Food Security

- Consequences of Prolonged Dry Weather Spells
- Risks Facing Purely Rainfed Agricultural Systems
- Fluctuations in Rural Incomes and Employment
- Promoting Climate Resilient Crops and Irrigation

4. Urban Fragility and Waterlogging Crisis Solutions

- Managing Flash Flooding After Intense Downpours
- Protecting Natural Channels and Urban Drainage
- Expanding Permeable Surfaces and Rainwater Harvesting
- Integrating Climate Resilience Into Urban Planning

5. Ecological Fragility across the Himalayan States

- Rising Risks of Landslides and Cloudbursts
- Melting Glaciers and Changing Snow Patterns
- Precipitation Impacts Across the Western Himalayas
- Mitigating Disasters Driven by Flash Floods

6. Nature Based Solutions for Sustainable Adaptation

- Ecological Restoration of Wetlands and Forests
- Protecting River Watersheds and Natural Lakes
- Enhancing Natural Systems for Groundwater Recharge
- Preserving Disturbed Habitats and Local Biodiversity

7. Modern Infrastructure and Climate Resilient Economy

- Engineering Roads and Bridges for Extremes
- Developing Resilient Dams and Housing Systems
- Securing Water Supply and Transport Systems
- Mobilizing Dedicated Climate Finance and Insurance

8. Technology Driven Early Warning and Forecasting

- Predicting Extreme Events Using Artificial Intelligence
- Deploying Satellite Monitoring and Weather Radars
- Distributing Real Time Alerts to Communities
- Strengthening Scientific Research and Interagency Coordination

TOPIC 2. Easing the urban mobility conundrum in Indian cities: the way out

As a concept the urban mobility refers to the efficient, safe, and sustainable movement of people and goods within a city or urban area. Increasing urbanization is a concomitant factor of economic growth. People move to or near the growth centres. The state is expected to provide the citizens various services so that they can live a dignified life and focus on increasing productivity in the economic activities they are engaged in.

While there are services where technology or financial constraints majorly influence the scope and nature of provision, there are many complex sectors which require a lot of convergence in planning and synergy in implementation. Urban mobility is one such sector. The urban mobility has to face the challenge of rapid urbanization, expanding road networks and increasing motorization

Majority of the bigger cities in India face the mobility challenge- narrow and damaged roads, traffic congestion, lack of adequate public transport infrastructure, even lack of proper planning, etc. all have huge impact on productivity.

The problem becomes acute when Core and nearby areas become costlier and people move out to peripheries. Urban agglomerations expand the city limits. Commuting and Residency away from the place of work adds to the cost of travel, especially for the poor. The problem is compounded due to same right of way to the motorized modes and cycling and non-motorized mode. Urban road space in India accounts for only 5-7% of the total land area, compared to 20-25% in many Western cities. As a result the accident rates have gone up. *Road Accidents in India 2024* mentions that there has been continual increase in road accidents. In 2024 alone, 177175 persons lost their lives in 487707 road accidents

Another dimension to urban mobility is increased pollution due to increased use of motorized modes of transport. India is the world's 4th largest automobile market, with over 300 million registered vehicles, growing at ~8% annually.

Increase in number of private vehicles is leading to the problem of traffic congestion. TomTom Traffic Index reports that in Bengaluru, commuters spend an average of 10 hours a week in traffic jams. Four cities- Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru are estimated to lose rupees 1.47 lakh crore annually in productivity, wasted fuel and health implications. Air pollution due to exhaust fumes adds to the toxic gases and small particles in the air, harming health and leading to impact on climate change due to large carbon emissions. CPCB reports that the transport sector contributes to 20-30% of PM2.5 pollution in Indian cities.

The government has made attempts to tackle it through introduction of electric buses and integrated multi-modal transit systems in major cities, but they do not match the scale of the requirements. Urban transport planning faces a lot of challenges.

The Urban Transport Policy envisions to allow the cities to evolve into an urban form that is best suited for the unique geography of their locations and is best placed to support the main social and economic activities that take place in the city. It further wants to make our cities livable and enable them to become the 'engines of economic growth'.

A NITI Aayog report on shared mobility emphasizes use of public transport and non-motorized transport. It is in the backdrop of the fact that the transport sector in India accounts for 18% of commercial energy consumption and is highly dependent on oil imports. The situation becomes worse in the events like oil crisis, imposed due to wars in major oil producing regions.

Moreover, land requirements for increased number of private vehicles are putting pressure on the land pool in urban areas. The Report says that the shared mobility could make a transportation future that is more affordable, reliable, clean and efficient. The challenge is to identify the factors that support or challenge the adoption of shared mobility in India

Major cities in India have made attempts to find solutions. The need is to standardize and optimize the use of urban transport services. The contestants of this competition may look at the problems, issues and their solutions. The following aspects relating to urban mobility may be covered:

Policies and Programmes

- Urban transport policies
- Integrated multi-modal transit systems
- Urban mobility programmes of other countries
- Subsidy to energy efficient vehicles
- PPP in transport infrastructure
- Research and development in the sector
- Transit-oriented development,

- Sustainable mobility
- Institutional coordination
- Metropolitan transport governance
- Mobility as a Service

Planning

- Incorporating urban transportation as an important parameter at the urban planning stage rather than being a consequential requirement
- Encouraging integrated land use and transport planning in all cities so that travel distances are minimized and access to livelihoods, education, and other social needs, especially for the marginal segments of the urban population is improved
- Ensuring last-mile connectivity
- Technology driven solutions
- Financing

Modes of transport

- Encouraging use of non-motorized transport
- National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) and the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme
- Greater use of electric vehicles and
- Shared mobility

Environment and climate change

- Impact on environment
- Air pollution
- Consequences of climate change
- Intelligent Transport Systems

Road safety

- Multi-pronged approach to achieve safer roads, safer road users
- Adoption of modern vehicles safety standards
- Engineering improvements
- Awareness campaigns
- Cooperation of all stakeholders including every citizen, enforcement agencies and governments at all levels

Urban transport system should follow the triple principle of sustainability, sensitivity to the local requirements and smart in operation. The need of the hour is to give major focus on green mobility.

The above is an indicative list only. The participants may choose any related area.

TOPIC-3. Growing use of AI and Receding Creativity

INTRODUCTION

Intellectual piracy is becoming a critical concern in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The magnitude of its menace is not only receding human creativity but also preparing a generation devoid of critical thinking and 'looking-glass-self'. However, AI generated information provides an instant input to anything, anywhere in short time. The influential inertia of AI is so powerful that it does not let people harness much of their imagination and creativity.

AI is fast becoming overpowering. It is making us lose creativity, as our dependence on AI is increasing day by day for simple things. Till the time, AI is used only for assistance, it is fine but if it becomes dominant, the whole existence of humanity is in peril. It becomes more of content consumption rather than quest for its creation. It also unfolds how authentic content creation recedes and its consumption precedes.

The growing use of AI raises serious concern about exorbitant access to knowledge, efficiency and innovation. However, its increasing dependence raises questions on originality, imagination and designed thinking. The instrumental question is whether excessive reliance on AI would gradually simmer down human engagement in the creative process. The topic invites participants to critically evaluate the relationship between the growing use of AI and creativity. One has to explore the opportunities and risks associated with AI assisted creation and reflect on how technology can be used as a tool to augment innovative knowledge rather than replacing human imagination, authenticity and intellectual efforts. The question is, how society can utilize the power of AI while preserving the human approach to imagination, authenticity, originality and intellectual efforts. This is the broad concern around which the essay has to articulate its meaning and deserve importance.

FOCUSED AREA

1. AI and intellectual creativity
2. Schooling, shoaling and AI based learning
3. Original and AI generated contents
4. Content piracy and legal measures
5. Reliability of AI contents and data points
6. AI and blurry human imagination
7. Probable size and scope of human engagement through dependence on AI
8. Ethics, values and intellectual property
9. Combining AI and individual cultural capital

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ESSAY WRITING

1. The suggested word limit should be in between 5000 and 5500 words.
2. The essay should have introduction, rational arguments and coherent conclusion.
3. Participants should examine both sides of the issue, the potential of AI to enhance creativity and AI possibility that excessive dependence on AI may weaken authentic and independent thinking.
4. The essay should differentiate between using AI as a creative tool and allowing AI to replace one's individual thinking and creative effort.
5. Participants are encouraged to use suitable examples from literature, art, music, research and everyday life in way that highbrow and lowbrow ideas are compared and contested.
6. Contents should be supported by evidence-based arguments.
7. The essay must demonstrate original thinking, critical analysis and clarity of thoughts.
8. If participants are using AI in writing, they must disclose the nature and extent of such assistance.
9. The participants are expected to maintain originality of ideas, depth of analysis, balance of arguments, relevant examples, structured write up and clarity of language.
10. The essay must demonstrate the linguistic competency of participants. Usage of words, idioms and phrases are to be carefully and relevantly done.
11. Writing out of context would invite negative marking and also, rejection from the evaluation.

General Guidelines for the Essay

The essay should be in English or Hindi language. The length of an essay should be approximately around 5000 words. An essay exceeding 5500 word limit shall not be accepted. The contestant must indicate the total number of words of the essay, failing which it shall not be accepted. All essays must be typed in double space on only one side of the paper and those entries which do not adhere to the stipulation shall deemed to be rejected. It should be submitted in triplicate under a “nom-de-plume” or “alias”. The full name and address of the competitor should be mentioned on a separate sheet and enclosed in a

sealed envelope bearing the nom-de- plume on the outer cover with the following inscription.

Annual Essay Prize Competition – 2026, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi

All essays should be sent to the Director General, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Indraprastha Estate, Ring Road, New Delhi-110002, by Speed Post and soft copy through email: trgiipa@yahoo.co.in, so as to reach him not later than **October 10, 2026**. The envelope should be marked “Annual Essay Prize Competition – 2026”. The entries received after the due date may not be entertained.

The essay will be adjudged by a body of judges and the award of the judges shall be final. The institute reserves the right not to make any award if none of the essays submitted meets the necessary standard. Any essay which receives an award shall become the joint intellectual property of the author and IIPA.

N.B. Intending competitors who wish to seek any further clarification may write to the Director General, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Indraprastha Estate, Ring Road, New Delhi-110002