

News Juice Monthly

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Current Affairs

For Prelims and Mains

JUSTICE IS SERVED

#JAIHIND

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1. Caste Census Approved by Cabinet

Why Now?



Caste enumeration to be part of upcoming population census, announces Union govt

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) has approved caste enumeration in the forthcoming population census, said Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the inclusion of caste enumeration in the upcoming Census.

Background: A Long-Standing Demand

Since 1951, Indian Censuses have recorded data on Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and religious groups — but not on other caste categories.

The last comprehensive caste data was collected in the 1931 Census. Though caste data was gathered in 1941, it was never published.

After independence, successive governments avoided caste-based enumeration, despite repeated demands, especially from parties representing Other Backward Classes (OBCs), such as the RJD, SP, and DMK.

From Census to SECC: A Shift in Approach

The 2011 Census Debate

In 2010, Law Minister Veerappa Moily proposed caste data collection for the 2011 Census. However, the Census Commissioner rejected the idea, citing logistical issues.

Home Minister P. Chidambaram explained in Parliament that Census enumerators were not trained to verify caste claims and that such data collection posed practical difficulties.

SECC 2011

Under political pressure, the UPA government launched a separate Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in 2011.

- Conducted after the regular Census
- Cost: Nearly ₹4,900 crore
- Caste data was never officially released
- The raw data was handed to the Ministry of Social Justice, which appointed an expert group for classification, but the report remains unpublished

Recent Political Momentum

Leading up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, most political parties, including Congress and even the BJP in Bihar, supported a caste census.

Congress, under Rahul Gandhi, highlighted the underrepresentation of OBCs in government leadership.

While Congress gained significantly in the polls (99 seats, up from 52), the BJP lost its single-party majority and suffered setbacks in key states.

Several states have started their own caste-based surveys, calling them "surveys" to avoid legal and constitutional issues, since Census is a central subject.

Past Resistance by Centre

In April 2021, the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) recommended the inclusion of OBC data in the Census.

However, in July 2021, the central government told Parliament that it had decided not to collect caste-wise data beyond SCs and STs.

Several petitions demanding a caste census are currently pending in the Supreme Court.

What's Next?

The 2021 Census, delayed due to COVID-19, is yet to be scheduled.

The Census has two parts:

- House Listing and Housing Census
- Population Enumeration

The questionnaire was already finalised, and the Registrar General's tenure was extended till August 2026, indicating preparation is underway.

Implications

- Census data will influence delimitation of constituencies, scheduled post-2026
- Women's reservation in legislatures also depends on fresh Census and delimitation
- A caste census may strengthen demands for:
 - Expanded reservations
 - Sub-categorisation within OBCs

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. Water sharing dispute between Punjab and Haryana: what happened, why

Why Now?



The Punjab Government ordered increased security at the Nangal dam, amid an escalating water-sharing dispute with Haryana.

The day before, the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) had ordered the release of 8,500 cusecs of water for Haryana—a decision vehemently opposed by the Punjab government.

The issue

The fresh confrontation arose when Haryana sought 8,500 cusecs from the Bhakra dam during a meeting on April 23. Haryana is currently receiving 4,000 cusecs daily but has now requested 8,500 cusecs. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said he subsequently made a phone call to Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, citing Haryana's drinking water needs. Mann, however, said that Punjab, already facing a water crisis, did not have a drop to spare.

In a marathon meeting chaired by BBMB chairman Manoj Tripathi, of the five member states, the BJP-ruled Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi voted in favor of releasing water to Haryana. Punjab stood isolated, as Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh chose not to vote for any side.

While the Bhakra Nangal dams are often referred to as one dam, they are two separate dams — Bhakra dam is in Himachal, while Nangal is in Punjab. However, they are complementary parts of the same river project.

The bone of contention between Punjab and Haryana

Punjab claims that at the start of every accounting year, the BBMB determines the water share of each partner state. For the current year, it allocated 5.512 Million Acre-foot (MAF) to Punjab, 2.987 MAF to Haryana, and 3.318 MAF to Rajasthan. Against this allocation, Haryana has already withdrawn 3.110 MAF—104% of its share.

Haryana argues it needs the water for drinking purposes, especially in Hisar, Sirsa, and Fatehabad districts, which are facing acute shortages. Punjab has countered that water levels in the Pong and Ranjit Sagar dams are below average due to scant snowfall during the snow season. Mann noted that the Pong dam's water level is 31.87 feet lower than last year, while Ranjit Sagar dam is 16.90 feet lower. In Bhakra dam it is 12 feet lower than last year. He added that since AAP assumed power, the state has prioritised canal water for irrigation to reduce pressure on groundwater reserves.

Expert opinion

AS Dulet, a noted water expert from Punjab, said supplying water for drinking purposes to Haryana for now is not likely to pose a problem.

"Such issues are common. Adjustments can be made. If Haryana's population needs drinking water, it can be provided, especially since Punjab does not need extra water at this time. We will require more water around May 24–25, when farmers begin paddy transplantation from June 1. The only condition is that each state's quota must remain unchanged. If extra water is given to Haryana now, Punjab should be compensated later. Flows can be adjusted. But it would be wrong to give additional water from one state's share to another. The fixed share is sacrosanct," Dulet said.

What next?

Punjab is now exploring legal options to contest the additional water release. An official said, "This situation, where water is being forcibly given, is unprecedented. We are working on finding a solution. The state government is firm—it will not allow even a drop to go across."

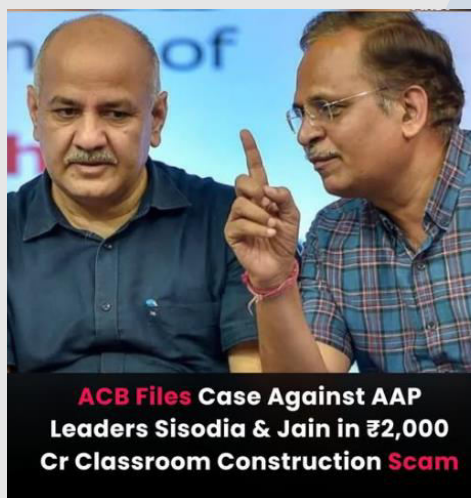
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. What is the Rs 2,000 cr 'classroom scam' in which top AAP leaders have been booked?

Why Now?

Former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and former Public Works Department Minister Satyendar Jain have been booked by the Anti-Corruption Branch of the Delhi government in connection with a Rs 2,000 crore "classroom scam".



The scam

Between 2015 and 2019, the Delhi government, under the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), undertook a large-scale infrastructure project to improve school facilities.

Among other things, this included the construction of 12,748 classrooms across various schools. The PWD was assigned the task of executing the work. However, multiple complaints filed by political leaders, including members of the BJP, claimed the project was riddled with corruption, resulting in a loss of nearly Rs 2,000 crore to the public exchequer.

A total of 12,748 semi-permanent structures were supposed to be built at a cost of Rs 1,200 per sqft. But during construction, the cost shot up to around Rs 2,292 per sqft.

Key allegations

It was alleged that the semi-permanent structures — which have a lifespan of less than 30 years — were constructed at a cost equivalent to RCC (reinforced cement concrete) structures, which last 75 years. This contradicts the stated objective of cost-saving and sustainability.

The core allegation is that the cost per classroom was fraudulently inflated during the construction process. As per the complaints and verification, the construction cost per room came out to approximately Rs 24.86 lakh, exponentially higher than the roughly Rs 5 lakh it takes for similar constructions in Delhi.

Reports from the Chief Technical Examiner (CTE) of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) revealed serious violations of government financial rules, CPWD manuals, and tendering processes. These include awarding contracts to firms allegedly associated with the ruling party without proper bidding, escalating project costs by 17% to 90% without inviting fresh tenders, engaging private consultants without following due procedure and duplication of work, execution of work without demand from schools, and mismanagement of timelines and funds.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

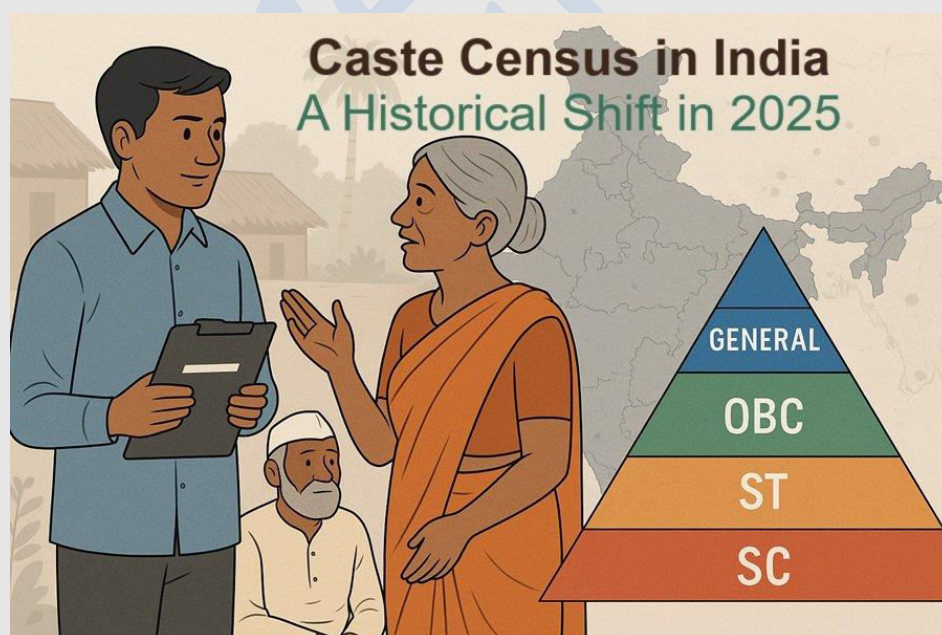
Source: The Hindu

4. Caste Census: Legal basis, preparation timeline, and challenges ahead

India Caste Enumeration

The next decennial Census of India is set to break new ground by including a detailed enumeration of caste—something that hasn't been attempted since the British-era census of 1931. With the Centre indicating its willingness to capture OBC data, this marks a significant policy shift with far-reaching social and political implications.

But it also raises several legal, procedural, and logistical questions: What legal provisions govern the inclusion of caste in the Census? Which list of OBCs will be used? How much preparation is needed before enumeration can begin? And what challenges—both during the data collection and after the publication of results—could lie ahead?



Legal requirements for caste enumeration

To include caste enumeration in the next Census, the government does not need to amend the Census Act. The Registrar General and Census Commissioner (RG&CC) is already empowered under existing law to design the census proforma — the standardised forms used during the house listing and population enumeration phases to collect information from households and individuals, respectively.

While finalising the questions for the second phase (population enumeration), the RG&CC can simply add a question that goes beyond the existing categories of General, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) to ask whether a person belongs to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), and if so, which specific class within that category. This addition would have to be included in the final proforma, which is notified through a formal gazette notification.

Which list will be used for OBC enumeration?

The most crucial question the government must now address — and one that will ultimately be a political call, much like the decision to enumerate caste itself — is which list to use while enumerating OBCs.

In the last Census, for SCs and STs, the proforma relied on the official lists notified under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. These lists — currently comprising 1,170 castes under SC and 890 communities under ST — are periodically updated through amendments passed by Parliament.

However, for OBCs, there is no single, consolidated list. A central list maintained by the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) is used for reservations in central government jobs and educational institutions. Separately, each state maintains its own OBC list, which often differs from the central list — and in many cases, includes many more communities.

The key decision now before the government is whether to rely solely on the central list, which currently includes 2,650 communities, or to merge it with the various state lists, thereby significantly expanding the scope of enumeration. Either way, the choice is likely to be politically sensitive.

Preparation timeline

So, how much time will the RG&CC's office need to prepare for the enumeration, given the addition of caste data?

The process is expected to mirror the preparation undertaken ahead of the 2020 Census, which was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Taken together, and by conservative estimates, the government will need at least six months of preparation before it can begin enumeration. The first step is for the Central government to issue a notification in the Official Gazette declaring its intent to conduct a Census. This must then be followed by similar notifications from all state governments — a process that could take up to two months. Once these are in

place, the proforma for the house listing and population enumeration phases will have to be formally notified.

The original 2021 Census was set to be the first to use digital enumeration, with enumerators collecting data via an electronic form rather than pen and paper. With the inclusion of caste data, the software will now need to be updated to include a new field for OBCs, along with a drop-down menu of sub-categories.

Enumerators will also need to be retrained, especially since many of those identified for the postponed 2020 exercise may have moved on or retired. Training alone typically takes up to two months. In addition, the RG&CC's office will need to conduct a pilot exercise — like the one conducted prior to 2020 — to ensure there are no glitches in the updated software.

Challenges ahead

The challenges now facing the government are both political and procedural.

On the ground, enumerators may face difficulties with new technology, but these can be addressed through proper training and rigorous piloting. However, a far bigger concern is the environment in which this Census will be conducted.

What we often overlook is that this Census is happening in an era of rampant misinformation, which can spread within minutes—especially through platforms like WhatsApp. There's little an enumerator can do in the face of a viral message falsely claiming they are fraudsters collecting personal data. This could seriously undermine the enumeration process. The only way to counter it is through robust public outreach and awareness campaigns.

On the political front, the first decision is which list to use for OBC enumeration. But the far more consequential challenge will emerge after the data is published. Until now, reservation policies have relied on projections and estimates from the last caste census in 1931. The upcoming Census will offer the first accurate estimate of India's caste composition in nearly a century. This data is expected to prompt demands for recalibrating reservation quotas in proportion to the actual OBC population—and could even fuel calls to lift the 51% cap on total reservations, set by the Supreme Court.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

5. Pakistani National Claims to Have Voted in India: What Are the Rules?

Why Now?

PAK NATIONAL FORCED TO LEAVE CLAIMS TO HAVE VOTED IN INDIAN ELECTIONS



After the recent Pahalgam terror attack, hundreds of Pakistani nationals living in India have been asked to leave. Some of them, however, claimed they had valid Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and even voter IDs.

One such individual, Osama, said in a video that he moved from Rawalpindi to Uri in Jammu & Kashmir in 2008, and had voted in India despite being a Pakistani citizen. An FIR was filed on April

30 after Baramulla's District Election Officer took note of the case.

Who Can Vote in India?

According to Article 326 of the Constitution, only Indian citizens aged 18 or above can vote in Lok Sabha and state/UT elections.

The Representation of the People Act, 1950 also states that a person is disqualified from registering as a voter if they:

- Are not an Indian citizen
- Are of unsound mind, as declared by a court
- Are disqualified due to election-related offenses

How Does One Apply for a Voter ID?

To register as a voter, applicants fill out Form 6 of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and provide:

- Self-attested age proof
- Address proof
- A signed declaration that they are an Indian citizen

Note: No official citizenship document is required, but false declaration is punishable by up to 1 year in jail, a fine, or both, under Section 31 of the RP Act.

Once submitted, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) checks the application. Booth Level Officers (BLOs) help by collecting claims and objections.

How Is Citizenship Verified?

According to the ECI manual:

- The ERO must ensure the applicant is a citizen of India.
- If no objections are raised, this check often doesn't happen.
- If objections are made, the applicant must prove their citizenship.
- The ERO must conduct an independent inquiry and examine all evidence.
- In migration cases, the ERO checks with the district the applicant moved from.
- For married women lacking documents, marriage certificates or community verification can be used.

Have Such Cases Happened Before?

Yes, the ECI has found cases of non-citizens being issued voter IDs in the past. When proven, such names are removed from the rolls, and action is taken.

What Is Being Done to Prevent This?

The ECI is working to link Aadhaar with Voter IDs to prevent non-citizens from voting. However, since non-citizens can sometimes obtain Aadhaar, this measure alone may not be enough.

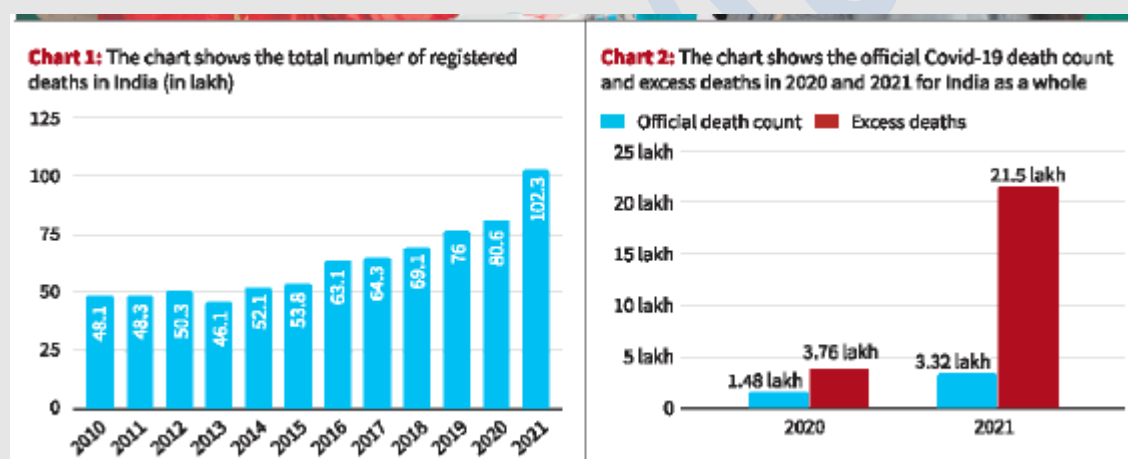
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

6. Govt. data confirms massive undercount of pandemic deaths

Underreporting of Covid Deaths

In 2021, an analysis of excess deaths — the increase in the death tally over expected numbers based on previous years (2015-2019) — shows that the number was nearly six times more than the reported COVID-19 death toll. This was the year when the delta variant of the SARS-COV-2 virus wreaked havoc across the country.



Registered Deaths

Chart 1 shows the total number of registered deaths in India over the years. Over 1 crore registered deaths were recorded in 2021, a 27% increase compared to the previous year. The bump in 2021 is obvious on account of the pandemic.

To estimate the multiple, we calculated excess deaths in 2021 using a three-step method. First, we analysed registered deaths in each State from 2015 to 2019 and extrapolated this trend to estimate expected deaths for 2020 and 2021. This gives a reasonable estimate of the expected number of deaths in these years, if not for an extraordinary event. Next, we compared these expected figures with the actual registered deaths revealed by the newly released data. The difference between the two gave the number of excess deaths.

Most of these excess deaths are likely attributable to COVID-19 — the only major disruptive event during those years. Moreover, pandemic-related restrictions had significantly reduced deaths from other causes, such as road accidents, making it unlikely that non-COVID-19 factors were behind the surge.

Death Counts

Chart 2 shows India's official COVID-19-related death count published by State governments in 2020 and 2021 compared to the excess deaths calculated based on the recently released reports. While the official COVID-19 death count in 2020 was about 1.5 lakh, about 3.8 lakh 'excess deaths' were recorded the same year. In 2021, while about 3.3 lakh COVID-19-related deaths were officially recorded, there were 21.5 lakh 'excess deaths' (6.5 times more).

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

7. What has been decided in the Pollachi sexual assault case?

Introduction



All 9 accused found guilty & sentenced to life, a look at infamous 2019 Pollachi sexual assault case

Six years ago, nine men from Pollachi, Coimbatore, were arrested for blackmailing, sexually assaulting, and videographing young girls and women between 2016 and 2018. The nine men, who have remained behind bars since their arrest, have been prosecuted for multiple offences, including criminal conspiracy, sexual harassment, rape, gang rape, and repeated rape of the same woman. On May 13, the Mahila Court in Coimbatore found all nine accused guilty and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The court also ordered the Tamil Nadu government to pay a compensation of ₹85 lakh to eight survivors of sexual assault.

What is the case?

On February 24, 2019, a college girl lodged a complaint with the Pollachi East police, alleging sexual abuse by four men in a moving car near Pollachi 12 days ago. The 19-year-old was the first survivor to speak up against the group of youngsters, who had allegedly been luring women and sexually assaulting them since 2016. The perpetrators filmed these sexual acts, which they used for further exploitation.

The police took up the investigation and examined the mobile phones and laptops of the accused. The gadgets contained numerous video clips of different women — from students to married women — who had been sexually assaulted at various locations by the accused.

Sensing the gravity of the case, on March 12, 2019, the State government directed the Crime Branch-CID to launch an investigation. Eventually, amid outrage, the then Edappadi K. Palaniswami government transferred the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and the agency took over the probe on April 25, 2019.

What did the agency find?

The central agency arraigned N. Sabarirajan also known as Rishwanth (32), K. Thirunavukkarasu (34), M. Sathish (33), T. Vasanthakumar (30), R. Mani, also known as Manivannan (32), P. Babu (33), T. Haronimus Paul (32), K. Arulanantham (39), and M. Arunkumar as the accused in the case.

It found that Sabarirajan was the key perpetrator who lured the girls and women, including the complainant. The sexual assault of the first complainant, aged 19, took place on February 12, 2019, in a car on Dharapuram Road. They filmed the act and robbed her of a gold chain. The girl informed her family only after the accused demanded sexual favours from her by threatening to leak the video. Numerous videos of sexual assault were found on the laptop of Sabarirajan and the mobile phone of Thirunavukkarasu. Using these, the police and the CBI identified the other accused and survivors. The case also stirred up a political controversy as Arulanantham had been the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) Pollachi town students' wing secretary. He was expelled from the party after his arrest.

Who were the survivors?

Investigations revealed the accused targeted young girls and women from middle class and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Though the accused are suspected to have sexually exploited numerous women, only eight of them testified. The investigation faced backlash when the then Coimbatore District Superintendent of Police R. Pandiarajan revealed the name of the complainant. It is believed some survivors chose to stay away from the investigation fearing their identities would be made public.

How was the trial conducted?

A special court room facility was created at the Combined Court Complex in Coimbatore for the trial to protect the identities of the survivors. A chamber made of one-way glass prevented others from seeing the survivors during the trial. They were brought to court with extreme care, while the accused were produced through videoconferencing.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

8. The 14 questions President Murmu has asked the SC

Introduction

14 QUESTIONS

President Murmu asked Supreme Court
on timelines for clearing bills



President Droupadi Murmu's letter to the Supreme Court states that Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution "(do not) stipulate any time frame" for a Governor or the President to act on bills passed by state Assemblies, and that "the concept of deemed assent", as introduced in the apex court's landmark April 8 decision, "is alien to the constitutional scheme and fundamentally circumscribes the power of the President and the Governor".

Exercising powers vested upon her under Article 143(1), the President thus made a 14-point reference to the SC for its consideration and opinion. These 14 questions, published here ad verbatim, are as follows.

- 1.What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
- 2.Is the Governor bound by the aid & advice tendered by the Council of Ministers while exercising all the options available with him when a Bill is presented before him under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
- 3.Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution of India justiciable?
- 4.Is Article 361 of the Constitution of India an absolute bar to the judicial review in relation to the actions of a Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
- 5.In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed time limit, and the manner of exercise of powers by the Governor, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders for the exercise of all powers under Article 200 of the Constitution of India by the Governor?
- 6.Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the President under Article 201 of the Constitution of India justiciable?
- 7.In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed timeline and the manner of exercise of powers by the President, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders for the exercise of discretion by the President under Article 201 of the Constitution of India?
- 8.In light of the constitutional scheme governing the powers of the President, is the President required to seek advice of the Supreme Court by way of a reference under Article 143 of the

Constitution of India and take the opinion of the Supreme Court when the Governor reserves a Bill for the President's assent or otherwise?

9. Are the decisions of the Governor and the President under Article 200 and Article 201 of the Constitution of India, respectively, justiciable at a stage anterior into the law coming into force? Is it permissible for the Courts to undertake judicial adjudication over the contents of a Bill, in any manner, before it becomes law?

10. Can the exercise of constitutional powers and the orders of/by the President / Governor be substituted in any manner under Article 142 of the Constitution of India?

11. Is a law made by the State legislature a law in force without the assent of the Governor granted under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?

12. In view of the proviso to Article 145(3) of the Constitution of India, is it not mandatory for any bench of this Hon'ble Court to first decide as to whether the question involved in the proceedings before it is of such a nature which involves substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of constitution and to refer it to a bench of minimum five Judges?

13. Do the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution of India limited to matters of procedural law or Article 142 of the Constitution of India extends to issuing directions /passing orders which are contrary to or inconsistent with existing substantive or procedural provisions of the Constitution or law in force?

14. Does the Constitution bar any other jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to resolve disputes between the Union Government and the State Governments except by way of a suit under Article 131 of the Constitution of India?

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express

9. After President Murmu seeks advisory opinion from SC, can court overturn its R N Ravi decision?

Introduction

President Droupadi Murmu has invoked the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction on whether timelines could be set for the President and Governors to act on Bills passed by state Assemblies.

Under Article 143(1) of the Constitution, the President may refer a "question of law or fact" to the Supreme Court for its opinion. The opinion, unlike a ruling, is not binding.

The reference was made on May 13, five weeks after the SC's April 8 ruling in which it fixed a three-month deadline for the President to clear Bills reserved for her consideration by the Governor.



That ruling, by a two-judge Bench headed by Justice J B Pardiwala, set aside Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi's decision to withhold assent to 10 pending Bills.

What is the SC's advisory jurisdiction?

A question under Article 143 may be referred if it "has arisen, or is likely to arise", and "which is of such a nature and of such public importance that it is expedient to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court".

Article 145(3) requires any such reference to be heard by five judges, after which the SC returns the reference to the President with the majority opinion.

Under the Constitution, the President acts on the aid and advice of the Cabinet. The advisory jurisdiction allows her the means to seek independent advice to act on certain constitutional matters. It is a power that the President has invoked on at least 15 occasions since 1950.

Can the SC decline to answer a presidential reference?

Article 143(1) states the court "may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report to the President its opinion thereon". The word 'may' indicates that it is the court's prerogative to answer the reference. The SC has so far returned at least two references without answering.

● In 1993, then President Shankar Dayal Sharma asked the SC "whether a Hindu temple or any Hindu religious structure existed prior to the construction of the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid...in the area on which the structure stood."

The SC unanimously refused to answer this as a civil suit on the dispute was already pending before the courts.

Justices Aftab Ahmed and S P Bharucha declined to answer also on the grounds that the reference was against secularism, and hence unconstitutional. The judges also expressed apprehension that the government could use the SC opinion as a springboard to politically negotiate the issue.

● The SC did not answer a 1982 reference made by President Giani Zail Singh on the constitutionality of a proposed law that sought to regulate the resettlement or permanent return of individuals (or their descendants) who had migrated to Pakistan between March 1, 1947 and May 14, 1954 to Jammu and Kashmir.

However, after the President's reference, the Bill was passed for a second time, and the Governor gave his assent. Petitions challenging the validity of the laws were also moved before the SC.

Since advisory jurisdiction is not binding as a precedent, even if the SC had held the law to be unconstitutional in the Article 143 reference, it would still have to decide its validity in the other batch. The SC's opinion would also be futile since the issue was no longer before the President.

Can the SC overturn its April 8 decision through the presidential reference?

In its 1991 opinion on the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, the SC said that Article 143 is not a mechanism for the executive to seek review or reversal of established judicial decisions of the Supreme Court.

"When this Court in its adjudicatory jurisdiction pronounces its authoritative opinion on a question of law, it cannot be said that there is any doubt about the question of law or the same is res integra so as to require the President to know what the true position of law on the question is," the opinion said.

The SC also said it could not "countenance a situation" where a question in a reference "may be so construed as to invite our opinion" on a settled decision of the court.

"That would obviously be tantamount to our sitting in appeal on the said decision which it is impermissible for us to do even in adjudicatory jurisdiction. Nor is it competent for the President to invest us with an appellate jurisdiction over the said decision through a Reference under Article 143...", the court said.

The government can, however, file for a review of the April 8 ruling, and can move a curative petition in an attempt to reverse it.

Since the judgment was by a two-judge Bench, and similar cases from other states, including Kerala and Punjab, remain pending, it is possible that another Bench might refer it to a larger Constitution Bench.

Is the presidential reference only about the April 8 ruling?

The reference contains 14 questions of law, which are mostly drawn from the April 8 ruling, but are not limited to it. The last three questions raise larger issues on how the SC exercises discretionary powers provided by the Constitution.

● In Question 12 asks whether the SC must first determine if a case involves a "substantive question of law" or requires "interpretation of the Constitution" that only a larger Bench can hear. This question essentially asks whether smaller Benches can hear such important matters.

● In Question 13, the reference raises questions on the use of Article 142 of the Constitution, which is the discretionary "power to do complete justice".

● The last question asks the SC to define the contours of Centre-state disputes that can be heard by any court. Article 131 states that "subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the

Supreme Court shall, to the exclusion of any other court, have original jurisdiction in any dispute."

What is the broader context behind the presidential reference?

The issues in the R N Ravi case essentially arise out of the interplay of powers between the Centre and Opposition-ruled states. Governors, who are appointed by the Centre, are seen to be undercutting elected state governments by their refusal to clear Bills passed by the Assembly.

While the SC addressed this issue in its April 8 judgment, it extended its scrutiny to the powers of the President as well, and set a three-month timeline to clear Bills reserved for her consideration by the Governor. Governor Ravi, under fire from the SC for withholding assent, had referred 10 Bills to the President.

The SC in its ruling allowed states the right to seek a "writ of mandamus" from the SC against the President. This is essentially a right to knock on the doors of courts seeking a directive against the President if she does not decide on the Bills within the prescribed time limit.

The government used the ruling to argue that the judiciary was undermining Parliament or the people's mandate. Attorney General for India R Venkataramani said the President "was not heard" before the SC passed directives for her office to follow.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar criticised the ruling. He has raised the issue of "Parliamentary supremacy" on several occasions, and called for limited judicial review and greater adherence to the separation of powers.

That said, such tussles between Parliament and the judiciary are as old as the Constitution itself.

In the first three decades after Independence, courts and the government sparred on the interpretation of the right to property, leading to constitutional amendments and adverse court orders. Eventually, in the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati ruling, the court allowed land reforms, watering down the fundamental right to property, but severely restricted Parliament's powers to tinker with any other fundamental right.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

10. Sacred Hill at the Centre of Santal-Jain Dispute

High Court Enforces Ban



On May 3, the Jharkhand High Court directed the state government to enforce an existing ban on meat, alcohol, and intoxicants on a sacred hill revered by both Santals and Jains.

Why Is the Hill Important?

For Jains: Parasnath Hill

- Jains believe 20 of the 24 tirthankaras attained

nirvana on the hill, named after the 23rd tirthankara, Parshvanatha.

- The hill hosts over 40 Jain temples and shrines.
- Jains consider it a sacred site for centuries.

For Santals: Marang Buru

- The Santals, an Adivasi community, call it Marang Buru, meaning "The Great Mountain".
- It houses Jug Jaher Than, their holiest site, and Dishom Manjhi Than, the traditional leader's seat.
- The hill is also the venue for the Lo Bir Baisi, a tribal court that resolves major disputes.
- The Santal Hul rebellion (1855), against British and zamindar oppression, began here.

Historical Conflict

Beginning of Legal Disputes

- Conflict over the hill was officially recorded in 1911.
- The Sendra festival, where Santal men go hunting, became a point of tension with Jains who oppose killing animals.
- Jains filed a legal suit in 1911 to stop this, but the courts upheld the Santals' customary rights through several rulings, including by the Privy Council in British India.

Post-Independence Changes

Erosion of Adivasi Rights

- In 1972, after the Wildlife Protection Act, Adivasi villages lost protections under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.
- By 1978, the hill was declared a wildlife sanctuary, further limiting tribal rights.
- Rituals at Marang Buru stopped between the 1970s and 2000.
- Activist Ajay Tudu, who campaigned for revival of tribal practices, was killed in 2008.

Recent Developments

Government Ban and Its Impact

- In 2023, the Ministry of Environment banned meat and alcohol within 25 km of the hill, affecting 99 mostly Adivasi villages.
- Even eggs and meat were banned in Anganwadi centres and primary schools.
- Following the HC order, security was increased to prevent violations.

Ongoing Resistance

- Despite the restrictions, Santals celebrated the Sendra festival this year.

- The Marang Buru Sanvta Susaar Baisi (MBSSB) filed a petition asserting tribal rights over the hill.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

11. Does Article 21 include right to digital access?

Introduction

On April 30, the Supreme Court (SC) directed revisions to Know-Your-Customer (KYC) digital norms to ensure accessibility for 'persons with disabilities' (PwD), reinterpreting Article 21 of the Constitution to encompass the 'right to digital access'.



What laws safeguard rights of PwD?

The Constitution, through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles, alongside disability statutes, obligates the state to adapt laws, policies, and infrastructure which allow PwDs to exercise their rights on par with others. Advancing these guarantees and giving effect to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), India enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which adopted a 'social-barrier' approach that defines disability as arising from impairments, along with physical, mental, intellectual, social, and psycho-social

obstacles which make full participation in society difficult.

Crucially, Section 42 of the RPwD Act, 2016, mandates 'government measures' to ensure that all audio, print, and electronic media are accessible; that electronic media includes audio description, sign-language interpretation, and captions; and that everyday electronic goods and equipment follow 'universal-design' principles.

Are KYC details mandatory?

To curb illegal finance and money laundering, the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 (and its 2005 Rules) mandates every bank and financial institution to verify client identities, maintain comprehensive records, and report relevant information to the Financial Intelligence Unit. Consequently, digital KYC verification has become indispensable for a wide range of essential services — from opening a bank, demat or trading account to accessing SIM cards, pension schemes or insurance policies. It also unlocks government benefits — from national scholarships to Aadhaar-linked 'direct benefit transfers'.

Building on this mandate, the RBI's 2016 Master Direction on Know Your Customer (KYC) rules prescribe a Customer Due Diligence (CDD) framework and, via Clause 18, introduces Video-based Customer Identification Process (V-CIP), enabling remote customer verification through secure, real-time video interaction. Customers can prove their identity online by clicking a

selfie; signing on a paper physically or digitally; printing and rescanning, or clicking a photo of the filled-in form; verifying OTPs in 30 seconds; and reading a random code flashed on the screen.

How does it affect PwDs?

Acid-attack survivors left with permanent 'facial disfigurement' and severe eye burns — and individuals with complete blindness or low vision — have filed writ petitions seeking directions to respondents, including RBI, the Department of Telecommunications and SEBI, to devise alternative digital KYC, e-KYC and video-KYC methods to make remote identity checks inclusive for all PwDs as they face significant hurdles under the current framework.

Currently, each 'regulated entity' has to devise its own tests. Methods such as eye-blinking, reading a flashing code, or writing it down and taking a selfie exclude blind users. Despite clear mandates in the 2021 and 2022 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Accessibility Standards, most KYC apps and websites flout them — there is no screen-reader prompt for camera alignment, no audio cues for lighting or focus, and no way to differentiate document sides during upload. Additionally, thumb impressions, commonly used by visually impaired users, are not accepted as valid signatures, nor are PAN cards issued with them. Aadhaar-based biometric systems worsen the exclusion. Scanners and interfaces lack basic 'accessibility' features such as 'text-to-speech' or 'self-verification'. As a result, blind applicants are frequently asked to appear in person or are rejected on vague technical grounds. The RBI's Master Directions also bar any form of 'prompting' during KYC verification, leaving users without assistance.

How has the SC intervened?

The SC has consistently held that accessibility for PwDs is a 'constitutional imperative'. In *Rajive Raturi versus Union of India* (2024), it ruled that 'accessibility' is central to the right to life, dignity, and freedom of movement under Article 21. During the COVID-19 vaccination drive, the court emphasised that digital registration must be fully accessible to prevent exclusion. In the instant case, the top court held that 'digital barriers' blatantly violate the rights of PwD under the UNCRPD and India's disability laws. Anchoring its judgment in the principle of 'substantive equality', it directed that digital KYC guidelines be revised with 'accessibility' at their core. It flagged that the digital divide affects not just PwDs, but rural users, senior citizens, the economically disadvantaged, and linguistic minorities.

Relying on Articles 14, 15, 21, and 38, the court affirmed that 'digital access' is inseparable from the 'right to life and liberty'. It mandated the state to ensure that all digital infrastructure is accessible, especially for marginalised communities.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

12. Drinking to Death: The Illicit Liquor Crisis in India

Recurring Tragedies

Illicit liquor tragedies — like the recent one near Amritsar that killed at least 23 people — are not new. Such incidents have been reported across India, often affecting poor daily wage earners who consume cheap alcohol to escape harsh living conditions.

The Deadly Mix: Methanol and Greed

Bootleggers, driven by profit, use toxic substances like methanol, a cheap industrial chemical, to brew spurious liquor. Methanol resembles ethanol (used in consumable alcohol) but is highly poisonous and can be lethal in small quantities.



Shortcuts include:

- Using toxic additives (e.g., dead scorpions)
- Diluting industrial methanol
- Misjudging safe dilution ratios

A Nexus of Corruption

These tragedies are often enabled by:

- Corrupt local politicians
- Complicit law enforcement
- Negligent regulation

In Punjab, some police officers were suspended, but investigations often stop short of exposing the deeper supply chain of methanol theft.

What Is Methanol?

- Industrial alcohol, not meant for human consumption

- Used in petrochemical industries
- Often not illegal in itself, but becomes dangerous when used in illicit brews
- Cheaper than traditional, molasses-based liquor
- Classified as a Class B poison in many states

Weak Legal Outcomes

Despite serious charges like murder and attempted murder, convictions are rare. For example:

- In the 2015 Mumbai's Malvani area case, 10 out of 14 accused were acquitted after 9 years.
- No one was convicted under the Poison Act, which provides for stricter sentence.

Need for Stronger Regulation

Since methanol distribution is often inter-State, there's a case for:

- A central regulatory framework on methanol transport
- Stricter State-level enforcement
- Better use of the Poison Act in prosecutions

Addressing the Root Causes

Beyond enforcement, long-term solutions lie in:

- Reducing poverty
- Improving education and awareness
- Tackling social inequality
- Ensuring clean and accountable governance

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu

13. PM Modi to Launch 'Gyan Bharatam Mission' for Manuscript Heritage

Massive Overhaul of Manuscripts Mission



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the revamped National Manuscripts Mission (NMM), renamed as the Gyan Bharatam Mission, on June 9, 2025.

The mission, announced in the 2025–26 Union Budget, aims to survey, document, and conserve over one crore manuscripts housed in institutions, museums, libraries, and private collections.

Why the Revival Was Needed

The original National Manuscripts Mission, launched in 2003 under the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, failed to meet expectations.

Digitisation Progress So Far

- 52 lakh manuscripts have been recorded in metadata.
- Over 3 lakh manuscripts have been digitised.
- But only 1.3 lakh are uploaded, and just 70,000 are publicly viewable.

A major hurdle has been the lack of an access policy, which has discouraged private owners from allowing public viewing. Notably, 80% of manuscripts in India are privately held.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu

14. Can a Sitting Judge Face an FIR? Understanding the Veeraswami Case

Introduction

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar recently criticized the Supreme Court's in-house inquiry process and called for an FIR against Justice Yashwant Varma, after unaccounted cash was found at his residence in March 2025. He also called for a review of the 1991 Supreme Court ruling in the K Veeraswami case, which governs criminal proceedings against sitting judges.

The Case Against Justice Yashwant Varma

- Justice Varma was a Delhi High Court judge at the time of the incident, now transferred to Allahabad High Court.
- An in-house inquiry conducted by the Supreme Court found irregularities and indicted him on May 8.
- The Supreme Court dismissed a plea for an FIR, noting that the inquiry report has been sent to the President and Prime Minister.
- Dhankhar argued that the inquiry lacks constitutional or legal authority and called for criminal action.

Why Judges Are Protected from FIRs

Judicial Independence

- Judges must be free from external pressure or harassment, especially from the executive or political actors.
- Article 124 of the Constitution allows removal of judges only through impeachment, which is a Parliament-led political process.
- In 75 years, no impeachment of a judge has been successful.

In-House Inquiry Mechanism

- Created by the Supreme Court to deal with complaints against judges.
- A panel of judges, appointed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), reviews allegations.
- The panel's findings can lead to impeachment, but not direct prosecution.
- This process is not legally binding, which critics argue offers too much protection.

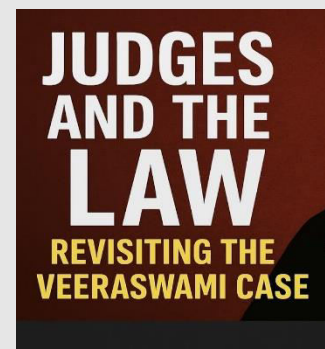
The 1991 Veeraswami Judgment: Key Takeaways

Background

- Justice K Veeraswami, former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, was accused of owning assets beyond his known income.
- The CBI filed an FIR against him before his retirement.
- He challenged the FIR, leading to a constitutional question before the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court Ruling

- The Court ruled that:
 - A sitting High Court or Supreme Court judge is a "public servant" under the Prevention of Corruption Act.
 - However, no FIR or prosecution can be initiated without prior approval from the CJI.
- This ruling ensures that judges are not prosecuted arbitrarily or under political pressure.



Why the CJI's Sanction is Required

- The Court clarified that judges are not employees of the President.
- The CJI's approval ensures that the executive cannot misuse power to target judges.

Has the Rule Been Used Since Then?

Yes, but very rarely:

- In 2019, then CJI Ranjan Gogoi allowed the CBI to file an FIR against Justice S N Shukla of the Allahabad High Court in a corruption case.
- Justice Shukla was previously recommended for impeachment by CJI Dipak Misra, but no action was taken by the government.

Current Debate: Impunity vs. Accountability

- Critics like Dhankhar say the Veeraswami ruling shields judges from prosecution, even in serious cases.
- Supporters argue it's essential to protect the independence of the judiciary.
- Calls to revisit the ruling reflect growing concerns about judicial accountability in India.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

15. Basava Raju: Top Maoist Leader Killed in Abujmad Encounter

A Major Blow to Maoist Insurgency

Basava Raju, also known as Nambala Keshav Rao, was a top commander of the CPI (Maoist). He was among 26 Naxals killed by security forces in Abujmad, Chhattisgarh. The encounter marks a significant success in India's fight against Left-Wing Extremism.

Maoist General Secretary and Mastermind

- Took over as General Secretary of CPI (Maoist) in 2018, succeeding Ganapathy.
- Known for planning deadly attacks, including:
 - Chintalnar attack (2010) where 76 CRPF jawans were killed.
 - Jhiram Ghati attack (2013) on a Congress convoy.



A Techie Turned Guerrilla

- Born in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh.
- Former kabaddi player in school.
- B.Tech graduate from REC (now NIT) Warangal, known for its past links to leftist student activism.
- Joined the People's War Group in the early 1980s.

Explosives Expert and NIA's Most Wanted

- Known for expertise in making IEDs used to ambush forces.
- Had a reward of over ₹1 crore on his head by the NIA.
- Allegedly planned the killing of two Andhra Pradesh politicians in 2018.

- Maintained ties with other rebel groups like the LTTE.
- Operated mainly in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

What Happened in the Abujhmad Encounter?

- Security operation carried out by the District Reserve Guard (DRG) from four districts: Narayanpur, Dantewada, Bijapur, and Kondagaon.
- Targeted a specific area in Abujhmad, based on intelligence.
- Abujhmad is a dense, largely unsurveyed forest region spread across Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, larger than the state of Goa.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

16. TASMAL Under Scrutiny: Supreme Court Slams ED, Allegations of ₹1,000 Crore Liquor Scam

What is TASMAL?

The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAL) is a government-run monopoly that operates around 7,000 liquor shops across Tamil Nadu. It is responsible for the sale and distribution of alcohol in the state.

ED Launches Investigation into Alleged Scam

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) began investigating TASMAL in 2025 after receiving reports of large-scale financial irregularities. The probe was based on 41 FIRs filed by the Tamil Nadu Vigilance Department between 2014 and 2025 under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Key allegations include:

- Overcharging customers by ₹10–₹30 per bottle.
- Kickbacks from distilleries to TASMAL officials.
- Bribery related to staff transfers and postings.
- Irregularities in transport and bar licence tenders.

ED's Findings So Far

- **Tender Manipulation:** Evidence of transport tenders awarded with incomplete documentation, mismatches in KYC details, and single-bid awards.



- **Fraud by Distilleries:** Five distilleries and three bottling companies allegedly worked together to inflate expenses, falsify records, and siphon off over ₹1,000 crore in unaccounted cash.
- **Illicit Cash Flow:** Bottling firms reportedly inflated sales figures to funnel cash back to distilleries. This cash was then used for bribes to secure bigger orders from TASMAC.

Supreme Court Intervention

On May 23, 2025, the Supreme Court stayed the ED's investigation and criticized the agency's actions.

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai questioned the legal basis of charging a government corporation like TASMAC under criminal laws, stating:

"How can a corporation commit an offence?... You may register against individuals. How [can you charge] a corporation in [a] criminal matter?"

He further rebuked the ED for:

- Overstepping its jurisdiction.
- Violating the federal structure of the Constitution.
- Ignoring the fact that Tamil Nadu had already filed its own FIRs.

Privacy Concerns Raised

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing TASMAC, accused the ED of cloning employees' phones, calling it a breach of privacy.

Politics in the Background

The case unfolds amid rising political tension ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. The ruling DMK has accused the BJP-led central government of targeting the state, while the BJP has focused on corruption allegations against the DMK regime.

What's Next?

The Supreme Court has paused the ED's investigation for now. The agency has been asked to submit a detailed response within two weeks.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express & The Hindu

17. Konkan Railway to Merge with Indian Railways: What It Means and Why It Matters

What is the Konkan Railway?

The Konkan Railway (KR) is a 741-km scenic and strategic railway line connecting Roha in Maharashtra to coastal Kerala, passing through Goa and Karnataka. Known for its 91 tunnels and 2,000+ bridges, the line is a crucial lifeline for both passengers and goods along the western coast.

Established in 1990 as a special purpose vehicle under the Ministry of Railways, KR began operations in 1998. It has functioned independently from Indian Railways as Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), with ownership split between:

- Government of India: 51%
- Maharashtra: 22%
- Karnataka: 15%
- Goa & Kerala: 6% each

Why Is the Merger Happening Now?

While operationally important, KRCL has faced financial difficulties for years, struggling to fund upgrades and expansion. Maharashtra, the last state to approve the merger, agreed recently, clearing the path for full integration with Indian Railways.

Maharashtra's approval came with two key conditions:

1. The "Konkan Railway" name must be retained.
2. Indian Railways must reimburse Maharashtra ₹394 crore for its initial investment.

Both conditions have reportedly been accepted by the central government.

What Will Change After the Merger?

Once merged, KRCL will become part of Indian Railways, allowing for:

- Better infrastructure and service upgrades
- Increased train frequency and improved connectivity
- Enhanced security and maintenance
- More competitive fares
- Seamless ticket booking via Indian Railways platforms
- Standardised customer support systems

The merger also opens the door for new projects, better tourism potential, and local economic growth along the Konkan coast.

What's Next?

The Railway Board will now begin the formal merger process. This will involve:

- Restructuring employee roles
- Adjusting operational zones
- Revising service and vendor contracts

The full transition will take a few months, but passengers can expect a smoother, more integrated experience once it's complete.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

18. CBI Charges Ex-J&K Governor Satyapal Malik: Two Major Allegations Explained

Background

Former Jammu & Kashmir Governor Satyapal Malik, 78, currently hospitalized in Delhi with a urinary infection and sepsis, has been charged by the CBI in a corruption case related to a

hydel project in Kishtwar, J&K. Malik had initially been examined only as a witness, and it was based on his allegations that the CBI filed the case in 2022.

Malik's Allegations: Two Key Scandals

1. Bribery Offer

In October 2021, Malik claimed he was offered a ₹300 crore bribe to approve two deals:

- One linked to Reliance Group (owned by Anil Ambani).
- The other involving an RSS functionary.

He said he refused the bribes, stating he came to J&K "with five kurta-pajamas and would leave with that."

2. Hydel Project Corruption

Malik alleged irregularities in awarding a ₹2,200 crore contract in the Kiru Hydel Project to Patel Engineering Ltd. He said proper tendering norms were ignored, and despite a decision to re-tender using reverse auction, the contract was handed to Patel Engineering without doing so.

Case 1: J&K Government Insurance Scheme

What Happened

- In 2017, the old insurance scheme with ICICI Lombard ended.
- J&K hired Trinity Reinsurance Brokers Ltd (TRBL) to float new tenders.
- Reliance General Insurance (RGIPL) won the bid with the lowest premium.
- The scheme launched in October 2018 and ₹61 crore was paid to RGIPL in advance.

Red Flags

- The payment was reportedly made without approvals from the Chief Secretary or the Governor.
- Employees protested the scheme due to high premiums and no opt-out.
- Malik cancelled the scheme, calling it "full of fraud."

Investigations

- The J&K Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) initially found no wrongdoing but recommended recovering ₹44 crore.
- The Finance Department later found irregularities.
- In March 2022, the case was handed over to the CBI, which filed an FIR naming RGIPL, TRBL, and unknown officials.

Enforcement Directorate Action

- In January 2024, the ED attached properties worth ₹36.57 crore, alleging dubious tendering practices.

Case 2: Kiru Hydel Project Contract

Project Details

- The Kiru Hydro Electric Project was estimated at ₹4,287 crore.

- The contract was for major construction works and was awarded to Patel Engineering Ltd in 2019.

Alleged Irregularities

- CVPPPL (the project authority) initially decided to cancel and re-tender the contract using e-tendering with reverse auction.
- However, the decision was overturned, and the contract was awarded without following new guidelines.

Other Issues

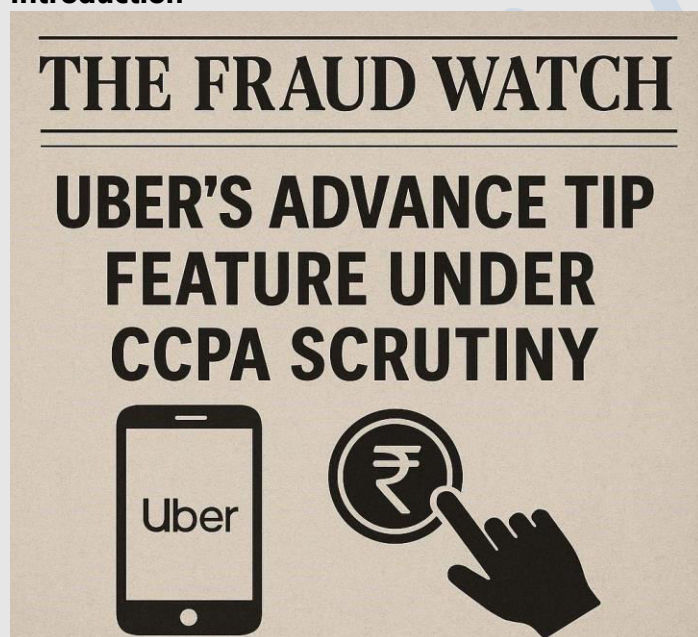
- The project faced criticism for sub-standard work and failure to provide local jobs, one of its main promises.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

19. Why Is Uber's Advance Tip Feature in the News?

Introduction



Uber is under government scrutiny for its "Add a tip for faster pickup" feature. India's consumer protection authority (CCPA) issued a notice to the company, questioning whether this practice is ethical or fair.

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi called the feature "deeply concerning" and exploitative, saying tips should be voluntary and given after service, not before. The CCPA is also looking into similar practices by Ola and Rapido.

What Is an Advance Tip?

When booking a ride, Uber asks users to tip in advance to increase the

chance of a faster pickup. The app says the driver gets 100% of the tip, and it cannot be changed later.

Other apps, like Rapido and Ola, have similar systems that encourage users to pay extra to increase the chances of finding a driver.

According to industry insiders, this model spread because:

- It allows drivers to earn more
- Tips are not taxed with GST, unlike ride fares

- Companies adopted it to avoid being at a competitive disadvantage

What Are the Main Concerns?

1. Unfair Pressure on Users

Law experts say the feature pressures customers into tipping by suggesting they'll get a ride faster. This creates a sense of urgency and feels coercive, even if it's optional.

2. Unfair Trade Practice

Under India's Consumer Protection Act (2019), any misleading or manipulative tactic that affects a user's buying decision could be considered unfair trade.

Is This a "Dark Pattern"?

Yes, it may fall under "dark patterns", which are tricks used in app or website design to push users into actions they wouldn't normally choose.

Common dark pattern tactics:

- False urgency: Making users feel they need to act fast (e.g. "add a tip now to get picked up")
- Drip pricing: Hiding the full cost until the final step

The CCPA issued guidelines in 2023 to prevent such misleading designs.

A 2024 study found that:

- 32% of apps, including Uber and Ola, used false urgency
- 42% used drip pricing, hiding costs until the end

How Are Companies Responding?

- Rapido says the tip is optional and just informs users about surge pricing.
- Namma Yatri renamed its feature to "Add more (voluntary)" after the CCPA warning.
- Companies claim it helps drivers earn more and improves service speed, but critics say it crosses ethical lines.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

1. Kingmaker to Casualty: The Fall of Jagmeet Singh

Why now?



Jagmeet Singh, Canada's first non-White leader of a major federal party, has resigned after a devastating electoral defeat. His New Democratic Party (NDP) plummeted from 25 seats to just 7, losing official party status. Singh's political future is now uncertain.

His departure may open the door for a reset in India-Canada relations, which had deteriorated under Justin Trudeau — in part due to Singh's perceived support for Sikh separatist elements.

A Symbol of Diversity and Controversy

When Singh became NDP leader in 2017, he was hailed as a milestone in Canadian politics — a practising Sikh, the first turban-wearing Member of Provincial Parliament in Ontario, and the first non-Christian to lead a major party.

While he helped Trudeau's minority government deliver major social reforms like universal dental care and pharmacare, Singh also became closely associated with pro-Khalistan elements, regularly criticizing India.

Tensions with India

- In 2013, India denied him a visa over remarks on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.
- He amplified Trudeau's 2023 claim that India was linked to the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.
- Singh called for diplomatic sanctions on India and a ban on the RSS in Canada.
- His stance contributed to the breakdown in New Delhi–Ottawa relations.

Why the NDP Lost in 2025

Several key factors led to the party's collapse and Singh's personal defeat in Burnaby Central:

1. Association with an Unpopular Government

Singh's alliance with Trudeau blurred the NDP's identity, tying it to a fading administration.

2. Khalistan Controversy

His support for Sikh separatists alienated moderate voters and much of the Indian diaspora.

3. Violence and Diaspora Tensions

Clashes in cities like Toronto and Vancouver created unease about importing sectarian unrest into Canada.

4. Nationalism vs. Trump

Trump's aggressive rhetoric toward Canada spurred a nationalist wave. Voters flocked to the Liberals and Conservatives, leaving little space for smaller parties.

5. Abandonment of Working-Class Issues

Singh's focus on foreign interference and identity politics distanced the NDP from its working-class roots. Economic issues like inflation and housing were overlooked.

What Comes Next?

Singh's resignation removes a vocal supporter of Khalistan politics from Canada's political center. Prime Minister Mark Carney, signaling a desire to rebuild ties with India, may now face fewer domestic hurdles.

The NDP's Crossroads

To remain relevant, the NDP must:

- Reconnect with its working-class base.
- Undertake grassroots outreach.
- Refocus on economic and local issues over identity politics.

Carney, however, still lacks a majority in the 343-seat House of Commons and may need cross-party support for key legislation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. All about the US-Ukraine agreement on Ukrainian minerals, reconstruction

Why in News?

After months of intense negotiation, the US and Ukraine signed a deal allowing the US preferential access to Ukraine's minerals and energy reserves.

The agreement will establish the US-Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund. The earnings made by the US from exploiting Ukraine's mineral and energy resources will be credited to this fund. The credit in the fund will be used to support Ukraine's war efforts against Russia.

What do we know about the agreement?

1. Joint Management of fund

The fund would be "jointly managed" by the US and Ukraine. Both sides would select the projects jointly, and all profits generated by the fund would be reinvested in Ukraine.

2. Ukrainian ownership, US access

Ukraine will retain full control over subsoil, infrastructure and natural resources, following the country's laws. Ukraine will also determine what can be extracted and from where.

3. Expanding the ambit beyond minerals

In addition to Ukraine's minerals, the agreement allows for new oil and gas projects and associated infrastructure.



The deal would apply to new licenses under the deal and would not draw on revenues from existing projects. Also, 50% of such revenue would be redirected towards the fund.

What minerals does Ukraine hold?

Ukraine is home to two kinds of minerals, which are vital in manufacturing high-tech products to enable the green-energy transition, and are also used in sophisticated weapons and consumer goods.

Rare earth elements, of which 17 types exist, including 15 Lanthanides (atomic numbers 57 — which is Lanthanum — to 71 in the periodic table), Scandium (atomic number 21) and Yttrium (39).

Critical minerals, which may be country-specific, but are broadly identified for their value in economic development and national security, and their lack of availability.

India identified 30 critical minerals in 2023. Ukraine holds 22 of the 50 strategic materials identified by the US as critical. Particularly, Ukraine holds very competitive positions in five key ones: graphite, lithium, titanium, beryllium and uranium.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations
Source: Indian Express & The Hindu

3. FATF and Pakistan

Why now?



Following the Pahalgam terror attack, which led to the deaths of 26 people last month, India announced multiple measures in response to Pakistan's role. As part of the strategy to curb financial flows that aid terror activities, it is planning to bring back Pakistan into the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

What is the FATF?

The FATF is commonly referred to as the world's "terrorism financing watchdog", which means it is the author and custodian of an international regime that works to ensure that the flows of money in the global financial system are not misused to fund terrorist activities.

It maintains a "grey list" of countries that it watches closely, including the ones who have failed to prevent international money laundering and terrorist financing. Currently, it includes Nepal, Lebanon, South Africa, Syria and Vietnam, among others.

Past Grey Listing of Pakistan

In June 2018, when it was first grey-listed, Pakistan made an international commitment at the highest political level that it would "work with the FATF to strengthen its AML/CFT regime, and to address deficiencies in its counter-terrorist financing-related actions". "AML/CFT" is FATF jargon for "Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism".

On October 21, 2022, the FATF announced that "Pakistan has strengthened the effectiveness of its AML/CFT regime and addressed technical deficiencies to meet the commitments of its action plans regarding strategic deficiencies that the FATF identified in June 2018 and June 2021". It then came off the list.

Enter and exit the FATF Grey list

FATF conducts periodic assessments. To initiate a nomination process demanding a 'grey list' status for Pakistan, India would require the support of other FATF member countries at the upcoming periodic assessment. India is also considering raising objections against Pakistan at the upcoming meeting of the board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in May.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations
Source: Indian Express

4. India Cuts Trade, Postal, and Port Ties with Pakistan

Why in News?

India has taken strong action against Pakistan by cutting off several key links, including trade, postal services, and port access, following the Pahalgam terror attack and Pakistan's missile test.

All Imports from Pakistan Banned

The Indian government announced a complete ban on all goods coming from Pakistan — whether directly or indirectly.

- This includes all items, even if they are normally allowed under import rules.
- The decision was taken in the interest of national security, said the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

No Ships from Pakistan Allowed at Indian Ports

The Ministry of Ports announced:

- No Pakistani-flagged ship can enter Indian ports.
- Indian ships are also banned from visiting Pakistani ports.
- Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Postal Services Suspended

India also suspended all postal services with Pakistan.

- This includes all categories of mail and parcels, whether sent by air or surface routes.

Missile Test Called a 'Provocation'

These steps came on the same day Pakistan test-fired a nuclear-capable missile named Abdali, with a range of 450 km.

- Indian sources called the test a "grave provocation".
- Military tensions have been rising along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

India's Visa Curbs on Pakistan Continue

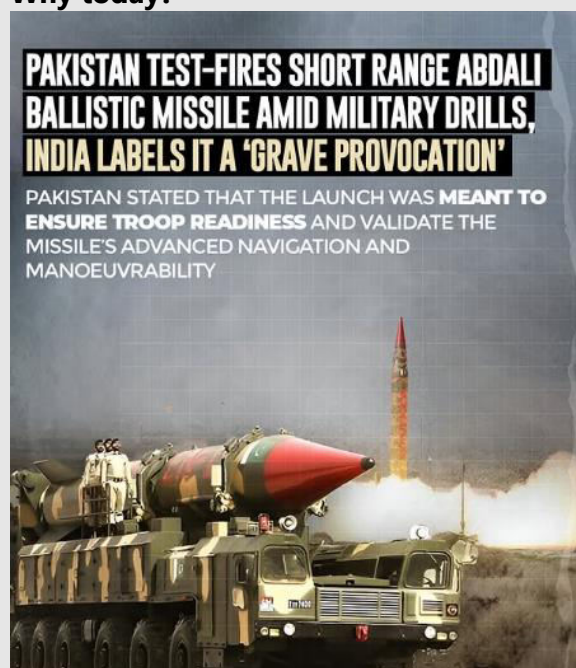
India had already taken action earlier by tightening visa rules:

- 14 categories of visas for Pakistani nationals have been cancelled.
- Only Long Term Visas, and diplomatic or official visas, remain valid.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations
Source: The Hindu

5. Abdali Weapon System

Why today?



Pakistan recently test-fired a ballistic missile called the Abdali Weapon System, a surface-to-surface missile with a range of 450 kilometers, as part of Ex INDUS. The launch was aimed at ensuring the operational readiness of troops and validating key technical parameters.

What is the Abdali missile?

The Abdali is a ballistic missile — a missile that uses projectile motion to travel towards its target, and is powered by a rocket for only the initial, short duration of its journey.

Naming of Missiles

The Abdali missile was first tested in 2001-02. It is named after Ahmed Shah Abdali, the Afghan ruler who invaded India multiple times in the 18th century. Pakistan has a tradition of naming

its missiles after Muslim rulers who invaded India. Thus, apart from Abdali, it has Ghaznavi missiles (named after Mahmud of Ghazni), the Ghauri missile (named after Muhammad Ghori), and the Babur missile, named after the first Mughal ruler Zahir ud-Din Babur.

Exercise Indus

The military drill during which this missile was tested was called Exercise Indus.

Background

India has recently suspended the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, following the Pahalgam attack on tourists. It has also taken a range of other steps — curbing water flow through the Baglihar dam over the Chenab; stopping the import of Pakistani products; banning docking of Pakistan-owned ships and suspending the exchange of all mail and parcels.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

6. No entry for Pakistan-flagged ships in India: How ships choose their flags and what they signify

Why in News?



As part of India's response to Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attacks last month, the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) banned the entry of ships bearing Pakistan flags to India.

In an order, the maritime authority said, "In exercise of power conferred by section 411 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958... keeping in view the present situation, the

following directions are hereby issued: A ship bearing the flag of Pakistan shall not be allowed to visit any Indian port. An Indian flag ship shall not visit any port of Pakistan." Later, Pakistan also imposed a ban on Indian-flagged ships from entering its ports.

The 1958 Act deals with ships with Indian flags anywhere in the world and ships with foreign flags while in Indian waters "to ensure safety of life at sea and safety of ships". But what exactly is the function of flags in shipping?

What do the flags of countries mean in shipping?

Flags on ships foremost show which country the vessel has been registered with, rather than the owner or the crew's nationality.

As the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) says, "By linking a ship to a State, the system of ship registration indicates that that State has the right to protect that ship in international law." This identification becomes necessary also because ships move through international waters, which are not under the jurisdiction of any state.

Under the framework of international law, all countries need to fix the conditions for granting their nationality to ships and the right to fly their flag. However, there is currently no common, binding framework for the registration process.

According to the DGS website, the registration affords evidence of title of the ship to those who deal with the property in question. It further gives protection to the members of the crew in case of casualties involving injuries and/or loss of life to claim compensation under the provisions of the Indian Acts in Indian courts.

Countries must also exercise their jurisdiction and control in administrative, technical and social matters over ships flying their flag. The responsibility for monitoring ships' compliance with international standards on safety, pollution prevention and on-board living and working conditions lies primarily with the flag state.

Can any ship fly any country's flag?

The 1982 United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the global treaty on maritime activity. It states that a "genuine link" must exist between the state and the ship registered with it, but again, there is no definition of such a link.

The idea behind a genuine link is to secure more effective implementation of the duties of the flag state. At times, the problem of fraudulent registration of ships has been raised. For instance, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) said in 2017 that approximately 73 vessels had been fraudulently using its flag and illegally fishing in its waters.

How do ships choose, then?

Some countries only register vessels with ties to the country through ownership or crewing ("closed registries"). Other countries allow foreign-owned or controlled vessels to use their flag through an "open registry". Still others choose not to allow the use of their flag for international trade at all. Open registries are now widely used around the world, the IMO says. A 2023 article in The Diplomat said that flagging a ship can mean a vessel has access to state-specific tax breaks, certification, and security measures. This is known as the "flag of convenience," where ships choose states that offer the most benefits. "To that end, most merchant ships are registered in only a handful of countries, with the top eight flag states for 2023 listed as Panama, Liberia, the Marshall Islands, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Malta, and the Bahamas," it said.

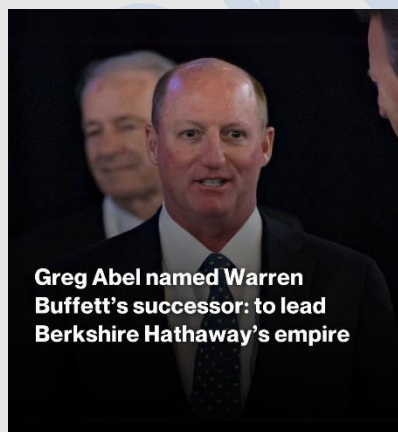
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

7. Greg Abel, the newly announced successor of Warren Buffett as Berkshire Hathaway CEO

Warren Buffett Greg Abel announcement

Billionaire businessman Warren Buffett, 94, announced he would step down as the CEO of the multinational conglomerate Berkshire Hathaway at the end of this year. Buffett has run the company since 1965.



About Gregory Edward Abel

Gregory Edward Abel was born in Edmonton, in the Canadian province of Alberta, on June 1, 1962, to a working-class family. Working odd jobs, he cleaned discarded bottles and filled fire extinguishers.

Upon graduating from the University of Alberta, he worked at the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and the energy firm CalEnergy. He joined Berkshire Hathaway Energy, then known as MidAmerican Energy, in 1992, which Berkshire later took over.

The rise of Berkshire Hathaway under Buffett

In August 2024, Berkshire Hathaway attained a market capitalisation of \$1 trillion, becoming the first non-tech company to do so. Its success has been chalked up to Buffett's business acumen, in particular.

One of the key strategies Buffett followed is called value investing. It involves selecting stocks that may be underestimated by the stock market. This is based on understanding the stock market's volatility, which results in 'overreactions' that may not indicate a company's long-term fundamentals. Value investors stand to profit by purchasing stocks at discounted prices and are generally long-term investors of high-quality companies.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

8. UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed: the key goods included, what it means

UK India trade deal

India and the United Kingdom inked a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). India and UK are the world's fifth and sixth largest economies, respectively.



FTAs are arrangements between two or more countries or trading blocs that primarily agree to reduce or eliminate customs tariff and non tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.

The timing of the India-UK FTA matters. While the US's high tariffs have now been paused temporarily, a flat 10% rate is still applicable to all countries, and the general sentiment of uncertainty continues to prevail.

As a result, countries around the world have been looking at strengthening trade relations with non-US partners and hedging against future shifts in US policy.

What's in the UK-India trade deal?

Trade Boost: Trade between the two nations totalled £42.6 billion in 2024. Total UK exports to India amounted to £17.1 billion, while total UK imports from India amounted to £25.5 billion in 2024. The deal is expected to boost the exports of both the countries.

Goods in focus: Whisky and gin tariffs will be halved from 150% to 75%, before falling to 40% by the tenth year of the deal, benefiting Britain's Scotch whisky industry and making the beverage cheaper in the world's largest whisky market.

India will also cut automotive tariffs to 10% under a quota from over 100% currently. Other British goods categories which will face lower tariffs include cosmetics, aerospace, lamb, medical devices, salmon, electrical machinery, soft drinks, chocolate and biscuits. Indian workers will also see increased quotas to work in the UK in certain sectors.

What led to the deal, and what issues emerged during negotiations?

The need for a trade deal between the countries was felt because of multiple factors.

1. The disruption of supply chains during the pandemic brought home to Western companies the risks of over-dependence on China and the need for a 'China-plus one' policy.

2. For the UK, the size and potential of the Indian market offered a way to compensate for the loss of access to the European Single Market after Brexit. Under European Single Market mechanism, EU countries could freely access each others markets and their residents could easily move between countries to work.

3. Further, UK has suffered from a "cost of living" crisis in recent years. The UK can benefit by importing cheap goods from India.

Points of contention

Some issues that took a while to be ironed out included work permits for Indian service sector workers under the FTA. Immigration is a major issue in UK.

Another point was the UK's carbon tax. It was looking to impose a levy on metal imports based on carbon emissions, which would have hurt Indian exporters. India had originally proposed larger quotas for professionals, particularly in sectors like IT and healthcare. However, the new rules will lead to "only around 100 new visas" for Indian workers each year.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

9. Operation Sindoor Details

Why in News?

Two weeks after Pakistani terrorists gunned down 26 civilians near Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir, India responded with airstrikes on nine locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Codenamed Operation Sindoor, these strikes targeted the terrorist infrastructure across the border and the Line of Control (LoC).

The targets were chosen "based on credible intelligence inputs" and so as to "avoid damage to civilian infrastructure and loss of any civilian lives.

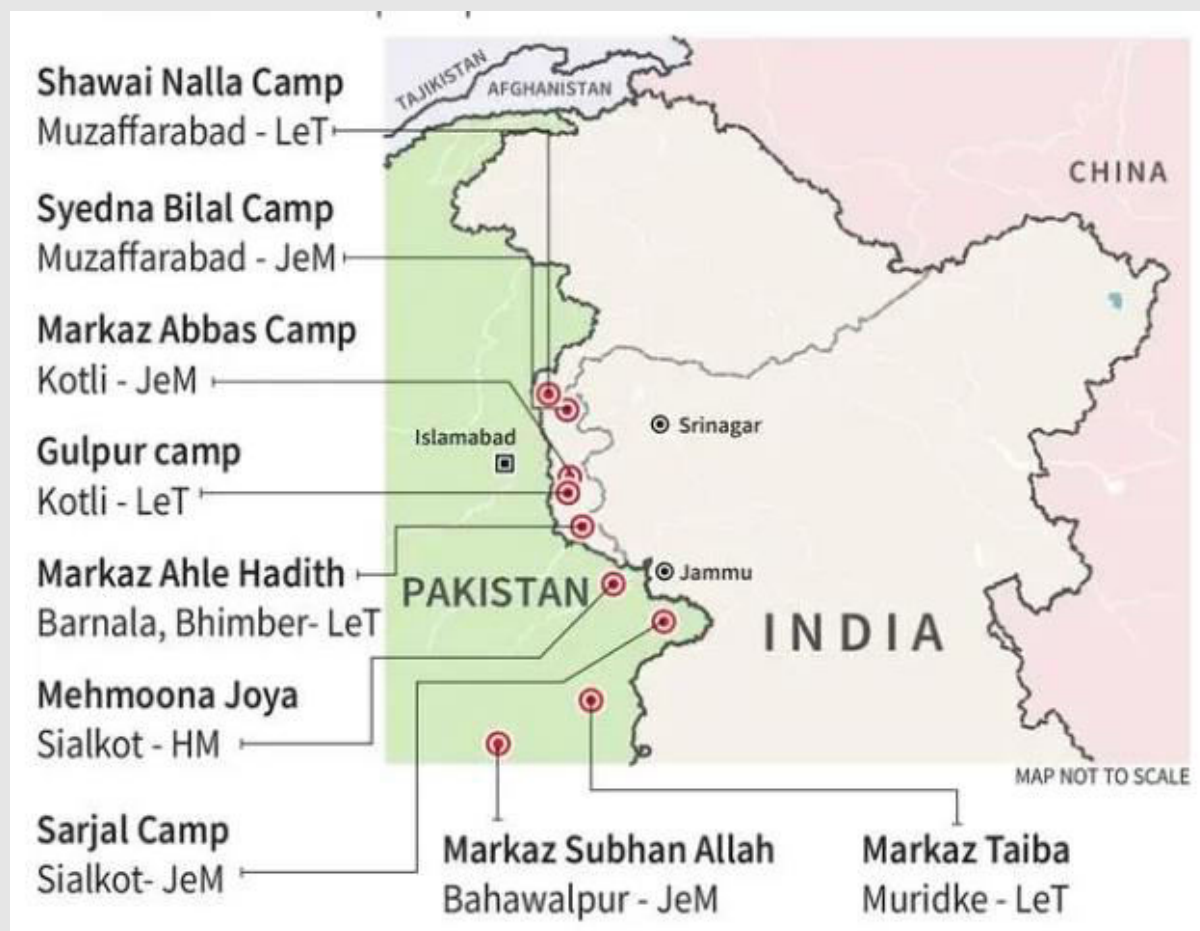
1. Markaz Taiba, Muridke, Pakistan's Punjab

● Hafiz Saeed's headquarters, nerve centre of Lashkar-e-Taiba

The Markaz Taiba in Muridke in Pakistan's Punjab province is the headquarters of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and its front, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). Besides being a site of training and recruitment, the sprawling 200-acre campus serves as the ideological nerve centre of the LeT. It is here that all key terror attacks of the Lashkar are planned and directed.

The facility lies 18-25 km away from the international border (IB), terrorists involved in the 2008 Mumbai attacks — including Ajmal Kasab and David Headley — were trained here.

The Markaz Taiba, as it stands today, was set up in 2000, with Osama bin Laden providing a Rs 1 crore donation for a mosque and a guest house within the campus. The complex includes multiple mosques, residential complexes (including the residence of LeT chief Hafiz Muhammad Saeed), schools, medical facilities, and farmland.



2. Sawai Nala camp, Muzaffarabad, PoK

● Major LeT camp in PoK, where Pahalgam terrorists trained

This camp in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) is located 30 km from the LoC, and is the LeT's most important training centre. The terrorists behind the attacks in Sonmarg and Gulmarg last October, and Pahalgam on April 22, were trained here. The name of this camp also came up after the 2000 Red Fort attack.

According to sources in the security establishment, the camp emerged in the 1990s, at the height of the militancy in Jammu & Kashmir. It has provided combat and weapons training, instruction in survival tactics and guerrilla warfare strategies, and ideological indoctrination to many LeT recruits over the years.

Under international pressure, the Sawai Nala camp was very briefly shut down following the 9/11 and 26/11 terror attacks. In recent times, several terrorists caught while infiltrating into J&K have named this camp as a location where they received training.

3. Syedna Bilal camp, Muzaffarabad, PoK

● Camp for Lashkar and Jaish, terrorist recruits are provided training by Pakistani special forces.

The Indian Army said that this camp was the main staging area for the Jaish-e-Mohammed in PoK, and served as a centre for weapons, explosives, and jungle-survival training. It is located on the Neelum river opposite the Red Fort in Muzaffarabad.

Intelligence sources said the camp is suspected to have come in the late 1990s or early 2000s, and that apart from JeM recruits, LeT fighters, too, are trained here. Photographs retrieved from the phones of killed JeM terrorists have indicated that the Pakistani special forces, the Special Service Group, provide training to the terrorist recruits at this site.

4. Barnala camp, Bhimber, PoK

● Close to the LoC, training camp for mountain and jungle terrain, launchpad for infiltrators

Located 9 km from the LoC in PoK, this is a training centre for weapons handling, assembling IEDs, and jungle-survival.

Security sources said the camp came up in the 1990s, and is used by both the LeT and the JeM terrorist groups. Sources said the camp specialised in preparing militants for mountainous and forested terrains which they would have to reckon with while infiltrating into J&K.

Its close proximity to the LoC also makes the Barnala camp a useful launchpad for terrorists looking to cross into J&K, or for smuggling operations.

5. Abbas camp, Kotli, PoK

● Indoctrination centre and school for fidayeen recruits, located close to Pakistani military camp

The Army said that the camp, located 13 km from the LoC in PoK and only 2 km from the Kotli military camp, is used to prepare fidayeen fighters — suicide attackers — for the JeM.

Sources in the security establishment said this camp too came up in the 1990s. It provides close-quarters battle (CQB) training, breaching and hostage-taking drills, and indoctrination focusing on martyrdom (shahadat) missions.

The camp's name has come in various terror attacks including the one on the J&K Assembly in 2001, and on the Army brigade headquarters in Uri in 2016.

6. Sarjal camp, Narowal, Pakistani Punjab

● Near International Border in Pakistani Punjab, regrouping site before specialised terror training.

This camp lies 6 km away from the IB in Pakistan's Punjab province. The Army said the terrorists who killed four J&K police personnel in March 2025 in Kathua, Jammu, were trained here.

Located inside the premises of a primary health centre in Sarjal village near Sialkot, the camp was established in the late 1990s. Due to its proximity to Punjab and the India border, Sarjal has been used as a staging ground for infiltration and coordinating logistics. It has occasionally served as a resting and regrouping site before militants are moved to more specialised camps in Muzaffarabad and Kotli.

7. Mehmona Joya camp, Sialkot, Pakistan's Punjab

● Initial induction centre for terrorists who infiltrate through Punjab and Jammu.

Hizbul Mujahideen camp lies 12-18 km from the IB in Sialkot district in Pakistan's Punjab province. This facility is used as a launchpad for Hizb terrorists to enter the Jammu region, as well as a training centre for operations and weapons handling.

Militants caught infiltrating through Punjab (Gurdaspur and Pathankot) and Jammu sectors have mentioned Mehmona Joya Camp as one of the initial induction centres, sources said. This camp emerged in the early 2000s when LeT and affiliated groups were expanding their network of tiered training camps.

8. Gulpur camp, Kotli, PoK

● Base of Lashkar units active in Rajouri and Poonch districts.

The Army said that this camp, located 30 km from the LoC in PoK, is a base of LeT units active in Rajouri and Poonch districts. Terrorists involved in the April 20, 2023 attack in Poonch, and the June 9, 2024 attack on a bus carrying pilgrims were trained here, the Army said.

Security establishment sources say the camp came up in the 1990s to provide training to terrorists. The Gulpur camp's significance lies in its location near the border, which allows infiltration into the Poonch and Rajouri regions, as well as the area's terrain, which sources said made the Kotli district conducive for training in guerrilla warfare.

Following the Indian surgical strikes in 2016 and the heightened focus on cross-border terrorism, there were reports that Gulpur and some other camps reduced overt activity. But operations likely continued in a covert manner.

9. Markaz Subhanallah, Bahawalpur, Pakistan's Punjab

● Headquarters of Jaish-e-Mohammed, base of Masood Azhar.

Markaz Subhanallah in Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab province is the headquarters of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). According to the Army, it is 100 km away from the IB, and serves as a centre for recruitment, training, and indoctrination.

Masood Azhar established the JeM in 1999, soon after his release from an Indian prison following the IC 814 hijacking. From the very beginning, the JeM maintained a base at Bahawalpur, Azhar's hometown. By 2009, this had grown into a 15-acre walled complex that reportedly had amenities such as a swimming pool and stables, and was allegedly used for terrorist training.

This complex is situated only 8 kilometres from the headquarters of the Pakistan Army's 31 Corps. Sources said the JeM facility has been associated with the 2016 Pathankot airbase attack, and the 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing, which resulted in the deaths of 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel.

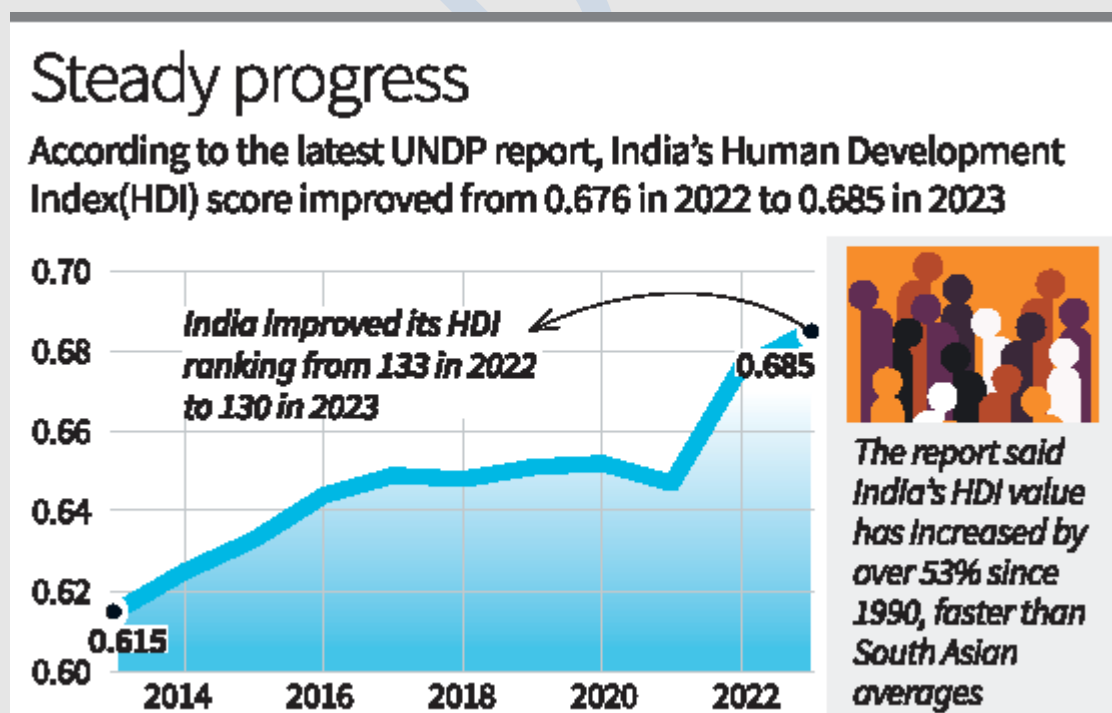
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

10. India climbs 3 spots to 130 among 193 nations in HDI

Improvement in rank

India moved up three spots in the Human Development Index, ranking 130 out of 193 countries in 2023, as per the Human Development Report 2023 released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



With the HDI value improving to 0.685 in 2023 from 0.676 in 2022, India remained in the medium human development category, moving closer to the high human development threshold of 0.700.

Rising Income

The Gross National Income per capita rose over four times to \$9,046.76 in 2023 from \$2,167.22 in 1990, while 135 million Indians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

Better life expectancy

Life expectancy in India rose to 72 years in 2023 from 58.6 years in 1990, the highest since the inception of the index. The report attributed this to the national health programmes followed by successive governments, including the National Rural Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and the Poshan Abhiyaan.

Improving educational standards

Also, children today are expected to stay in school for 13 years on average, up from 8.2 years in 1990. Initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the National Education Policy 2020 have enhanced outcomes. However, quality and learning outcomes remain areas for continued focus.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu

11. Arabian Gulf or Persian Gulf

Why Now?

United States President Donald Trump plans to announce that the US would refer to the Persian Gulf as "Arabian Gulf" or the "Gulf of Arabia" going forward.



What's with Trump and Names?

Trump does have an affinity for changing the names of places: on Day 1 of his second term in the White House, he renamed the Gulf of Mexico "Gulf of America", the Alaskan peak Denali "Mount McKinley, and Fort Liberty, the sprawling US Army base in North Carolina, "Fort Bragg" after the Confederate general Braxton Bragg.

Impact of Recommendation

Trump likely wants to signal to Saudi Arabia his agreement with the Kingdom's preferred nomenclature of the body of water that lies between Iran to the east and Saudi, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to the west, as the "Arabian Gulf".

This body of water – connected to the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Oman – has been called "Persian Gulf" or Gulf of Persia since at least the 16th century, after Persia, the older name of Iran.

However, many countries, especially the Arab countries, refer to it as the Gulf of Arabia or Arabian Gulf.

The US military has for years referred to the "Arabian Gulf" in its statements and images. Google Maps in the US refers to "Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf)", while Apple Maps only says Persian Gulf.

Opposition by Iran

This is an emotive issue for Iran. The name harkens to the civilisational glory of Persia and remains a source of Iranian national pride and inspiration.

Back in 2012, the government of Iran had threatened to sue Google because it had decided not to label the gulf at all in its maps. Then, in 2017, when Trump became President for the first time and used the name Arabian Gulf, Iran's then President Hassan Rouhani suggested that he should "study geography".

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

12. Operation Sindoor signals: Three takeaways from India's action against Pak terror

Operation Sindoor 2025 Analysis



The Indian Armed Forces carried out Operation Sindoor in the early hours of May 7, "to deliver justice to the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack and their families".

Nine terrorist camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Pakistan were targeted and successfully destroyed, the government said in a press briefing.

What signals did the Indian military action send? Here are three broad takeaways from Operation Sindoor.

First, India's response was not just about the terrorist attack in Pahalgam last month.

By framing Sindoor as a reply to the string of attacks since 2001, India has changed the causal chain that links Pakistan with terrorism in this country.

Rather than focus solely on Pahalgam, press briefing framed Sindoor as a response to all significant acts of terrorism sponsored by Pakistan since the attack on Parliament two dozen years ago.

These attacks have been perpetrated and claimed by Pakistan-based and Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which have long been designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations Security Council.

As an example of Pakistan's failure to act legally against these terrorist outfits, India invoked the example of Sajid Mir, the Lashkar terrorist involved in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks whom Pakistan first declared dead, and later showed as having been arrested in 2022 as part of actions taken to comply with requirements imposed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

These same FATF-based compulsions guided the LeT and JeM to switch from directly claiming responsibility for terror attacks in India, to raising proxies such as The Resistance Front or People's Anti-Fascist Force etc, and to ostensibly present their actions as part of a non-religious/ non-Pakistan sponsored "Kashmiri resistance".

Hence, having characterised Pahalgam as the latest and most heinous in a long line of attacks by these terrorist groups, Sindoor targeted the temporary and permanent infrastructure of both the JeM and LeT (and Hizbul Mujahideen) across Pakistan.

Second, India is, for now, focused on the terrorist infrastructure across the Line of Control/ International Border without deliberately targeting the Pakistani military.

India's public messaging to justify its strikes deep into Pakistani territory shows a continuation of the reasoning that it adopted in 2016 and 2019 – that it will act militarily against terrorist infrastructure across the LoC and IB (sub-conventional targets), but without deliberately hitting conventional military targets.

The implication: India continues to make a distinction between terrorist infrastructure and Pakistan military targets in order to preserve some element of escalation control. That said, however, the scale of India's response has changed dramatically.

In 2016, the Indian surgical strikes hit terror camps across the LoC in PoK. In 2019, India struck camps in undisputed Pakistan across the LoC (Jabba Top, Balakot).

And in Op Sindoor, it struck targets deep inside Pakistan, including those across the International Border, along with targets across the LoC.

Third, while striking Pakistan, India has signalled that it does not seek full-scale war. But what happens now remains up in the air.

India has described Sindoor as "focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature", signalling to Pakistan and the international community that it does not seek full-scale conventional war.

However, the strikes have decisively punctured Pakistan's deterrence against India, and the credibility of the threats that it delivered to India between April 23 and May 6.

Any action by Pakistan now will be loaded with further escalatory potential, and would open the door for India to target Pakistan Army infrastructure, should it cross India's threshold of tolerance.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

13. New Pope: Robert Prevost

Why Now?

Robert Francis Prevost has been elected as the 267th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He has chosen the name Pope Leo XIV and is the first American pope in history.

How a New Pope is Elected

Role of the College of Cardinals

When a pope dies or resigns, the leadership of the Catholic Church temporarily shifts to the College of Cardinals. These cardinals, chosen by the pope, come from around the world and wear distinctive red robes.

They hold general meetings (called general congregations) at the Vatican to discuss Church matters and prepare for the election of the next pope.

The Conclave Process

- Only cardinals under age 80 (called cardinal electors) can vote.
- The election takes place in the Sistine Chapel, where the electors take an oath of secrecy.
- Voting is done by secret ballot. Each day, up to four rounds of voting are held.
- To be elected pope, a cardinal must receive two-thirds of the votes.
- If no candidate wins, the ballots are burned with chemicals to create black smoke, signaling no decision.

Announcing the New Pope

Once a cardinal is elected:

1. He is asked if he accepts.
2. He chooses a papal name.
3. He is dressed in papal robes.
4. The final ballots are burned with chemicals to produce white smoke, signaling a new pope has been chosen.

The senior cardinal then announces to the public: "Habemus Papam" ("We have a pope"). The new pope then steps out onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to give his first blessing to the world.

VATICAN CITY

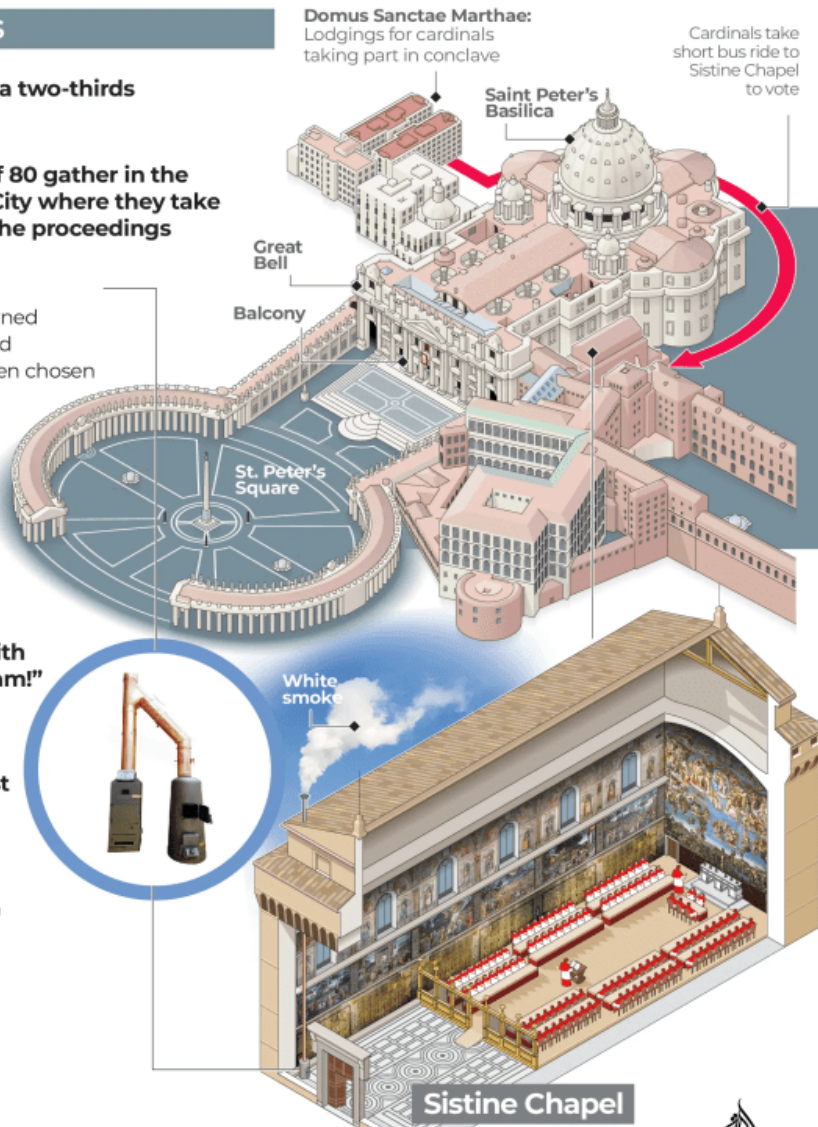
How is the pope selected?

When the pope dies or resigns, the new leader of the Catholic Church is chosen through a papal conclave - a secretive meeting of the College of Cardinals, which is made up of senior church officials from around the world.

HOW THE VOTING WORKS

- 1. A candidate must receive a two-thirds majority to be elected.**
- 2. Cardinals under the age of 80 gather in the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City where they take an oath of secrecy about the proceedings**
- 3. Cardinals vote in secret.**
After each vote, ballots are burned
Black smoke = No pope elected
White smoke = A pope has been chosen
- 4. Once a candidate receives enough votes, they are asked if they accept**
If they say "accepto", they choose a new papal name
- 5. The new pope is then announced to the world with the words "Habemus papam!" ("We have a pope!")**
- 6. The new pope gives his first blessing from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica**

The pope is considered the spiritual head of some 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide and is also the head of Vatican City, the smallest independent country in the world



Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Al Jazeera

14. Turkey's Drones and Pakistan's Attack on India

Why in News?

Pakistan's Drone Offensive and India's Findings

On the night of May 8–9, Pakistan launched a large-scale drone attack on 36 military and civilian sites across India's western border. Indian officials revealed that 300–400 drones were used in this operation. A preliminary forensic probe indicates that many of these drones were Turkish-made Songar armed drones, produced by the defense company Asisguard.

The Songar is Turkey's first indigenous armed drone, designed for low-intensity conflict. It was delivered to the Turkish Armed Forces in 2020 and is now confirmed to be part of Pakistan's arsenal.



Pakistan-Turkey Military Ties: A Deepening Alliance

The use of Turkish drones by Pakistan is not accidental—it reflects deep and growing defense cooperation between the two countries.

- Turkey is Pakistan's second-largest arms supplier after China.
- The two nations have a long-standing military partnership through

mechanisms like the Pakistan-Turkey High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council.

- In recent years, Pakistan has acquired:
 - Bayraktar TB2 drones
 - Kemankes cruise missiles
 - Turkish naval engineering company designed naval corvettes (small warship)
 - Submarine upgrades
- Collaborations between Pakistani and Turkish defense firms, such as Baykar (Turkish defence firm) and NASTP (National Aerospace Science and Technology Park, based in Pakistan), have also increased, enhancing Pakistan's drone and aerospace capabilities.

Turkey's Political Support for Pakistan

Turkey hasn't just helped Pakistan militarily—it has also been one of its most vocal international supporters, especially on the Kashmir issue.

- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has regularly backed Pakistan's stance on Kashmir.
- After India's recent strike on terror sites in Pakistan and PoK, Erdogan called PM Shehbaz Sharif to express solidarity, praising Pakistan's "calm and restrained policies."
- During the ongoing crisis, Pakistan's parliament thanked Turkey, China, and Azerbaijan for their open support.

Turkey was the only West Asian country to condemn India's Operation Sindoor, further underlining its alignment with Islamabad.

Geopolitical Context: Why Turkey Backs Pakistan

The Turkey-Pakistan alliance is rooted in shared Islamic identity, Cold War-era alliances, and strategic competition with Gulf rivals like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both of whom are now closer to India.

- Ideological alignment: Both Erdogan and past Pakistani leaders have promoted political Islam.
 - Strategic competition: Turkey's outreach to Pakistan is partly to offset Saudi dominance in the Muslim world.
 - Naval cooperation: Turkey is expanding its influence in the Indian Ocean Region, aligning closely with Pakistan's navy.
- Erdogan's frequent visits to Pakistan and joint initiatives reflect a long-term vision for Turkey to play a bigger role in South Asia.

India's Response and Strategic Concerns

For India, Turkey's growing military and political support to Pakistan is a serious concern.

- The use of Turkish drones in direct attacks on Indian soil is seen as a red flag.
- India has traditionally enjoyed good ties with most West Asian nations, but Turkey remains an exception, often taking hostile positions.
- New Delhi is adjusting its geopolitical and defense strategies to counter the Pakistan-Turkey nexus while strengthening ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other partners.

Conclusion

Pakistan's use of Turkish Songar drones in the recent cross-border attack underlines a dangerous escalation in the region—powered by foreign military support and deep strategic ties. While India successfully repelled the incursion, the evolving defense partnership between Turkey and Pakistan poses long-term security and geopolitical challenges for New Delhi.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express & The Hindu

15. What is the "Fog of War"?

Meaning

The "fog of war" refers to the confusion and lack of clarity that often surrounds military conflicts. It includes the challenges in getting accurate information during such times, especially regarding the strength, movements, and intentions of enemy forces.

Origin of the Term



The phrase was first used in 1896 by British Colonel Lonsdale Augustus Hale, who described the term as the “state of ignorance” faced by military commanders in understanding real-time battlefield conditions.

Later, the U.S. armed forces adopted the term to describe operational difficulties—including intelligence gaps and information warfare—that can affect decision-making during war.

Why is “Fog of War” in the News Now?

The term is being widely used again due to the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan. Analysts and media commentators are invoking it to highlight the confusion and uncertainty surrounding recent developments, including both military actions and the information being circulated about them.

The Role of Misinformation

The “fog of war” today is not limited to the battlefield. It also applies to the spread of false or misleading information, especially on social media platforms.

Examples include:

- AI-generated videos
- Old videos reused with misleading captions
- Completely fake news stories

Some of these false claims include:

- ATMs being shut down across India
- A nationwide ban on entering Indian airports

How is the Government Responding?

To tackle the surge in misinformation:

- The Press Information Bureau’s (PIB) fact-check unit is actively debunking fake claims.
- The Indian government has used its legal powers to block online content it considers misleading or harmful.
- Several Pakistani news accounts have been blocked in India.
- X (formerly Twitter), owned by Elon Musk, announced it has complied with Indian government orders to remove over 8,000 accounts, including those of international news outlets and influential users.

Why It Matters

During such tense periods, accurate information becomes both vital and scarce. The combination of real-world conflict and online misinformation deepens the uncertainty, making it difficult even for experts to distinguish fact from fiction in real-time.

This is the modern “fog of war”—not just about what’s happening on the battlefield, but also about what people believe is happening.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

16. Why Did the IMF Give Money to Pakistan?

Why in News?



On May 9, 2025, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a loan of \$1 billion (around ₹8,500 crore) to Pakistan. This is part of a larger \$7 billion loan program called the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), which was started in September 2024. So far, Pakistan has received \$2.1 billion from this program.

In addition, the IMF also approved a new loan of \$1.4 billion under a separate program called the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).

What Is the EFF? Is It a Loan or a Grant?

- The EFF is a loan, not a grant or aid.
- It is designed to help countries that cannot pay for essential imports (like fuel or food) due to serious structural problems in their economy.
- These problems may include:
 - Poor infrastructure
 - Weak education and health systems
 - High government debt
 - Underdeveloped financial systems

Since fixing these issues takes time, the IMF gives a longer period for countries to repay EFF loans.

Why Does Pakistan Qualify for the EFF?

Pakistan’s economy has weakened over the decades. Despite being a nuclear power, its economic indicators have worsened:

- GDP is stagnant: In 2023, Pakistan’s GDP was \$338 billion, which is lower than in 2017.
- Inflation is very high: Prices have more than doubled since 2019.
- Major economic issues:
 - Poor economic planning
 - High population growth
 - Low savings and investments
 - Weak infrastructure
 - Limited female participation in the workforce

Pakistan has borrowed not only from the IMF (28 loans in 35 years) but also from:

- China
- Saudi Arabia
- UAE
- Asian Development Bank
- Islamic Development Bank
- And several other global institutions

Why Did the IMF Approve the Latest Loan Now?

The IMF's loan was not automatic — it was approved after a detailed review of Pakistan's economic policies. The IMF said:

- Pakistan has made progress in stabilising its economy.
- Inflation has dropped sharply, hitting just 0.3% in April 2025.
- Foreign exchange reserves have improved.
- The central bank was able to cut interest rates due to better economic conditions.
- The government's 2025 budget includes key reforms, such as introducing an Agricultural Income Tax, which helped regain international confidence.

India's Response

India expressed strong objections to the IMF's decision, especially because of recent military tensions between India and Pakistan. India:

- Abstained from voting on the loan (countries cannot vote "No").
- Highlighted Pakistan's poor track record with IMF loans.
- Warned that such funds could be misused, possibly even for state-sponsored terrorism.

Conclusion

Pakistan continues to rely heavily on international loans due to deep-rooted economic challenges. The IMF's latest approval reflects some improvement in economic management, but long-term reforms are essential if Pakistan is to avoid repeated financial crises.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

17. Operation Sindoor: All about Pakistan Air Force assets that India hit

Introduction

Indian missiles and drones inflicted heavy damage on at least eight Pakistan Air Force bases and several radar & air defence units in a withering aerial attack last week. While Pakistani air defences were knocked out, the enemy's own aerial attacks were unable to breach Indian air defences.

PAF Base Nur Khan, Rawalpindi

- Close to Pak Army HQ, n-command

Home to the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF's) Air Mobility Command and the PAF College Chaklala, this is one of Pakistan's most vital air bases, which plays a key role in logistics, VIP transport, strategic operations, and aviator training.



Chaklala Airfield (Nur Khan)

The base houses PAF transport aircraft such as Lockheed C-130 Hercules, Ilyushin Il-78 refuellers, and trainers such as Karakoram-8. With the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters and the Strategic Plans Division — the operational arm of the country's nuclear command — in the vicinity, the base lies at the heart of the Pakistani military establishment.

PAF Base Chaklala was renamed PAF Base Nur Khan in 2012, in honour of Air Marshal Nur Khan, the base's first Pakistani commander in 1947 who went on to lead the Pakistan Air Force from 1965 to 1969.

PAF Base Murid, Chakwal

- Home base for Pakistan's drone fleet

The Murid base is the home base of Pakistan's growing fleet of combat drones, and one of the PAF's most important forward operational flying bases today.

Its more than eight hangars house unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) such as the indigenously developed GIDS Shahpar and NESCOM Burraq, the Chinese Chengdu Wing Loong II, and the Turkish Bayraktar TB2.

PAF Base Sukkur, Sukkur

- Doubles as a civilian airport, important for northern Sindh

This is another forward operational base of the PAF which doubles as the Begum Nusrat Bhutto International Airport Sukkur, the second major civilian airport operational in Sindh after Karachi's Jinnah International Airport.



Originally built as a military aerodrome during World War II, the Sukkur base operates under PAF's Southern Air Command.

PAF Base Rahim Yar Khan, Rahim Yar Khan

- Runway knocked out by Indian strike, base shut for repairs



The Rahim Yar Khan base is a forward operational base of the PAF's Central Command. Its sole runway is also used by the Sheikh Zayed International Airport, named after Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the first President of the UAE, who funded the construction of the airport's terminal. Day-to-day operations at the airport are handled by the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA).

After India's strike at the air base, which has left a massive crater on its runway, all flight operations have been suspended for a week.

PAF Base Mushaf, Sargodha

- Most strategic PAF base, home to best fighters, pilots

Considered to be the most vital strategic asset of the PAF, the Sargodha base is home to Pakistan's best fighter aircraft and pilots, as well as the headquarters of the Central Air Command, the Combat Commanders' School, and the Airpower Centre of Excellence.



Aircraft such as the American F-16 Fighting Falcon, Chinese Chengdu J-7, French Mirage 5, and the JF-17 Thunder, the mainstay of PAF's fighter fleet developed jointly with China, are stationed at the base.

The Sargodha base was a prime target of Indian air attacks during the 1965 war, during which India destroyed 10 Pakistani aircraft at the base. After this, the PAF reserved much of its fighter fleet to protect Sargodha rather than sending them to the front.

The base was renamed in 2003 in honour of Air Chief Marshal Mushaf Ali Mir who had died in an aircraft crash earlier that year.

PAF Base Shahbaz, Jacobabad

- Crucial NATO base during War on Terror, important for Pak's F-16s

JACOBABAD AIRFIELD



Heavily used by NATO forces during Operation Enduring Freedom, the official moniker of the US-led Global War on Terrorism, the Jacobabad base is home to some of PAF's most advanced aircraft and equipment.

These include the latest JF-17 Block II, multiple variants of the F-16 Fighting Falcon, and the Italian Leonardo AW139 helicopters of the 88 Search and Rescue Squadron.

According to local media reports, the base also houses private contractors who work on the American F-16s.

PAF Base Rafiqui, Shorkot

- Base for JF-17 and Mirage 5 fighters

Located 337 km to the south of Islamabad, this base is a vital asset of PAF's Northern Air Command. It is home to squadrons of JF-17, Mirage 5, and the French utility helicopter Alouette III.

The base is named in honour of Sq Ldr Sarfaraz Ahmed Rafiqui, one of Pakistan's most decorated fighter pilots, famous for his exploits during the war of 1965.

PAF Base Bholari, Jamshoro

- Newest Pak's air base, where Pak & China held major aerial exercise in 2020

Inaugurated as recently as December 2017, this is one of Pakistan's most modern main operational bases. It is home to squadrons of both the JF-17 Thunder and F-16 Fighting Falcon, as well as Saab 2000 AEWACs (airborne early warning and control aircraft) aircraft fitted with the Erieye radar system.

In 2020, the base hosted Exercise Shaheen IX, a major joint Pakistani-Chinese aerial exercise.

Radar sites and air defence units

- Pasrur, Sialkot district, Punjab
- Sialkot, Punjab
- Chunian, Kasur district, Punjab
- Lahore, Punjab
- Malir Cantt, Karachi, Sindh

India also struck at least three radar sites in Pakistan's Punjab province, close to the border with the Indian state of Punjab and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, as well as two air defence units — one in Lahore and the other in Malir Cantonment, Karachi.

These were all likely a part of Pakistan's larger air defence system.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

18. Why US & China have agreed to temporarily slash tariffs

Why in News?

After two days of high-level negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland, the United States and China announced a 90-day pause in their trade war, suspending the high tariffs and non-tariff barriers that the two countries had put in place recently.

What were the tariffs until now?

Since February 1, US President Donald Trump has imposed tariffs on China for a variety of reasons. The first lot of tariffs was for the sale of fentanyl, an opioid that is responsible for thousands of deaths due to overdose in the US. On April 2, which Trump designated as "Liberation Day", Washington imposed an additional 34% tariffs on China.

China responded with its own counter-tariffs, unlike most other countries. By April 10, the tariffs had reached a prohibitive level. The US had imposed 145% tariffs on China, and China had responded with 125% tariffs on US imports. At this 145% rate, the price of an \$100-worth imported Chinese good in the US would rise to an eye-watering \$245.

In addition to tariffs, China also imposed some non-tariff barriers on the US, such as export restrictions on rare earth minerals, and restrictions/investigations against multiple US companies.

What is the situation now?

After the truce, the base tariff rates have fallen to 10% for both countries. However, the US continues to levy a 20% tariff on account of fentanyl smuggling.

So effectively, consumers in the US now face a tariff of 30% on imports from China, and consumers in China face a tariff of 10% for imports from the US.

China has also suspended the non-tariff barriers it installed after April 2.

THE TRADE WAR BETWEEN US & CHINA

FEB 1: Trump imposes 10% tariffs on China, 25% on Mexico and Canada, citing fentanyl crisis

FEB 4: As tariffs on China take effect, Beijing puts 15% tariffs on US coal, LNG; 10% on crude

MAR 4: Another 10% US tariffs; total now 20%. China responds with up to 15% on key US farm products

APR 2: On "Liberation Day" Trump announces 34% on all Chinese goods from April 9

APR 4: China announces its own 34% effective April 10, as well as controls on rare earths exports

APR 7: Trump threatens additional 50% tariffs if China doesn't back down

APR 9–10: The US levies 84% additional tariffs, bringing the total to 104%. China retaliates with 84% tariffs, effective April 10. Trump then raises it to 125%, totalling 145%.

APR 11: China raises tariffs to 125%, effective Apr 12, and declares no further hikes

APR 13: Trump exempts smartphones, computers and other electronics, subjecting them only to a 20% tariff

MAY 6: Talks in Geneva announced

Why were tariffs placed in the first place?

Explaining the rationale behind the tariffs, the US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer yet again pointed to the \$1.2 trillion trade deficit on goods that the US had with the rest of the world. This essentially means that US consumers import goods worth \$1.2 trillion more than what the consumers in the rest of the world import from the US.

The Trump administration sees a trade deficit negatively, saying it is proof of the fact that the rest of the world is "ripping off" the US. That is because, as Greer argues, while the US opens its markets to the rest of the world, other countries protect their companies, and subsidise them to take over the US market.

Greer said the trade deficit had ballooned more than 40% since the end of President Trump's first term in 2020. He also underscored that merely talking and requesting other countries to open their markets had not helped over the decades, and that imposing high tariffs was the most logical way forward.

Why has there been a truce?

Tariffs are not the solution to trade imbalances. Put simply, they are counterproductive, and hurt the domestic economy's consumers while protecting its producers. But since the hurt on consumers is spread over a large number of individuals and the benefit of protection is concentrated over a small number of producers, it can appear that tariffs help.

Unsurprisingly, the US economy started wilting under the price pressure of tariffs because all imports started getting costlier. There was a genuine risk that if this truce had not been announced, the shelves in retailers such as Walmart would have soon become empty.

The US economy contracted in the first quarter of 2025, before the full effects of the highest tariffs would have even been registered. After the April 2 announcement, the consensus view among economists was that the US was set to face recession — that is, two consecutive quarters when the overall GDP declines in absolute terms. Worse, with tariffs raising the price level, the odds of the US facing a stagflation — economic stagnation coupled with high inflation — were becoming higher.

So, which country won the tariff war?

There are no winners in a tariff war. However, currently, it appears that China has managed to get the better of the US.

For instance, even though China's exports to the US fell by 21% in April, its overall exports grew by 8%. According to an Axis Bank analysis, China's trade surplus grew by \$96 billion in April. In the quarter where the US contracted, China's GDP exceeded expectations by growing by 5.4%.

Also, at 10% baseline tariffs, China now faces the same rate that the United States' traditional allies, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, face. These are the rare countries which had a trade deficit with the US, and still got charged with a 10% tariff rate.

The 20% tariffs on fentanyl are likely to go away, given the fact that both Greer and US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent spoke positively about China's engagement on the issue.

What's next?

The immediate reaction from all market parameters is positive, but that should be seen as a huge sigh of relief. Investors can see that the worst possible outcome — a trade embargo between the world's two largest economies — is behind them.



Stock markets have risen, and so has the US dollar and the price of oil — all pointing to better economic prospects — while prices of assets (gold and government bonds) that are considered safe havens have fallen.

However, the fact is that this is not a “deal”. It is just a truce to start talks. As there is no clarity on who called first for talks in Geneva, the actual negotiations could be quite thorny and tense.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

19. India asserts J&K stand after U.S. claims

Clearing the air India rebuts Trump's statements against the backdrop of Operation Sindoor, the understanding between India and Pakistan	
	Trump/Rubio statements
	■ U.S. brokered India-Pakistan ceasefire
	■ Averted nuclear conflict
	■ Threatened to stop trade
	■ Will mediate on Kashmir
	■ Hyphenated India and Pakistan
	MEA response
	■ Agreement directly via DGMOs; it was requested by Pak. due to 'effective' IAF strikes
	■ Military action in conventional domain only
	■ No discussion on trade with U.S. during Operation Sindoor
	■ Talks will be bilateral, and topic will be PoK's return
	■ No hyphenation; international community stands with India on terrorism
	■ India and Pakistan to talk at neutral venue
	■ No such discussion planned

India's Stand

Responding to U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks on the Kashmir issue, India reiterated its “long-standing national position” that regards Jammu and Kashmir as a “bilateral” issue to be addressed within the framework of India-Pakistan ties.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the only subject India wished to raise was Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and that the matter of India-U.S. trade did not figure in the telephone conversations the leadership of India and the U.S. held against the backdrop of Operation Sindoor.

Claim by Trump

Mr. Trump has been speaking on his behind-the-scene role in bringing the hostilities between India and Pakistan to a pause.

Shortly before India announced the “understanding” to pause firing and military action, Mr. Trump had said in a post on Truth Social on May 10 that the U.S. had mediated between India

and Pakistan, leading to a “full and immediate ceasefire”. The announcements from the Indian side were made by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar thereafter. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar announced the “ceasefire with immediate effect” the same evening.

On 12th, Mr. Trump elaborated on his earlier statements while interacting with reporters at the White House. “I said [to the Indian and Pakistani leadership], let’s stop it. If you stop it, we’re doing trade. If you don’t stop it, we’re not going to do any trade,” Mr. Trump said. “I think it could have been a bad nuclear war. Millions of people could have been killed. So I’m very proud of that,” he added.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

20. Qatar’s \$400-million aircraft gift to Trump: Legal, ethical concerns up in the air

Introduction



President Donald Trump is setting the stage to accept a \$400-million gift — a Boeing 747 jet from the royal family of Qatar. The jet, officials say, would serve temporarily as Air Force One and eventually find a home in Trump’s presidential library.

The offer has ignited a firestorm, not only because of the staggering value but because

it challenges a longstanding tradition of restraint around foreign gifts.

All about the luxury jet from Qatar

The plane in question — the luxury Boeing 747 fitted with three bedrooms, a private lounge, and an executive office — is one of the most extravagant gifts ever offered to a US president. The plane is likely to be re-fitted and used temporarily as Air Force One.

The two Air Force One planes have been in use for almost 40 years, and their revamp has been delayed for various reasons. Trump, who is annoyed by the delays, has called the offer from Qatar “a great gesture” that would be “stupid” to turn down.

Concerns

Apart from the question of accepting a staggeringly expensive gift, there are two other concerns — the Air Force One is the official vehicle of the US President, and a foreign nation supplying it sits odd with Trump’s claims of making the US a manufacturing powerhouse. Then there is the security aspect. The Air Force One is equipped with a variety of defence and communications equipment. Accommodating all of this on a foreign-made, refitted plane would not be easy.

What does the US law say about gifts to the President?

The US Constitution's Emoluments Clause — Article I, Section 9, Clause 8 — was designed to shield the republic from foreign influence.

The clause reads: "No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State."

Besides the clause, there have been a number of laws also by the Congress related to lawmakers accepting foreign gifts, such as the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, which means that congressional consent is required for the acceptance of foreign gifts above a certain value.

US law allows federal officials to retain gifts valued under \$480. Anything above that amount is legally considered a gift to the United States, not to the individual. It must be reported and handled through the White House Gift Unit.

If a president desires to keep a gift personally, they can purchase it at fair market value.

How have some notable gifts been handled in the past?

Foreign dignitaries have routinely offered US Presidents numerous gifts — from animals to artwork to antiquities. Most of these items are not kept by the president personally, but are instead logged, assessed for value, and often stored in the National Archives or displayed in presidential libraries.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

21. Birthright Citizenship in US

Why Now?



The US Supreme Court will hear arguments over the legality of an executive order issued by President Donald Trump that seeks to end birthright citizenship. It is aimed at children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants and temporary visa holders. The outcome of the case could determine the future course of American citizenship law. The US Supreme Court has already issued nationwide injunctions staying the order.

What is Birthright Citizenship?

According to the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

The provision has been widely interpreted to make citizens of anyone born on American soil, except for:

- The children of diplomats who have allegiance to another government.
- Enemies present in the US during hostile occupation.

The concept itself is centuries old and is based on the English common law principle of 'jus soli', or 'right of soil', granting automatic citizenship to anyone born within a country's boundaries regardless of the nationality of their parents.

Why does Trump want to end Birthright Citizenship?

On his first day of office, Trump signed an executive order denying citizenship to children of parents who were not themselves US citizens or lawful permanent residents. According to the order, this targeted people who were illegally or temporarily present in the country because they are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States.

Is the US really the only country to practise Birthright Citizenship?

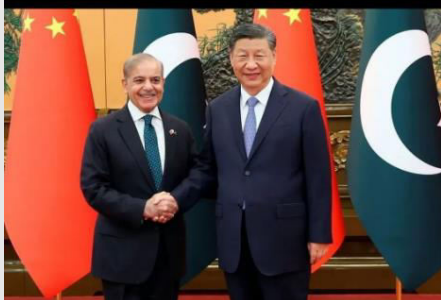
No. At least 37 other countries grant citizenship to anyone born on their soil, mostly in South America and the Caribbean. India does not practice unconditional birthright citizenship, nor do several European countries.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

22. China: Support for Pakistan and Trade Deal with US

China Vows Unwavering Support To Its 'Iron-Clad Ally', Pakistan After Ceasefire With India



1. China Supports Pakistan After India-Pakistan Ceasefire

- On May 10, India and Pakistan announced a ceasefire.
 - China expressed willingness to play a constructive role and spoke to Indian and Pakistani leaders.
 - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi:
 - Told India's Ajit Doval that China condemns terrorism.
 - Told Pakistan's Ishaq Dar that Pakistan has made major contributions to the fight against terrorism.
 - Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif praised China as a "trustworthy friend."
- India showed evidence of a Chinese-made missile (PL-15) shot down during Operation Sindoor.
 - Taiwan backed India, calling its actions against cross-border terrorism legitimate.

Upshot:

China supported Pakistan's narrative while avoiding mention of its own role in blocking UN action on terror groups. Taiwan's support for India was one of the strongest global statements, despite limited diplomatic ties with India.

2. US-China Tariff Deal Brings Relief

- On May 12, China and the US agreed to significantly reduce tariffs, helping ease tensions from their ongoing trade war.
- US tariff on Chinese goods dropped from 145% to 30% (including a 20% fentanyl-related surcharge).
- China reduced its tariff on US goods from 125% to 10%.
- A new dialogue mechanism was set up between trade officials to prevent future escalations.

Upshot:

Both sides want economic stability and trade cooperation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

23. Why the Northeast-Kolkata Link via Myanmar Matters

Shifting Priorities: From Bangladesh to Myanmar

India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), which connects Mizoram to Kolkata via Myanmar, has gained importance due to deteriorating ties with Bangladesh. The project offers a critical alternative route to the Northeast that bypasses Bangladesh.

Tensions with Bangladesh

Relations with Bangladesh have cooled since former PM Sheikh Hasina, a long-time ally of India, was ousted in 2023.

Recently, Bangladesh's interim leader called the Northeast "landlocked" and claimed Bangladesh was its "only gateway to the ocean"—remarks that troubled New Delhi.

India's Strategic Vulnerability: The 'Chicken's Neck'

India currently connects to the Northeast through the Siliguri Corridor, a narrow 20-km wide strip between Nepal and Bangladesh.

This "Chicken's Neck" is seen as a strategic weak point, prompting India to seek alternative access routes.

Kaladan Project: A Strategic Alternative

What is the KMMTTP?

A project signed in 2008 between India and Myanmar, the Kaladan Project aims to connect Kolkata to Mizoram via:

- Sea to Sittwe port in Myanmar

- River to Paletwa via the Kaladan River
- Road to Zorinpui (Mizoram border), and then to Aizawl and the rest of the Northeast



Key Benefits

- Cuts 1,000 km in distance between Kolkata and Mizoram
- Reduces travel time by 3–4 days
- Enhances connectivity without relying on Bangladesh

Components of the Kaladan Corridor

Segment	Mode	Status
Kolkata to Sittwe	Sea (539 km)	Completed
Sittwe to Paletwa	River (158 km)	Completed
Paletwa to Zorinpui	Road (108 km)	Partially incomplete (last 50 km pending)

Segment	Mode	Status
Zorinpui to Aizawl & beyond	Road	Operational; further upgrades planned

India has also approved a Shillong-Silchar four-lane highway, which will extend to Zorinpui and boost the corridor's utility.

Why the Delay?

Political and Security Challenges in Myanmar

- Myanmar's ethnic conflicts and 2021 military coup disrupted progress.
- The region through which the road passes is controlled by the Arakan Army, labeled a terrorist group by Myanmar's military.

India's Response

- In 2022, India signed a deal with Indian Railway Construction International Limited (IRCON) to complete the project within 40 months.
- Local contractors have been engaged, but on-ground progress remains slow.

Arakan Army's Stance

Interestingly, the Arakan Army claims to support the project, offering security since 2021 and denying any threat to the construction.

The Bigger Picture

With strained ties with Bangladesh and instability in Myanmar, India's goal is clear: secure independent and reliable access to its Northeastern states. The Kaladan Project is now more than a connectivity initiative — it is a strategic lifeline.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

24. India Imposes Restrictions on Bangladeshi Exports via Land Ports

Background: A Reciprocal Move

India has restricted Bangladeshi exports through land ports in response to Bangladesh's April 13 decision to stop Indian yarn exports via land routes, allowing them only through seaports.

New Indian Rules

- From now on, Bangladesh can export ready-made garments to India only via the seaports of Kolkata and Nhava Sheva (Mumbai).
- These shipments will undergo mandatory inspections at the ports.



- Exports through land ports in Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram are no longer permitted for these items.

Additional Items Restricted via Land Ports

India has also restricted the import of certain non-essential and locally producible items through northeastern land ports. These include:

- Ready-made garments
- Plastic products
- Wooden furniture
- Juices and carbonated drinks
- Fruit-flavoured drinks
- Bakery and confectionery items
- Cotton yarn and dyes

These restrictions will also apply to Fulbari and Changrabandha land ports in northern West Bengal.

Why the Restrictions?

- India accuses Bangladesh of “cherry-picking” trade policies by selectively allowing exports.
- Officials said Bangladesh has also stopped Indian rice exports via Hili and Benapole from April 15.
- The move aims to protect India’s local manufacturing, especially in the Northeast.

Strategic and Political Angle

India's decision follows a controversial statement by Bangladesh's interim Prime Minister Muhammad Yunus during his visit to China. He described India’s Northeast as “landlocked” and suggested Chinese companies could access the region through Bangladesh, portraying Bangladesh as a “gateway to the ocean”.

Impact and Significance

- 93% of Bangladeshi garment exports to India currently go through land ports, so the new policy will have a significant impact on trade.
- Indian state governments, especially in the Northeast and West Bengal, have already been briefed.
- Officials say the decision is part of a broader economic message and geopolitical response.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

25. India’s global outreach on Operation Sindoor

Seven all-party delegations

Seven all-party delegations on Operation Sindoor, led by Shashi Tharoor, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Shrikant Shinde, Baijayant Jay Panda, Supriya Sule, Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, and Sanjay Jha, will travel to various countries soon. The seven delegations are scheduled to visit 32 countries, including the European Union headquarters in Belgium.

The Centre released the list of seven all-party delegations that will soon travel to key partner countries, including members of the United Nations Security Council and the European Union, to convey India's message of zero tolerance against terrorism following the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor.

Speaking as one

In the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, seven all-party delegations led by the following leaders will visit up to 35 global capitals to explain India's stance on terrorism



Shashi Tharoor,
Congress



Ravi Shankar Prasad, BJP



Kanimozhi,
DMK

■ **Sanjay Kumar Jha, JDU** ■ **Baijayant Panda, BJP**
■ **Supriya Sule, NCP** ■ **Shrikant Shinde, Shiv Sena**

Details

The seven delegations comprise 59 members, including 31 political leaders from the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and 20 politicians from other parties. They will be assisted by former diplomats.

These delegations will be led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs Baijayant Jay Panda (Group 1) and Ravi Shankar Prasad (Group 2); Janata Dal (United) leader Sanjay Jha (Group 3); Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde (Group 4); Congress's Shashi Tharoor (Group 5); Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi (Group 6); and Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar) leader Supriya Sule (Group 7).

Group 1

Countries visiting: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Algeria

Led by BJP MP Baijayant Jay Panda, the eight-member group also includes former J&K Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and retired diplomat Harsh Shringla.

Group 2

UK, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, and European Union

The group visiting European countries and the European Union headquarters in Belgium is led by BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad. It also includes former Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar and former Indian Ambassador to Russia Pankaj Saran.

Group 3

Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore

The group led by Janata Dal (United) MP Sanjay Kumar Jha is tasked with carrying India's message to key Southeast Asian countries. The delegation also includes former Union Minister for External Affairs Salman Khurshid, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, and Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee.

Group 4

United Arab Emirates, Liberia, Congo, and Sierra Leone

Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Eknath Shinde is leading India's delegation to the UAE and key partner countries in Africa. The delegation also includes IUML MP from Kerala E.T. Mohammed Basheer and former diplomat Sujan Chinoy.

Group 5

United States of America, Panama, Guyana, Brazil, and Colombia

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, who also served as Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, is leading the delegation to the United States of America and other key countries in the Americas. Former Ambassador to the United States Taranjit Singh Sandhu is also part of the delegation.

Group 6

Spain, Greece, Slovenia, Latvia, and Russia

India's delegation to Russia and Spain is led by DMK MP from Tamil Nadu, Kanimozhi Karunanidhi. The group also includes two former diplomats, Manjeev S. Puri and Jawed Ashraf.

Group 7

Egypt, Qatar, Ethiopia, and South Africa

The delegation led by NCP MP Supriya Sule will visit Egypt, Qatar, Ethiopia, and South Africa. The group includes Congress leaders Manish Tewari and Anand Sharma, along with V. Muraleedharan, former Minister of State for External Affairs, and Syed Akbaruddin, former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in Geneva.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

26. Did Trump Cross the Line on Kashmir?

Background

U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that the U.S. brokered the May 10 ceasefire between India and Pakistan. India's Ministry of External Affairs, including Minister S. Jaishankar, strongly denied this claim. Trump's statements, especially about Kashmir, have raised concerns in India over interference in a highly sensitive issue.

Why Did Trump's Comments Cause Uproar?

- **Misleading Statements:** Trump took credit for brokering a ceasefire just before India's Foreign Secretary announced it.
- **Erroneous Claims:** He inaccurately called the Kashmir conflict a "thousand-year-old" issue.
- **Violation of Indian Policy:** His repeated offers to mediate on Kashmir go against India's core foreign policy principles:
 - No third-party mediation.
 - No hyphenation with Pakistan.
 - No internationalisation of Kashmir.
 - Focus on terrorism as the key issue.

India's Stance on Internationalisation of Kashmir

- **Historical Context:** In 1947, PM Nehru went to the UN over Pakistan's occupation of part of Kashmir but did not seek international arbitration.
- **Simla Accord (1972):** India and Pakistan agreed to resolve issues bilaterally.
- **1994 Parliamentary Resolution:** Declared Jammu and Kashmir an integral part of India and demanded Pakistan vacate occupied areas.
- **Post-2019 Position:** After the revocation of Article 370, India asserted that any future talks with Pakistan would be about reclaiming Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Has Third-Party Mediation Ever Happened?

- **UN Involvement:** Initially involved, but made irrelevant after the Simla Accord.
- **Soviet Mediation:** Led to the Tashkent Declaration after the 1965 war.
- **U.S. Role:** Typically informal—helped reduce tensions but did not mediate officially. Notable moments include:
 - President Clinton during Kargil War (1999) encouraged dialogue but did not intervene directly.
 - Post-Balakot (2019), Trump claimed to have helped secure release of an Indian pilot but was rebuffed when he offered mediation on Kashmir.

Is Direct Dialogue with Pakistan Possible?

- **Stalled Talks:** No major bilateral engagement since 2015.
- **Closed Channels:** Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and Kartarpur corridor has narrowed communication.
- **Back-Channel Use:** Security-level talks have occurred for crisis management, not political negotiation.
- **Current Indian Stand:** Talks will only cover terrorism and the return of PoK—conditions Pakistan finds unacceptable.

Conclusion

President Trump's comments have not only misrepresented facts but also crossed key boundaries of India's foreign policy. While direct India-Pakistan dialogue remains stalled, third-party mediation continues to be off the table for India. The Modi government is focused on addressing cross-border terrorism without internationalising the Kashmir issue.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations
Source: The Hindu

27. Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir promoted to Field Marshal

Why now?

The Pakistan government announced that the Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistan Army, General Asim Munir, is being promoted to the rank of Field Marshal.

His promotion was announced by the presidential cabinet for "successfully" leading the armed forces in the recent conflict with India, according to state-run TV.

He will be the second person in history to hold this rank, after Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1959.

Who is a Field Marshal?

The Indian and Pakistani armies are modelled on the British army's system of ranks and privileges. A Field Marshal or FM is a five-star officer rank, and the highest attainable rank, above the general.

The FM rank in the Indian Army is equivalent to the Admiral of the fleet in the Indian Navy and the Marshal of the Indian Air Force.

India has had two FMs: Sam Manekshaw was the first, ascending to the rank in January 1973. KM Cariappa was the second Field Marshal and was promoted in January 1986. India has also had one Marshal of the Air Force, Arjan Singh, who was elevated to the rank in 2002.

What does the Field Marshal Rank entail?

The Field Marshal rank is typically bestowed on generals for ceremonial reasons or during wartime. A Field Marshal is considered to be on 'active list' until his death.

While a Field Marshal does not hold any office in official capacity beyond his date of retirement, he is entitled to wear his uniform at any event he deems fit. He wears special badges of rank, has five stars displayed on his vehicle, and as per tradition, salutes with the special Field Marshal's baton raised to the forehead and not the hand as is the norm in a military salute.

And who is Asim Munir?



According to Ramanathan Kumar, who headed the Pakistan desk at R&AW from 2015 to 2020, Munir was Pakistan's first "mullah general". While posted as a military attaché in Saudi Arabia, Munir, then a 38-year-old Lieutenant Colonel, had memorised the Holy Quran, a feat that earned him the title of Hafiz-e-Koran.

He hails from a non-military background, with his father having worked as a school principal and imam of the local mosque in Rawalpindi. Munir completed his primary education at an Islamic seminary in Rawalpindi.

Asim Munir was set to retire in 2025, but legislation by the Pakistan National Assembly in November 2024 extended the tenures of the Army, Navy and Air Chiefs to five years from three years. He is now due to retire in 2027 and will remain the Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistan Army until then.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

28. Why the UK and EU Are Resetting Ties, Five Years After Brexit

Background: What Was Brexit?

"Brexit" (Britain + exit) refers to the UK's decision to leave the European Union. Although the vote took place in 2016, the UK officially left the EU on January 31, 2020, entering an 11-month transition period. A trade deal was signed on December 24, 2020, and the UK exited the EU single market and customs union on December 31, 2020.

Why Are Talks Happening Now?

Global politics have shifted significantly since Brexit:

- **Russia-Ukraine War:** Ongoing since 2022, the UK has taken a leading role in supporting Ukraine, aligning with EU efforts.
- **Trump's Return:** A potential second term for Donald Trump has caused concern due to his America First stance, trade tariffs, and reduced support for Europe.

- **Need for Security Cooperation:** With possible US disengagement, the UK and EU see value in working together on defence and security.



What Does the UK-EU Reset Deal Include?

1. Fishing Agreement

- EU boats can continue fishing in UK waters until 2038.
- Annual quotas and licenses will still be managed jointly with the EU and Norway.
- The UK will launch a £360 million (\$482 million) fund to boost coastal economies.

2. Agrifood and Veterinary Deal

- Eases border checks on UK food exports to the EU.
- Allows the UK to resume selling items like raw sausages and burgers in EU markets.
- May require regulatory alignment over time (known as "dynamic alignment").

3. Security Pact

- A formal UK-EU defence and security agreement has been signed.
- UK arms firms will gain access to the EU's £150 billion (\$200 billion) SAFE fund, supporting defence projects and jobs.

4. Youth Mobility Scheme

- Young people (18–35 years) may soon work and travel in each other's countries for up to three years.
- The scheme will be limited by quotas and time.

5. Passport Gates and Pet Travel

- UK citizens can use e-gates at EU airports.
- Simplified pet travel rules will reduce the need for repeated vet checks.

6. Carbon Tax Alignment

- The UK will link its carbon pricing system with the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
- This will avoid double taxation on goods like steel and cement, potentially saving £800 million (\$1.07 billion).

What's Not Included in the Deal

The reset does not change the UK's core post-Brexit positions:

- No return to the EU single market.
- No customs union.
- No free movement of people.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

29. Trump Unveils Ambitious 'Golden Dome' Missile Defense Plan

Introduction

On May 20, former US President Donald Trump announced the design selection for a new missile defense system called the 'Golden Dome', putting General Michael Guetlein of the US Space Force in charge. This futuristic system draws inspiration from Israel's Iron Dome but aims for a much broader and more advanced scope — including space-based weaponry.

A Step Toward 'Space Wars'

The Golden Dome proposes using:

- Space-based sensors and interceptors
- Thousands of small satellites in Earth's orbit
- Ability to neutralize enemy missiles moments after launch

If implemented, this would be the first space-based missile defense system, expanding beyond current uses of space in warfare (mainly reconnaissance and targeting).

Trump compared it to Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' initiative from the 1980s, which was ultimately shelved due to technological limitations at the time.



Inspired by Israel's Iron Dome — But Much Bigger

How Iron Dome Works:

- Ground-based system using Tamir interceptor missiles
- Relies on radars to track incoming threats
- Defends against short-range rockets, drones, and missiles
- Ideal for Israel's small, flat terrain

Golden Dome vs. Iron Dome:

- Global-scale defense for the vast US territory
- Designed to intercept long-range ICBMs from rivals like China and Russia
- Space-based tracking and interception capabilities
- Tailored to threats traveling through outer space, such as hypersonic missiles

Challenges and Concerns

Trump estimates the system will cost \$175 billion and be operational by January 2029, but experts and lawmakers are doubtful.

Key Issues

- Experts say it's currently just a concept, not yet feasible
- Initial \$25 billion funding is part of a controversial defense bill facing hurdles in Congress
- Concerns over cost, feasibility, and timeline

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

30. WHO Member States Adopt Global Pandemic Treaty: What It Means

Historic Move After Years of Negotiation

After over three years of complex discussions, member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a legally binding global pandemic treaty on May 20. This is only the second such agreement in WHO's 75-year history—the first being the 2003 tobacco control treaty.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called it “a victory for public health, science and multilateral action.”



Why Was a Pandemic Treaty Needed?

Negotiations began in December 2021, during the spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant. At the time, vaccine-producing countries hoarded supplies, leaving many lower-income nations without access.

- A 2022 Nature study showed over a million lives could have been saved with more equitable vaccine distribution.
- A 2021 report by the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response criticized global pandemic handling as “a toxic cocktail” of poor decisions and inequality.

The treaty aims to avoid such outcomes in future pandemics.

Key Features of the Treaty

1. Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System

- Pharma companies gain access to data like pathogen samples and genome sequences.
- In return, they must:
 - Allocate 10% of vaccines, drugs, and diagnostics to WHO.
 - Provide another 10% at affordable prices.

2. Technology Transfer and Support

- Countries must promote and incentivize the sharing of technology and expertise.
- This supports drug and vaccine production in developing countries.

3. Funding Conditions for Equitable Access

- Governments must attach conditions to public research funding to ensure global access to resulting treatments.

Limitations and Challenges

1. No Authority Over National Policies

- The treaty explicitly states that WHO cannot impose or direct national laws or policies.
- WHO also cannot mandate lockdowns, vaccine mandates, or travel restrictions.

This limits WHO's ability to enforce the agreement or respond uniformly in a global crisis.

2. Lack of Clarity on Key Mechanisms

- Details on how the benefit-sharing system will function remain unclear.
- Pharmaceutical companies may hesitate to invest without clear rules.

3. Absence of the United States

- The US did not adopt the treaty. After Donald Trump returned to office, he withdrew from WHO negotiations.
- Experts say US non-participation weakens the treaty due to its dominance in global health industries.

Conclusion

While the treaty marks a major step toward better global pandemic preparedness, its impact may be limited by enforcement gaps, lack of clarity, and the absence of major players like the US. Future negotiations and implementation will determine how effective it truly becomes.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

31. Why China Is Speeding Up Work on Pakistan's Mohmand Dam

Dam Construction Amid India-Pakistan Tensions



China has accelerated construction of the Mohmand Dam in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, citing the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attacks. The dam is part of China's broader infrastructure investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

What Is the Mohmand Dam?

- Built on the Swat River, a tributary of the Indus.
- Located in Mohmand Tribal District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Purpose: flood control, irrigation (16,737 acres), hydropower, and drinking water supply
- Start: 2019, target completion: Dec 2025

Why It Matters to Pakistan

- Will generate 2,862 GWh of electricity annually.
- Expected to supply 300 million gallons/day of drinking water to Peshawar.
- Important due to India's control over upstream waters and current treaty suspension.
- Over 75% of Pakistan's renewable water comes from the Indus Basin.

- 90% of crops and 20% of electricity in Pakistan depend on this river system.

China's Role and Strategic Interests

- China funds key projects in Pakistan like Diamer-Bhasha Dam in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, despite India's objections.
- Mohmand Dam highlights China's goal to counter India's regional influence.
- China Power owns 70% of the Diamer-Bhasha project, and Pakistan's military-linked FWO owns 30%.
- Past projects like Diamer-Bhasha faced funding issues, protests, and security threats.

CPEC: High Hopes, Slow Gains

- China remains committed to Pakistan despite delays, attacks on engineers, and economic instability.
- CPEC projects have faced major roadblocks, yet China continues investment due to Pakistan's strategic location.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

32. India Resumes Visas for Afghan Citizens After Long Suspension

Background

After nearly four years, India has resumed issuing visas to Afghan nationals in several categories, including business, medical, student, and cultural visas.

Background: Visa Suspension Since Taliban Takeover

- In August 2021, after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, India suspended all visas for Afghan citizens.
- Only a limited number of "e-Emergency X-Miscellaneous visas" were issued, mostly to Hindus and Sikhs.

Quiet Rollout of New Visa System

- No official announcement has been made by the Indian government.
- However, a new online visa portal specifically for Afghan nationals was launched in late April 2025.
- A government source confirmed that Afghans are now getting visas for trade, medical treatment, and other purposes.



33. Land Port Closures Between India and Bangladesh: Regional Impact

Background

On May 17, 2024, India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade issued an order shutting down land ports with Bangladesh for the import of readymade garments and certain other goods. This move is seen as a reflection of strained ties between India and Bangladesh following political changes in Dhaka.

What Does the May 17 Order Say?

- **Banned via Land Ports:** Import of readymade garments, fruit products, baked goods, plastic goods, wooden furniture, etc.
- **Allowed Only via Sea Ports:** Nhava Sheva and Kolkata.
- **Exemptions:** Fish, LPG, edible oil, and crushed stone continue to be allowed.

Why Did India Issue the Order?

India cited the need for reciprocal trade policies:

- Bangladesh banned import of Indian cotton yarn via land ports (April 13).
- Bangladesh stopped export of Indian rice via Hili land port.
- Indian trucks were reportedly subjected to aggressive checks.

India also expressed concerns over Dhaka treating India's northeast as a "captive market."

Impact on Bangladesh's Economy

- **Readymade Garments (RMG):** A significant blow. Around \$700 million in annual exports to India now affected.
- **Other Sectors:** Limited impact on furniture and agriculture, according to Bangladeshi officials.

Bangladesh's Response



- No official reaction yet, but off-the-record sources express disappointment.
- Officials claim India didn't notify Dhaka in advance.
- Bangladesh argues its restrictions on Indian goods were aimed at curbing corruption.

Implications for India's Northeast

- The closure affects trade through northeastern states (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura).
- India argues this is to promote local manufacturing under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- Indian officials also point to Bangladesh's recent political statements in China suggesting alternate trade routes via Bangladesh to India's northeast.

Is This Part of a Bigger Diplomatic Issue?

Yes. The order is seen as a response to:

- Remarks made by Bangladesh's interim government in China referring to India's northeast as "landlocked."
- Bangladesh's growing closeness to China and Pakistan.

India sees the move as a signal both to Bangladesh and the international community about its strategic concerns.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

34. Donald Trump's 'One Big Beautiful Bill': What It Means

What Is the Bill?

Last week, the US House of Representatives passed President Donald Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (OBBBA) — a massive, 1,000+ page legislative package that rolls many of Trump's policy promises into a single document. The bill now moves to the US Senate for approval.

What Does the Bill Include?

1. Permanent Tax Cuts

- Makes permanent the 2017 cuts to income and estate taxes.
- Introduces new tax cuts on:
 - Overtime pay
 - Tips
 - Social Security income
- The White House claims Americans earning \$30,000–\$80,000 will see 15% tax cuts.

2. Increased Government Spending

- More spending on:
 - Border security
 - Military and defense

3. Targeting Government Spending Waste

- Promises to reduce "waste, fraud, and abuse" in federal spending.

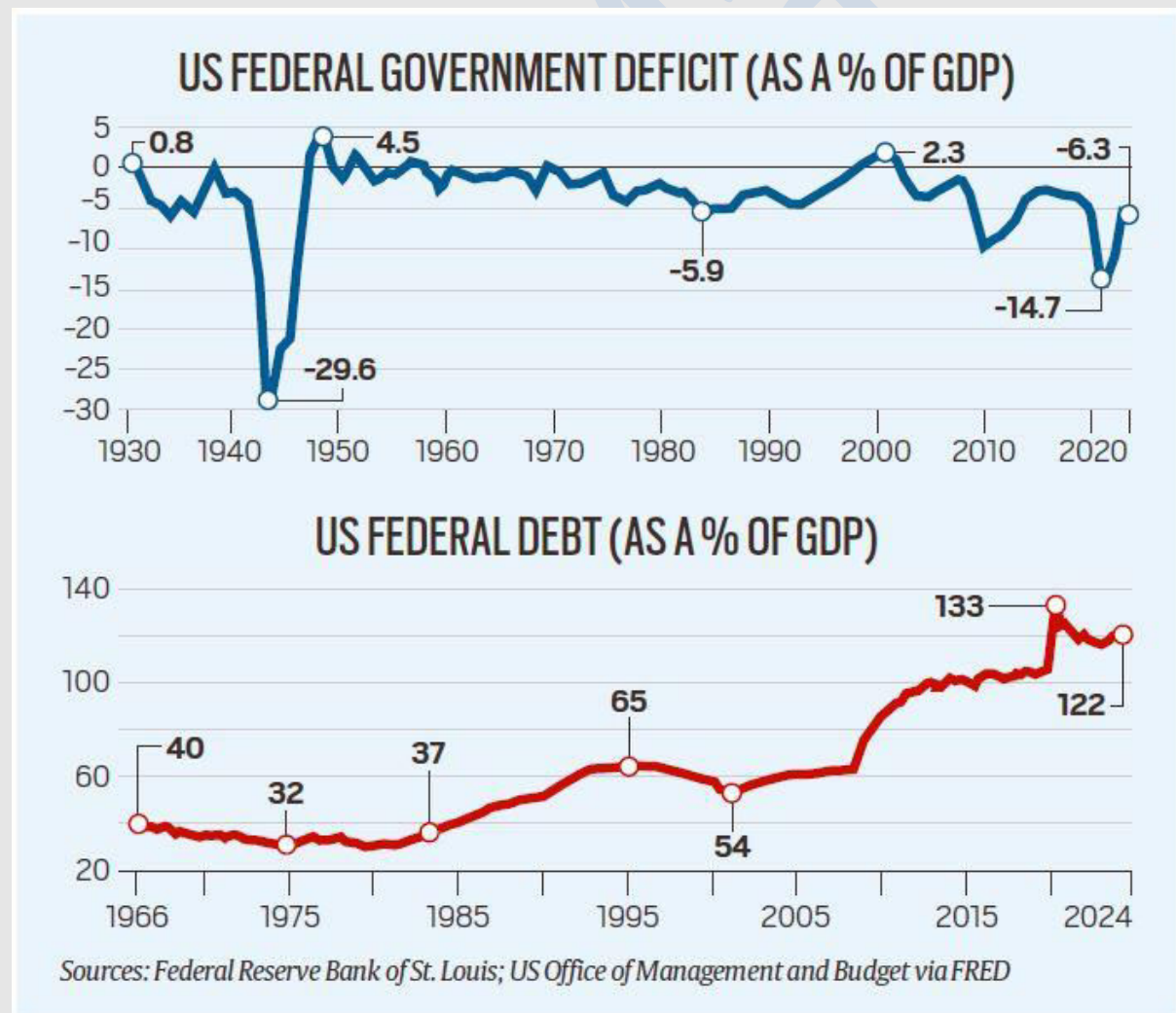
4. Raising the Debt Ceiling

- Increases the limit on US government borrowing, allowing more debt to fund the Bill's provisions.

What Are the Main Concerns?

1. Worsening US Government Finances

- Tax cuts + higher spending = bigger budget deficit
 - The US deficit was already 6.4% of GDP in 2024 (~\$1.9 trillion).
 - Debt-to-GDP ratio has reached 120%, with forecasts predicting it may hit 200% in the next decade.
- Investor confidence is declining:
 - Credit rating agency Moody's downgraded US debt in May 2025.
 - Bond yields are rising, meaning higher borrowing costs for the government and the public.



2. Unequal Distribution of Benefits

- Critics say the Bill favors the rich while cutting support for the poor.
- Economist Justin Wolfers called it "anti-Robin Hood".
- A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis found:
 - Poor households (lowest 10%) will lose 2–4% of income due to reduced welfare (e.g., Medicaid, food stamps).
 - Rich households (top 10%) will gain 2–4% due to tax cuts.

Why It Matters

- The Bill's mix of tax breaks and spending increases could balloon US debt, raise interest rates, and shift resources away from low-income Americans.
- It may boost Trump's political support among higher-income voters but risks long-term economic challenges and political backlash over inequality.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

1. World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES)

Why now?

The World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) kicked off recently with a speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Actors Shah Rukh Khan, Deepika Padukone, Rajnikanth, Chiranjeevi, Mohanlal, and Alia Bhatt are among the speakers at the event, and have promoted it in recent days across their social media accounts.

WAVES

World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit

Connecting Creators,
Connecting Countries



trade and influence the sector's future."

What is the WAVES Summit?

It is described as "a key forum for promoting discussions, collaboration, and innovation in the M&E (Media and Entertainment) industry. The event will bring together industry leaders, stakeholders and innovators to discuss prospects, challenges, promote global

Under the slogan "Connecting Creators, Connecting Countries", the inaugural summit of the Government of India is being held at the Jio Convention Centre in Mumbai for four days. It will include panel discussions and provide opportunities for those in the M&E industry to connect.

Boost to Orange Economy

The 'orange economy', also known as the creative economy, refers to economic activities that leverage creativity, culture, and intellectual property to generate wealth and jobs.

WAVES aims to "unlock a \$50 billion market by 2029, expanding India's footprint in the global entertainment economy." As of 2024, the M&E industry's total value stood at Rs 2.5 lakh crore (\$29.4 billion) and is expected to grow by 7.2% in 2025.

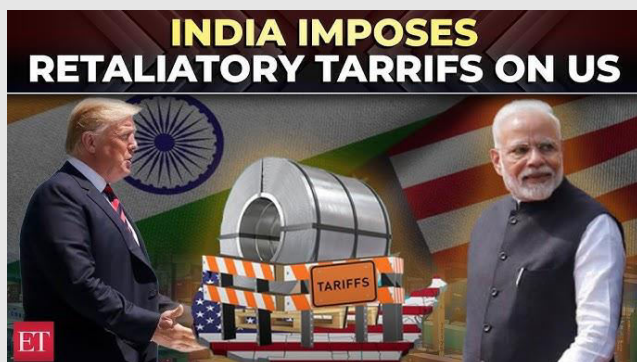
However, it also flagged some concerns. Though over 1,600 films were released in 2024, theatrical admissions declined, and only 11 Hindi films grossed Rs 100 crore, down from 17 in 2023. Total revenues dropped 5% to Rs 18,700 crore.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

2. India to Impose Retaliatory Tariffs on U.S. Imports

Why in News?



India has notified the World Trade Organization (WTO) of its plan to impose tariffs on \$7.6 billion worth of imports from the United States. This move is a direct response to the U.S. decision to raise import duties on steel and aluminium to 25%.

Background: U.S. Tariff Hike on Metals

The dispute dates back to 2018 during former U.S. President Donald Trump's first term, when the U.S. imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium imports. In February 2025, Trump, in his second term, increased these tariffs and removed exemptions that were previously granted to many countries.

India's Stand: Tariffs Violate WTO Rules

India argues that the U.S. tariffs are essentially safeguard measures — which are meant to protect domestic industries — and must therefore follow WTO rules. India states that the U.S. did not notify these measures to the WTO or hold required consultations.

According to India:

- The U.S. actions violate the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards (AoS).
- The lack of consultations gives India the right to retaliate.
- The tariffs imposed by the U.S. have adversely affected Indian exports.

India's Response: Tariffs on U.S. Goods

India plans to suspend trade concessions on selected U.S. products, effectively raising import duties. These retaliatory measures could begin 30 days after the May 9 notification.

India says:

- It will target U.S. goods equal to the impact on Indian exports — \$1.91 billion in duties on \$7.6 billion worth of trade.
- It will notify WTO bodies about the next steps.

Past Retaliation: A Similar Case in 2019

This is not the first time India has responded with tariffs:

- In June 2019, India imposed higher duties on 28 U.S. products after being removed from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).
- These duties were lifted in September 2023, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington.

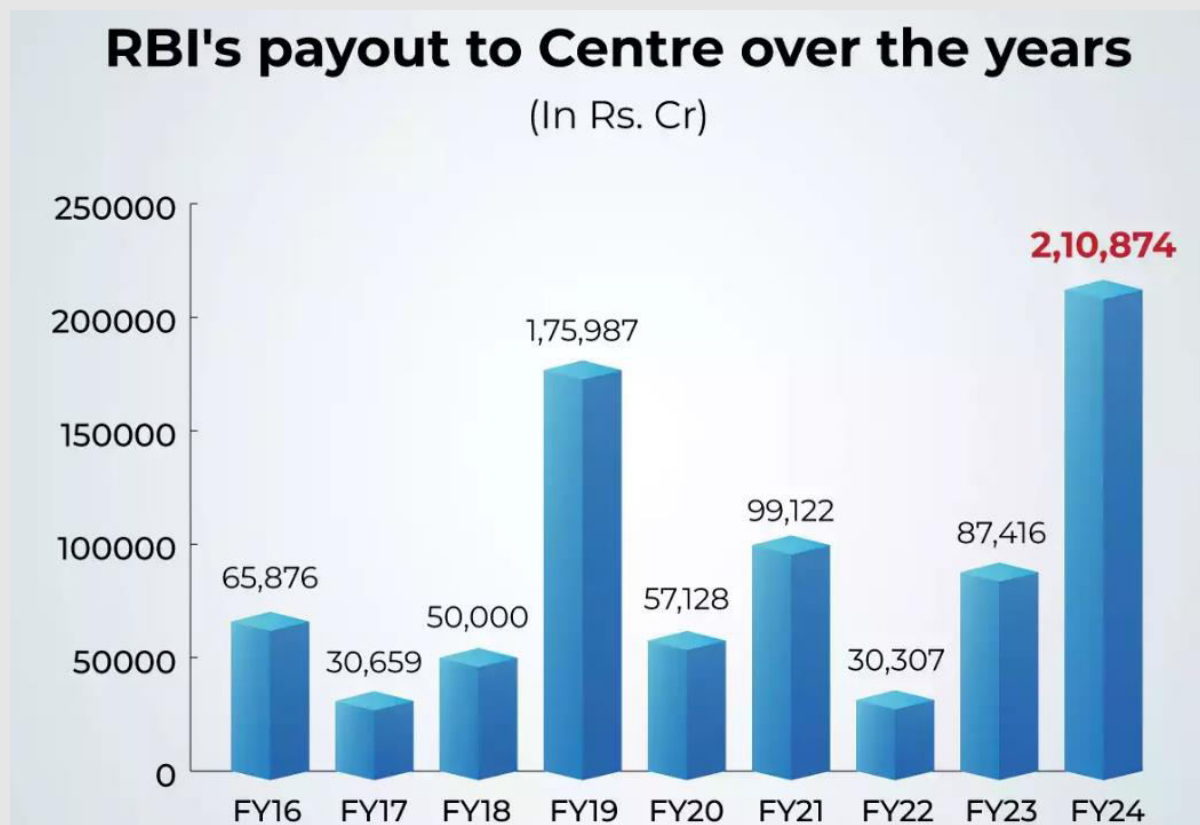
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

3. Why Does the RBI Transfer Surplus to the Government?

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) transfers its surplus (profit) to the government as per its statutory mandate. For the financial year 2024–25, the RBI is expected to transfer a record Rs 2.5–3 lakh crore. In 2023–24, it transferred Rs 2.11 lakh crore — the highest ever.



This surplus is not a “dividend” in the corporate sense, as the RBI is not a company but a central bank. The transfer is done based on the Economic Capital Framework (ECF), which guides risk provisioning and surplus distribution.

How Does the RBI Earn Profits?

The RBI earns income through various operations while performing its core functions such as regulating monetary policy, managing government borrowings, and overseeing the banking system. Key sources of income include:

- Interest on foreign assets like bonds and deposits held with other central banks.
- Interest from domestic government securities.
- Short-term lending to banks.
- Fees/commissions from managing government borrowings.

Main expenses include:

- Printing currency.
- Staff salaries and pensions.

- Commissions paid to banks and dealers for handling transactions and borrowings.

What Is the Legal Framework for Surplus Transfers?

The RBI transfers its surplus to the government under Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934, after provisioning for:

- Bad debts
- Asset depreciation
- Staff-related funds
- Other necessary reserves

The transfer is finalized after the July–June financial year ends, usually in August.

Does the RBI Pay Taxes on Its Earnings?

No. Under Section 48 of the RBI Act, the RBI is exempt from income tax and other taxes on its income, profits, or gains.

Is There a Formal Surplus Distribution Policy?

There is no fixed policy, but past expert recommendations guide the process. In 2013, the Malegam Committee recommended higher transfers to the government. Before this, the RBI set aside a portion of its surplus for:

- Contingency Fund (for unexpected events)
- Asset Development Fund (for capital investments)

Following this, surplus transfers rose sharply — from 53.4% in 2012–13 to 99.99% in 2013–14.

Have There Been Differences Between the RBI and Government?

Yes, occasionally. The government has argued that the RBI's reserves are more than needed and could be used to recapitalize public sector banks. The RBI, however, emphasizes the importance of strong reserves for financial stability and autonomy.

How Do Other Central Banks Handle Surplus Transfers?

- In the UK and US, surplus transfers are decided in consultation with the government.
- In Japan, the government has the final say.
- Globally, surplus transfers usually amount to about 0.5% of GDP, with some exceptions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

4. RBI to Transfer ₹2.69 Lakh Crore Dividend to Government

Highest-Ever RBI Dividend

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will transfer ₹2.69 lakh crore to the Union government as a dividend for FY 2024-25 — a 27% increase from last year's ₹2.11 lakh crore. This is the highest-ever surplus transfer by the central bank.



Risk Buffer Increased to 7.5%

The RBI has also increased its Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) to 7.5%, up from 6.5% last year. This decision was made based on a revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF) and current macroeconomic conditions.

- CRB was held at 5.5% between 2018–2022 due to COVID-19 and other challenges.
- It was gradually raised to 6%, then 6.5%, and now 7.5%.

Why the Dividend Matters

- The Union Budget 2025-26 had estimated total dividends from the RBI and public sector financial institutions at ₹2.56 lakh crore. The RBI alone has now exceeded that.
- According to SBI's Soumya Kanti Ghosh, this could reduce the fiscal deficit by 20 basis points to 4.2% of GDP.

Key Drivers of the Surplus

- High foreign exchange gains: RBI earns upon both sale and purchase of foreign exchange.
- Strong dollar sales
- Rising interest income

The RBI was also noted as the top seller of foreign exchange reserves among Asian central banks in January.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

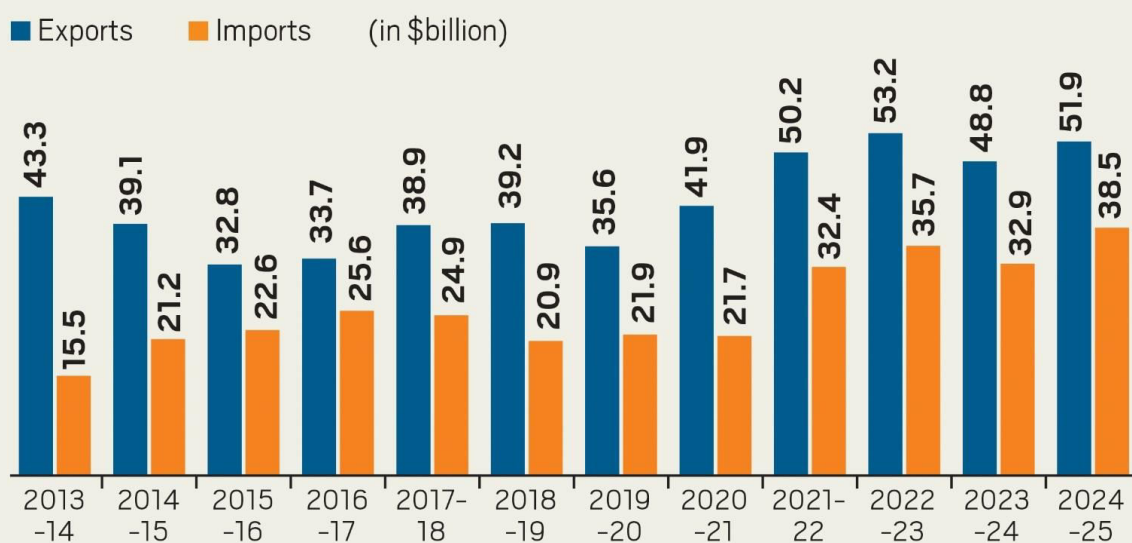
Source: The Hindu

5. India's Farm Trade Trend Analysis: How FTAs with US, EU, UK May Change the Game

Rising Exports, But Faster-Rising Imports

- In 2024–25, India's agriculture exports rose by 6.4% to \$51.9 billion, while imports surged 17.2% to \$38.5 billion.
- While India still has a farm trade surplus of \$13.4 billion, it has halved from \$27.7 billion in 2013–14.
- The gap is shrinking due to rising imports and supply challenges in key crops.

INDIA'S AGRICULTURE TRADE



Source: Department of Commerce.

Top Export Performers

1. Rice Leads the Way

- Combined basmati and non-basmati rice exports hit a record \$12.5 billion.
- Basmati mainly goes to West Asia, non-basmati to Africa.

2. Spices and Vegetables on the Rise

- Exports of spices, tobacco, coffee, and fresh/processed fruits & vegetables hit new highs.
- Coffee exports surged due to poor harvests in Brazil and Vietnam.

3. Seafood Struggles

- Marine products, India's top export, fell from \$8.1 billion (2022-23) to \$7.4 billion.
- US duties on frozen shrimp (17.7%) may rise to 26%, further affecting exports.

INDIA'S TOP AGRI EXPORT ITEMS (\$ million)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Marine products	7772.36	8077.98	7372	7405
Non-basmati rice	6133.63	6356.71	4573.41	6527.58
Basmati rice	3537.49	4787.65	5843.3	5944.48
Spices	3896.03	3785.36	4248.56	4451.54
Buffalo meat	3303.78	3193.69	3743.26	4060.54
Sugar	4602.65	5770.83	2824.74	2159.4
Fruits & Vegetables	1692.48	1791.05	2037.58	2065.39
Processed F&V	1190.59	1417.59	1624.22	1805.76
Tobacco	923.57	1213.39	1449.54	1979.01
Coffee	1020.74	1146.18	1286.28	1805.57
Oil meals	1031.94	1601.72	1713.98	1344.39
Oilseeds	1113.65	1337.69	1437.02	1344.31
Castor oil	1175.5	1265.64	1071.55	1152.37
Raw cotton	2816.24	781.43	1116.52	809.72
Wheat	2122.13	1520.46	56.74	2.03
Other cereals	1087.39	1194.07	517.79	270.88
TOTAL	50240.21	53153.55	48821.68	51940.67

Source: Department of Commerce.

Exports Hit by Domestic Supply Issues

- Wheat, sugar, and cotton exports dropped due to supply shortages and export bans.
- India now imports raw sugar and re-exports refined sugar.
- Once a major exporter, India now imports cotton due to stagnant yields.

Key Import Drivers

1. Edible Oils and Pulses Dominate

- Low yields and lack of government support keep oilseed and pulse production low.
- Vegetable oil imports continue to rise; pulse imports crossed \$5.5 billion for the first time.

2. Cotton and Rubber Imports Climb

- Cotton output fell from 398 lakh bales (2013–14) to 291 lakh (2024–25) due to no yield breakthroughs post-GM hybrids.
- Rubber production is stagnant, even as demand rises.

3. Fruits, Nuts, and Spirits

- Rising demand and stagnant local production have increased imports of almonds, pistachios, apples, and alcoholic beverages.

INDIA'S TOP AGRI IMPORT ITEMS (\$ MILLION)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Vegetable oils	18991.62	20837.7	14871.66	17333.14
Pulses	2228.95	1943.89	3746.78	5477.28
Fresh fruits	2460.33	2483.95	2734.97	3043.7
Cashew	1255.46	1805.67	1431.39	1669.43
Spices	1299.38	1336.65	1455.57	1625.42
Sugar	169.2	292.97	1984.88	1388.1
Raw cotton	559.55	1438.69	598.66	1219.32
Alcoholic beverages	693.23	797.64	1328.22	1115.51
Natural rubber	1032.71	937.6	739.18	1069.05
TOTAL	32422.3	35686.2	32870.03	38509.32

Source: Department of Commerce.

Impact of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

What the US, EU, and UK Want

- Lower tariffs on farm products
- Greater market access for items like:
 - Wine and spirits
 - Dry fruits
 - GM crops (like maize, soybean, cotton)
- Non-tariff barriers (e.g. GM regulations) also under negotiation.

What's at Stake for India?

- These FTAs may increase agricultural imports.
- There's concern that India's farm trade surplus may shrink further.
- Pressure to open markets could affect domestic producers, especially in sensitive sectors like pulses, edible oils, and cotton.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

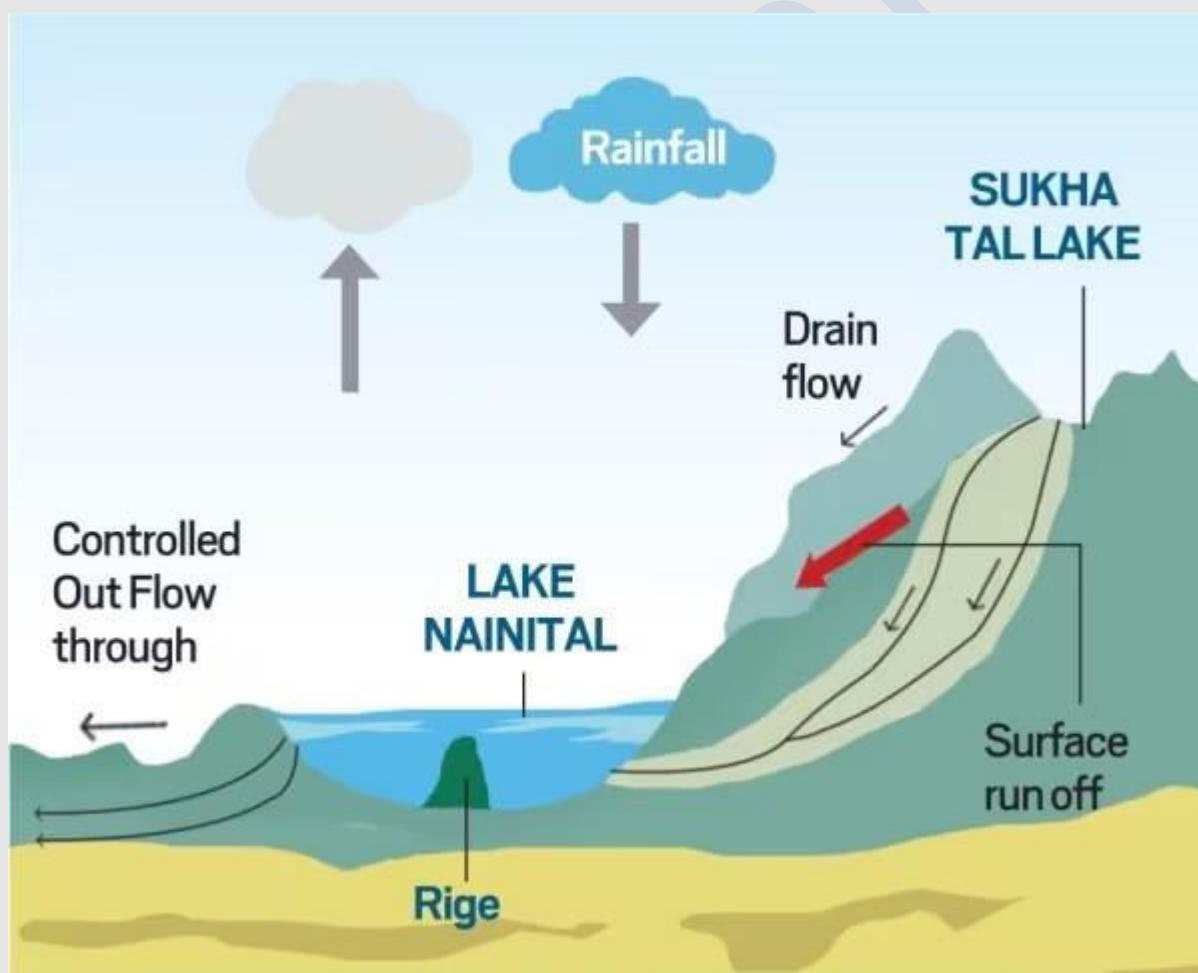
PrepMate

1. Why Naini Lake is seeing record-low water levels this year

Why in News?

The Naini Lake, one of Nainital's key attractions, has recorded fall in water level. This has sparked concerns over drinking water scarcity ahead of the summer season. The Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan extracts 10 million litres everyday from the lake to supply drinking water to the city.

For many years now, alarm bells have been sounded about the lake's depleting water levels. This time, a decrease in snowfall and rainfall in the winter months has played a role, compounded by long-term issues surrounding the lake's upkeep.



Central to Nainital

The Naini Lake is a natural kidney-shaped lake in the heart of Nainital, surrounded by seven hills. It is said that English businessman P Barron chanced upon it around the mid-19th Century, spurring the town's development as a hill station for the British.

Nearly, 76% of the city's water demand was met by the Naini Lake in 2024.

Reasons behind falling levels

Pressure from an increasing population, the increase in tourist activity, and commercialisation of nearby areas have impacted its health.

There are other civic issues also. For instance, pollution from the discharge of untreated wastewater, improper disposal of solid waste, and inadequate sewer systems causing sewage to overflow into stormwater drains, which ultimately discharge into the Naini Lake.

Climate change has a bearing on prevailing weather patterns. Annual mean temperatures in Uttarakhand have increased by nearly 1.5 degrees Celsius between 1970 and 2022. Experts say the warming is affecting rainfall and snowfall.

Also, Enhancing siltation, dumping debris in Sukhatal Lake, which is a major aquifer recharge area for Naini Lake, is fall in water level of Naini lake.

Efforts to Save lake

Several petitions have been filed concerning the lake, with one of the earliest going to the Supreme Court in 1993. The court held that projects of commercial complexes should be banned in Nainital. However, construction had not stopped.

Homestays have been permitted, and almost every third house is a homestay. Construction has been done on wetlands as well. Water is stored in wetlands for six months and serves as an important source for the lake during the lean period.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. Green Credit Programme: What the scheme entails, criticisms against it

What is the Green Credit Programme?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, officially unveiled the GCP on December 1, 2023, during the annual United Nations climate conference in Dubai. It was dubbed as a mechanism to incentivise "pro-planet" actions in response to climate change, and one which would promote the Centre's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment).

The Union Environment Ministry notified the Green Credit Rules, which spelt out the programme's objectives and implementation, in October 2023.

Trading green

The programme will cover 8 types of activities, including tree plantation, water management and sustainable agriculture



■ **Applicant shall register activity via web site**

■ **Activity will then be verified by a designated agency**

■ **Based on its report, administrator shall grant credit certificate**

What do rules say?

At its core, the GCP seeks voluntary participation of individuals, companies, industries, and other entities across seven different activities — such as tree plantation, waste management, and water conservation — that will lead to improvements in the environment. This participation will be incentivised by generating “green credits”, which can then be traded on a domestic market platform to potential buyers looking to meet sustainability targets, or existing legal obligations.

For instance, could be exchanged for meeting compliance of compensatory afforestation, in cases where forest land has been used for development projects.

The credits can also be used by listed companies as part of their environmental, social and governance disclosures under SEBI’s Business Responsibility and Sustainability framework, indicating efforts taken by these companies on environmental sustainability.

How will green credits be calculated?

To begin with, the Centre has rolled out the scheme through the pilot on tree plantation, which was later expanded to eco-restoration activities such as plantation of shrubs, herbs and grasses, soil moisture conservation, rain water harvesting, and other similar measures as per site suitability.

Under GCP pilot on tree plantation and eco-restoration, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun, will act as the nodal administrator. Plantations will be carried out in degraded land parcels including open forest, scrubland, wasteland and catchment areas, and they must be five hectares in size or above.

Forest departments of states and Union Territories would have to identify these land parcels, which are under their control. Any party interested in participating would have to apply and register with ICFRE. After processing the applications and charging a fee, the land parcels identified by forest departments would be allotted to the parties. It would be the forest department's responsibility to carry out and maintain the tree plantations, and the plantation would have to be completed within a period of two years after the money is paid.

One grown tree raised on the identified land parcels would be accounted as one green credit. This would be subject to a minimum density of 1,100 trees per hectare based on local silvicultural conditions and after certification of completion provided by the forest department.

As on March 4, 2364 land parcels spread over 54,669.46 hectares were registered by forest departments across 17 states, as per GCP progress status data shared by the union environment ministry in Parliament. So far, a total of 384 entities have registered for participation in the GCP, including 41 public-sector undertakings and central public sector undertakings.

What have some people criticised the scheme?

GCP has been criticised for incentivising forest diversion for industries, by generating tradable credits which could also be used to meet legal obligations such as compensatory afforestation. It has also been criticised for promoting plantations on degraded lands, open forests and scrub lands, which experts have argued offer unique and important ecological services.

Earlier this month, the Supreme Court also heard an intervention application on the GCP, in an on-going case challenging the amendments to the Forest Conservation Act. The plea questioned the survival issues of plantations raised under the scheme, and the SC Bench has sought the Environment Ministry's views on the matter.

Under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023, India's forest conservation law, non-forest land equivalent to forest land used for industries and development projects is mandated for compensatory afforestation. Only if non-forest land is unavailable, twice the size of degraded or unclassed forest land is used for compensatory afforestation. This is to ensure land-for-land compensation.

However, GCP mandates use of degraded forest land for plantations. It also has complementary provisions which allow exchange of credits, generated by paying money, for meeting the compensatory afforestation compliance. This translates into compensating for older forests with existing forest land, rather than adding non-forest land into the forest cover, as laid down in the Van Adhiniyam.

In April 2024, over 100 environmental organisations and 400 citizens demanded the government to rollback the scheme. The representation to the government stated that arbitrary tree plantation cannot be used as credit to compensate for old-growth forests.

3. Kancha Gachibowli forest issue: All you need to know

Why in News?

The Supreme Court recently directed the Telangana government to stop its “alarming deforestation activities” in the Kancha Gachibowli forested area.

This came after the Telangana government in February announced it plans to auction some 400 acres of forested land adjacent to the University of Hyderabad (UoH) to build IT parks. This decision has since led to massive student protests, and now, got the attention of the highest courts in the land.

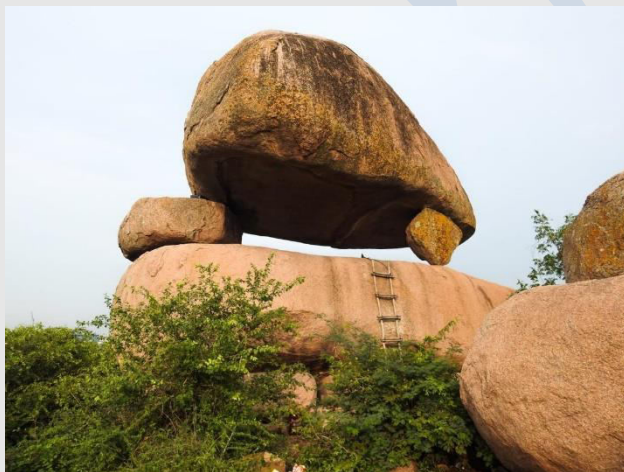
Primely located urban forest

Kancha Gachibowli is one of Hyderabad’s last remaining urban forests. It is rich in biodiversity, home to numerous bird, mammal and reptile species, and beautiful rock formations.

Urban forests such as Kancha Gachibowli help regulate local climates by providing shade, reducing temperatures, and increasing humidity.

View of government

For the government, the forest lies bang in the middle of Hyderabad’s Financial District. Auctioning the land would not only fill government coffers, but also attract potential



investments of Rs 50,000 crore, and generate as many as 5 lakh jobs, the government says. Notably, the Gachibowli IT corridor is one of the most expensive localities in Hyderabad, boasting extremely high property rates.

The Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TGIIC) says it has prepared a layout duly preserving rock formations including the so-called ‘Mushroom Rock’ as green spaces.

Mushroom Rock in Kancha Gachibowli

Question of land ownership

Although the 400 acres in question were a part of the 2,300 acre parcel allotted to the UoH when it was established in 1974, legally, the state government is the sole owner of the entire land. Over the years, it has allocated pockets of land from this 2,300 acres for various purposes: constructing a bus depot, a telephone exchange, a IIIT campus, the Gachibowli sports stadium, a shooting range, etc.

The disputed 400 acres were handed over by the then united Andhra Pradesh government to a private sports management firm in 2003, only to be reclaimed in 2006 due to non-use. This triggered a lengthy legal battle, which eventually saw the SC reiterate that the Telangana government was the sole owner of the land.

But the 400 acres have never been demarcated. Nor has it been notified as a forest, even though it is a part of the UoH's larger forest ecosystem. This is at the heart of the current issue.

View of Students and Activists

Students and activists protesting against the Telangana government cite the SC's landmark verdict in *T N Godavarman Thirumulpad v Union of India* (1996). The apex court had held that any land with forest cover qualifies as "forest land", even if the land is not notified as a forest. Some have also called the government to declare the land as a National Park, something that would provide it protection from future deforestation.

Latest escalation, courts get involved

On March 30, the government sent at least 50 earthmovers to the UoH campus to begin clear the forested land for auction. This triggered massive protests in the campus.

As the issue began to get national attention, two public interest litigations (PILs) were filed before the Telangana High Court. The HC issued an interim order directing the state government to stop the felling of trees till the next hearing the day after.

However, the SC took suo motu cognisance of the matter, and sought a ground report from the High Court registrar (judicial). The apex court on sought an explanation from the Telangana government on the "compelling urgency" for clearing the forest, and put a stay on all activities till further orders.

The SC also directed a central empowered committee to visit the site and file a report by April 16.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

4. Ramban rain causes destruction: Understanding the weather events affecting the region

Why in News?



Jammu Kashmir rainfall impact:

Three people were killed after torrential rainfall and hail in the Ramban tehsil of Jammu and Kashmir recently. Buildings collapsed, transport was disrupted and hundreds of people had to be relocated due to the heavy rain.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), in the 24 hours

ending 8:30 am on April 20, Jammu and Kashmir received 16.9 mm of rainfall, which is a 575% departure from the normal of 2.5 mm.

The Ramban district administration, Udhampur MP and Union Minister Jitendra Singh, and the J&K Office of Chief Minister all posted information about the events on social media, using terms like flash flood, landslide, and cloudburst. What are these events, what causes them, and what impact can they have?

What is a cloudburst?

While episodes of heavy rain are often termed "cloudburst", a cloudburst has a specific technical definition — rainfall of 10 cm or more in an hour, over a roughly 10 km x 10 km area. Cloudbursts are more common in hilly areas because of a phenomenon called 'orographic lift', which basically means warm air rising up the side of a mountain. As warm air 'climbs' a mountain, it expands because of the low pressure above. The expanding air cools, releasing the moisture it was holding as rain. But if more and more warm air keeps rising, it prevents that rain, till a large amount of rain builds up and bursts out in a massive shower all at once. Because cloudbursts happen in localised areas (over a roughly 10 km x 10 km area), they are difficult to capture accurately.

The sudden rain released by a cloudburst can quickly overwhelm drainage systems and lead to flash floods and landslides.

What is a flash flood?

As the name suggests, a flash flood happens quickly, when a lot of rain suddenly enters into the drainage systems (waterbodies, drains), and water overflows. Flash floods are again more common in hills, because rocky terrain does not absorb water very well.

While river floods, the kind normally seen in plains, last longer and cause more damage to property, the sudden flash floods are more likely to lead to loss of life.

What is a landslide?

Landslide is a portion of 'land' coming loose and sliding — rocks and soil slipping down a mountain, for example. As the British Geological Survey's website says, "When the force of gravity acting on a slope exceeds the resisting forces of a slope, the slope will fail and a landslide occurs...adding water to the material on a slope makes a landslide more likely to

happen. This is because water adds weight, lowers the strength of the material and reduces friction, making it easier for material to move downslope.”

A lot of water gushing down just speeds up this process. Landslides can crush people and animals under the debris, make roads unmotorable, and a lot of debris falling into a water body can cause floods.

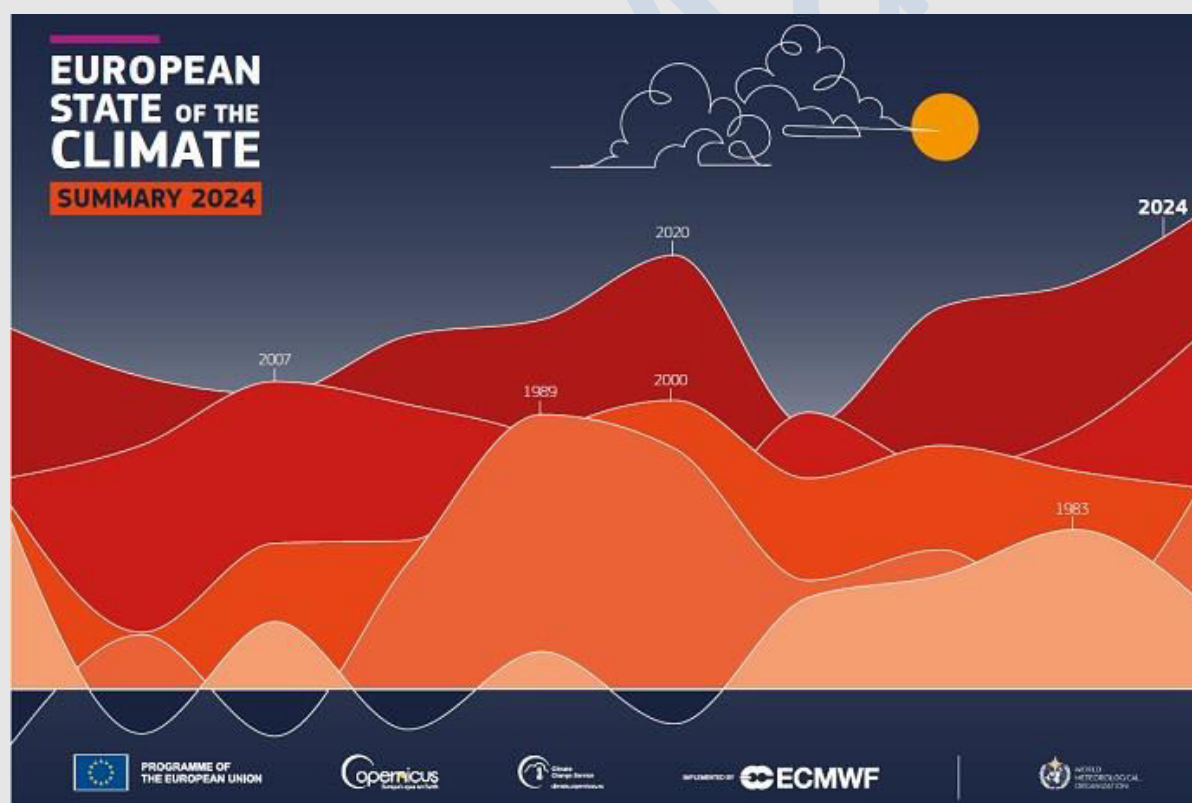
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

5. Why Europe is warming faster: Causes many, including its cleaner air

Why now?

While global temperatures have been rising rapidly, primarily due to human activities that release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, not every region has been warming at the same rate. Europe, for example, has warmed about twice as much as the world as a whole, as highlighted by the 2024 European State of the Climate Report that came out last week.



European State of Climate Report

The European State of Climate Report — an annual publication of Copernicus Climate Change Service, which is part of the European Commission — captures climate trends in Europe, and is published in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organisation.

The new edition of the report has said that the year 2024, which was the warmest ever for the planet, was the warmest for Europe as well. Eastern Europe was sunny and warm, while the western part was cloudier and wetter.

The report said much of eastern Europe saw warmer than average, or record-high, temperatures through the entire year in 2024. Southeastern Europe, comprising countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and others, also experienced its longest heatwave on record.

Higher warming in Europe

The planet as a whole has seen its annual average temperature rise by about 1.3 degree Celsius from the pre-industrial baseline (the average of 1850-1900), though the year 2024 breached the 1.5 degree Celsius warming for the first time.

Europe, however, has seen its average annual temperature rise by about 2.4 degree Celsius compared with pre-industrial times. This has resulted in an unprecedented spate of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, heavy rainfall and flooding.

1. The Arctic Effect

Several factors contribute to the greater rate of warming over Europe, the most prominent being the fact that a substantial part of the continent lies in the Arctic region. In fact, Europe has the largest inhabited landmass in the polar region. And the warming around the poles, particularly the North Pole, is much more pronounced than anywhere else in the world. The contribution of warming around the North Pole pushes the average for Europe.

The prime reason for greater warming in the Arctic is what is known as the albedo effect. The ice cover in the Arctic is melting, because of which more land or water is getting exposed to the Sun. Ice traps the least amount of heat, reflecting most solar radiation back. Land or water, which are darker surfaces, tend to absorb solar radiation better, leading to higher degrees of warming. The melting of ice sheets is a little less in Antarctica, because of which warming in Antarctica is less pronounced than that in the Arctic.

The Arctic is known to be warming three to four times faster than the global average, and accounts for the substantial part of the average global warming.

2. Un-uniform warming

Warming is not uniform over the entire planet. Land areas have warmed more than the oceans, and higher-latitude areas, in general, have warmed more than tropical areas, which are nearer the equator. India, for example, has warmed only 0.7 degree Celsius from pre-industrial times, compared with the average of 1.59 degree Celsius for the entire land area on the planet. These numbers are from studies conducted a few years ago, and would have changed in the last few years.

3. Reduction in aerosols

Another factor contributing to higher warming rate in Europe is the reduction in aerosols emissions, the State of Climate report said. This is ironic since reduction in aerosols points to reduced air pollution and cleaner air to breathe. Aerosols refer to all kinds of tiny solid and liquid particles suspended in the atmosphere, and largely consist of air pollutants.

These particles are able to scatter sunlight back so that there is less absorption of solar radiation by the Earth's surface. Aerosols also help in cloud formation and clouds, in turn, have an impact on how much sunlight is reflected or absorbed.

Europe having relatively cleaner air and less emission of aerosols contributes to a faster warming.

4. Other contributing factors

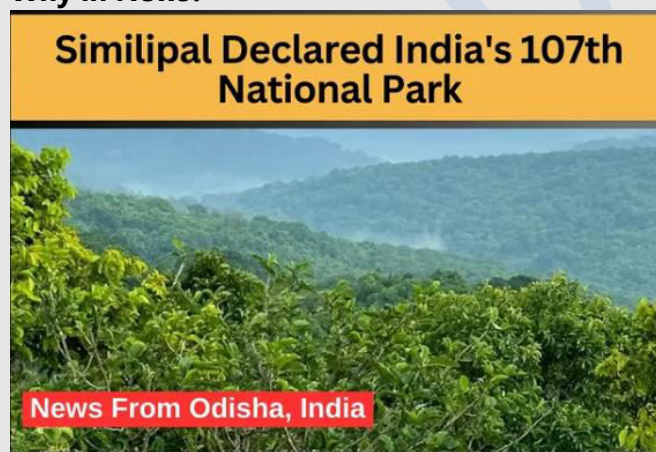
Many other factors contribute to Europe's faster rate of warming, the climate report said. These include changes in atmospheric circulation that favour more frequent summer heatwaves in the European region, the higher than average increase in the sea-surface temperatures around Europe, urban heat island effect, and the melting of glaciers, which has similar consequences as the albedo effect.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

6. Simlipal designated Odisha's second national park, after Bhitarkanika

Why in News?



Simlipal is a national park and tiger reserve in the Mayurbhanj district in the Indian state of Odisha covering 2,750 km². Out of the total area, national park spans an area of 845.70 km². The remaining part of the 2,750 km² area will be considered as a wildlife sanctuary.

107th National Park

It is the 107th national park and the second in the eastern state, after the Bhitarkanika. Simlipal National Park

derives its name from the abundance of red silk cotton trees growing in the area.

Part of UNESCO recognised Biosphere Reserve

This protected area is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009. Simlipal, located in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district, is home to 40 royal Bengal tiger.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: The Hindu

7. Draft Greenhouse Gases Emissions Intensity (GEI) Target Rules

Emissions intensity targets



The government has notified draft Rules introducing targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by “obligated entities” in energy-intensive sectors and industries.

The Draft Greenhouse Gases Emissions Intensity (GEI) Target Rules, 2025, notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest

and Climate Change, puts in place a compliance mechanism for the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023 (CCTS).

The CCTS was launched to create a framework for the trading of carbon credits, to facilitate the reduction of emissions in energy intensive industries, and to support India’s climate commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015.

The draft Rules are open for objections and suggestions in a 60-day window from the date of their notification.

What is meant by greenhouse gases emissions intensity (GEI)?

GHGs are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to the “greenhouse effect” that raises surface temperature on Earth.

GHG emissions intensity, or GEI, is the amount of GHGs that are emitted per unit of product output — the amount of GHGs that are released in the production of, say, 1 tonne of cement, aluminium, or paper, etc.

The draft Rules define GEI as “greenhouse gases emission intensity in tCO₂e/ equivalent output or product”. tCO₂e, or tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, is the standard unit used to measure the impact of all GHGs, not just CO₂, based on their potential to warm the planet.

So what do the draft GEI target Rules say?

The Rules set forth baseline emissions for 2023-24 and define gradual reduction targets for the years 2025-26 and 2026-27 as part of the mechanism to make India’s Carbon Credits Trading Scheme, 2023, operational.

GHG intensity reduction targets and benchmarks have been set for the highly energy-intensive aluminium, chlor-alkali, pulp and paper, and cement industries.

These targets, for a two-year period starting 2025-26, cover 282 entities or industrial units in these industries — 13 aluminium plants, 186 cement plants, 53 pulp and paper plants, and 30 chlor-alkali plants.

Among the large corporations that have been assigned targets under the Rules are Vedanta, Hindalco, Bharat Aluminium, JSW Cement, Ultratech, Nalco, JK Cement, Dalmia Cement, Shree Cement, Grasim Industries, and JK Paper.

The Rules also lay down the mechanism for industries to comply with these targets, and specify penalties for their failure to do so.

Why is it important to have the targets?

The introduction of industry-specific targets is crucial to meet India's climate goals. The ultimate objective is to push industries towards a low-carbon growth trajectory through reduction, removal or avoidance of GHG emissions.

A cement plant can, for example, reduce its GEI by adopting cleaner and greener processes in the various stages of production. It could replace the use of coal with biomass, and adopt cleaner, more energy-efficient kilns.

More importantly, the Rules aim to help India meet a key commitment made under the Paris Agreement — to reduce the emissions intensity of its gross domestic product (the amount of energy used per unit of GDP) by 45% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

Not all of this is entirely new. While targets have been set for the reduction of GHG emissions intensity for the first time, a scheme to improve energy efficiency, known as PAT — Perform, Achieve, Trade — has been running since 2012.

And how do these draft Rules tie into India's carbon credit trading scheme?

The CCTS established a framework for generating, trading, and using carbon credit certificates.

With the introduction of the GEI targets, industries will know what exactly to achieve in order to earn carbon credits. They will also have to create action plans towards achieving those goals.

Industries will be issued carbon credits for cutting emissions intensity, which they can trade on India's carbon market. Industries that fail to meet their obligations under the carbon trading scheme would have to buy credits to meet their compliance shortfall, or be penalised by the Central Pollution Control Board, as per the Rules.

Carbon credits are traded through the Indian Carbon Market platform, with oversight of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Union Ministry of Power.

The availability of credits provide industries with the incentive to decarbonise. Industries with resources to adopt clean technology can use their credits to earn profits, while those with fewer resources can make the shift gradually by buying carbon credits.

Similar carbon credit markets have been operational elsewhere in the world — in Europe and China since 2005 and 2021 respectively.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

8. Why the Supreme Court Struck Down Retrospective Green Clearances

What the Supreme Court Ruled

The Supreme Court invalidated:

- A 2017 notification by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) that allowed environmental clearances after project work had begun.
- A 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) that created a standard procedure for such post facto clearances.

The Court also barred the Centre from issuing similar orders in the future, stating they violate environmental laws and citizens' rights.



What Was in the 2017 Notification?

The 2017 notification:

- Gave industries a one-time six-month window to apply for environmental clearance after starting work or operations without approval.
- Covered cases where companies had:
 - Started operations
 - Expanded beyond permitted limits
 - Changed product mix without prior clearance

This bypassed the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which is mandatory under the 2006 EIA notification. The EIA process includes:

- Project screening
- Environmental impact analysis
- Public hearings
- Final expert review and approval or rejection

Why the Centre Introduced It

The government justified the move by stating:

- It was better to bring violators into the compliance system rather than leave them unregulated.
- Violators would be made to pay for environmental damage, removing any unfair economic advantage.
- All cases would be assessed centrally and allowed only if legally permissible at the site.

An expert panel under S R Wate (former NEERI director) reviewed these cases and met 47 times between 2017 and 2021. The 2021 OM introduced an SOP to handle such violations, following a National Green Tribunal directive.

Supreme Court's Reasoning

The Court strongly criticized the Centre for:

- Protecting violators instead of enforcing environmental law.
- Violating Article 21 (right to life and a healthy environment) and Article 14 (equality before law).

The Court reminded the Centre:

- Of its promise to the Madras High Court that the 2017 notification was a one-time exception.
- That even a one-time exception violates constitutional rights.

The judges also pointed to real-world consequences like Delhi's pollution levels to stress the dangers of lax environmental enforcement.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

9. Perito Moreno Glacier: Once Stable, Now Crumbling

A Sudden Shift After Decades of Stability

The Perito Moreno glacier in Argentina, known for its unusual stability amid global warming, began showing signs of significant retreat around 2020. Once steady while other glaciers melted, it is now rapidly losing mass.

A Landmark of Ice and Tourism

Located in Los Glaciares National Park near El Calafate, the glacier covers 250 sq km — roughly the size of Patna, Bihar. It stretches 30 km long and rises 60 m above water. Formed during the last Ice Age, it is a major source of freshwater and a key tourist attraction due to spectacular ice calving events.



Growing Ice Calving Events Raise Alarms

Ice calving — where chunks of ice break off and fall into the water — is not new for Perito Moreno. But in recent years, the chunks have grown much larger. In April 2025, a block the size of a 20-story building broke off. According to park officials, such large-scale events were rare until just 4–6 years ago.

Recent Retreat and Scientific Warnings

A 2024 government-backed report showed the glacier has been retreating rapidly since 2015, losing about 0.85 meters of mass annually — the fastest rate in nearly 50 years. Between 2020 and 2023, it lost over 700 meters of mass.

Experts attribute this to climate change, with warming air temperatures and decreased snowfall in the region. Glaciologist Lucas Ruiz notes the glacier is now visibly feeling the delayed effects of climate change.

A Global Pattern of Glacier Loss

Perito Moreno joins a growing list of glaciers melting due to rising temperatures. A 2025 study in *Nature* found that glaciers worldwide have been losing 273 billion tonnes of ice annually for 25 years — enough to supply the global population's water needs for 30 years. This melt has already raised sea levels by 2 cm.

A UNESCO report in March 2025 added that glaciers (excluding Greenland and Antarctica) have lost over 9,000 billion tonnes of ice since 1975 — comparable to a block the size of Germany with 25 meters thickness.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

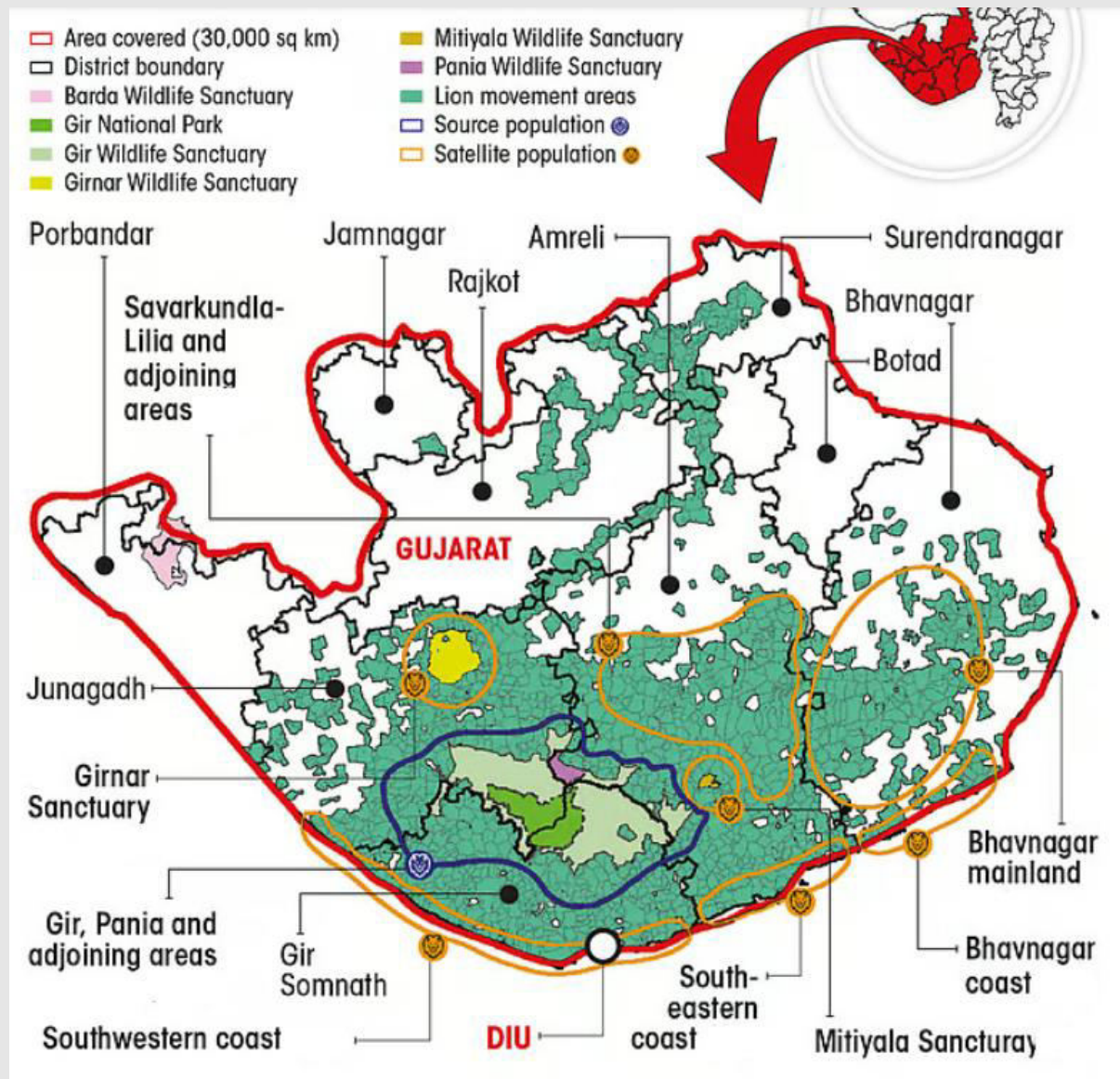
Source: Indian Express

10. Asiatic Lions in Gujarat: Population Booms, but Challenges Loom

Lion Population Grows 32% in Five Years

Gujarat's Asiatic lion population has increased significantly, rising by 32% between 2020 and 2025 to reach 891 lions. The number of adult females, a key indicator of future growth, grew by 27% to 330.

This growth continues a long recovery trend — from under 200 lions in the 1960s to nearly 900 today — thanks to strong conservation efforts and favorable conditions in Gujarat.



Lions Spread Beyond Protected Areas

While the core population still resides in Gir National Park and Paniya Wildlife Sanctuary (394 lions), more lions now live outside these protected zones. The lions have expanded their range by 17%, now occupying 35,000 sq. km across 58 talukas in 11 districts, up from 30,000 sq. km and 53 talukas in 2020.

In the last five years, lions have colonized new areas including Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, Jetpur, and Babra-Jasdan. However, this spread has increased interactions with human settlements, raising the risk of conflict.

Habitat Limitations Threaten Long-Term Survival

Despite population growth, conservationists warn that the lions are "spreading thin." The lion's range has expanded by 430% since 1990, but the population has grown by only 214%. This is because Gujarat lacks large, quality forested habitats beyond Gir and a few small sanctuaries like Girnar and Mitiyala.

Currently, only 56% of lions live in forested areas. In non-forested zones, lion density drops significantly, and they often rely on livestock carcasses — raising the risk of disease.

Rising Conflicts and Limited Social Tolerance

Though Gujarat's people are known for their tolerance toward lions, close encounters have become more frequent. Reports mention retaliatory killings and unprovoked attacks, especially in human-dominated landscapes.

"Lions used to people are less wary and can be aggressive," noted wildlife biologist Dr. Ravi Chellam. While education campaigns and compensation for livestock losses have helped reduce tensions, the situation remains fragile.

Project Lion and Relocation Delays

In March 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved a ₹2,900-crore Project Lion to enhance and develop new lion habitats within Gujarat. However, experts emphasize the need to establish habitats outside the state as well, particularly to prevent epidemics and genetic stagnation.

The Supreme Court had ordered lion relocation to Madhya Pradesh in 2013, and though Kuno National Park was initially selected, Gujarat has resisted moving lions out of the state. The government has since limited relocation plans to within Gujarat, even though some lions have naturally migrated to Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, which is too small to host a large population.

Future Outlook: Numbers Alone Aren't Enough

While the lion population is growing, numbers alone don't secure the species' future. Experts argue that the focus must now shift to creating quality forest habitats, reducing human-lion conflict, and ensuring genetic diversity through strategic relocation.

Without these steps, the success story of Gujarat's lions could face serious setbacks.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

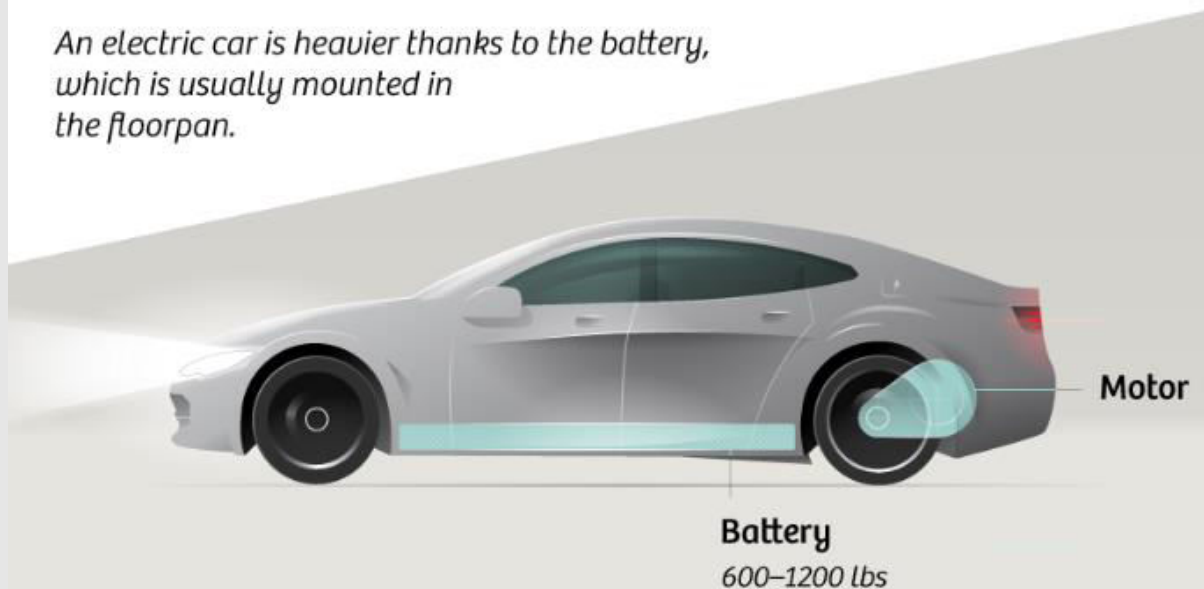
Source: Indian Express & The Hindu

11. EVs: A Green Solution with a Pollution Problem

Electric Vehicles (EVs) are celebrated for cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, helping fight climate change. But a new study warns of an overlooked environmental cost—pollution from tyre particles.

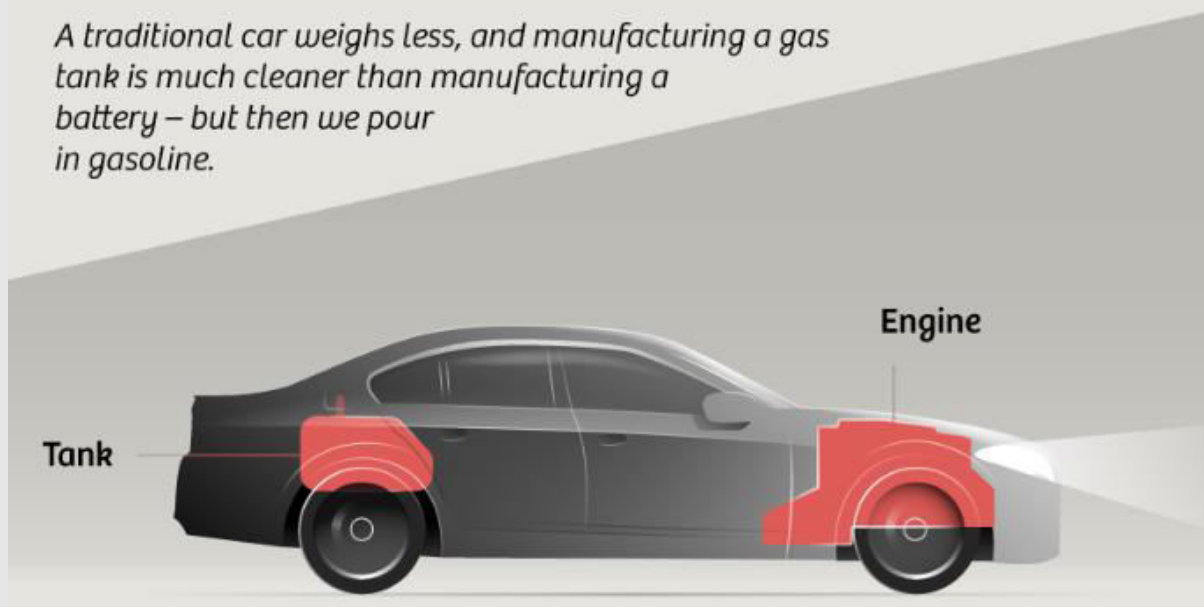
⚡ Electric car

An electric car is heavier thanks to the battery, which is usually mounted in the floorpan.



💧 Gasoline car

A traditional car weighs less, and manufacturing a gas tank is much cleaner than manufacturing a battery – but then we pour in gasoline.



Key Findings of the Study

Published in *Soft Matter* (Royal Society of Chemistry), the study shows that:

- EVs release more microplastic particles from tyres than regular vehicles.

- This is mainly because EVs are heavier, leading to more tyre wear and tear.
- The smaller particles released stay in the air longer and are more harmful.

How Tyres Release Pollutants

Tyres shed tiny rubber fragments during use, which become airborne pollutants.

Two Types of Particle Production:

1. Primary Fragmentation

- Caused by sudden braking or hitting potholes.
- Releases mostly smaller particles.

2. Sequential Fragmentation

- Caused by gradual wear during normal driving.
- Produces larger particles.

Smaller particles remain suspended in the air, while larger ones settle on the ground.

Why EVs Cause More Tyre Pollution

- EVs are 15–20% heavier due to their large batteries (300–900 kg).
- Heavier vehicles = more tyre degradation.
- EVs also accelerate faster, adding further stress to tyres.
- As a result, EVs emit more tiny plastic particles—a hidden source of air pollution.

Global Implications

- EV adoption is growing rapidly worldwide:
 - Globally: 20% of new cars sold last year were electric.
 - India: 2.5% in 2024, with a goal of 30% by 2030.
 - China: Almost 50% of car sales were EVs in 2024.

As EVs become more common, tyre particle pollution could worsen without proper action.

What Can Be Done?

Researchers suggest a multi-pronged approach:

1. Stronger Tyres for EVs

- Manufacturers should design durable tyres tailored for heavier EVs.

2. Track Non-Exhaust Emissions

- Pollution standards should include tyre wear and brake dust, not just exhaust.

3. Capture Technologies

- Innovative tech could collect tyre particles before they enter the air.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

12. Ship Sinks Off Kerala Coast: Oil Spill Fears Arise

Introduction

A Liberian-flagged cargo ship, MSC ELSA 3, sank off the coast of Kerala on May 25, raising concerns about a possible oil spill. The ship was carrying 640 containers, including 13 with hazardous cargo. Thankfully, all crew members were rescued by the Indian Coast Guard and Navy.



What Caused the Ship to Sink?

According to the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), the ship capsized due to flooding in one of its cargo holds in the early hours of Sunday.

Key details:

- 640 containers onboard
- 13 hazardous cargo containers, including 12 with calcium carbide. It is a compound with the chemical formula CaC_2 and also known as 'masala'. It is commonly used for ripening fruits like mangoes, releases acetylene gas which contains harmful traces of arsenic and phosphorus.
- Ship carried 84.44 tonnes of diesel and 367.1 tonnes of furnace oil. Furnace Oil is a heavy residual fuel obtained from distillation of crude oil.

Is There an Oil Spill?

- No oil spill has been reported yet, but monitoring is ongoing.
- ICG has deployed the ship Saksham, equipped with pollution response systems.
- Aircraft with oil spill mapping technology are also assessing the area.

What Is an Oil Spill and Why Is It Dangerous?

Oil spills:

- Occur due to accidents, natural disasters, or equipment failure.
- Spread rapidly, forming a layer that blocks sunlight, affecting marine plant life and oxygen production.
- Can poison fish, birds, and other marine animals.
- Have long-term environmental effects, especially near sensitive ecosystems.

Example: The 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill released over 4 million barrels of oil, devastating marine life for years.

Are There Global Rules to Prevent Oil Spills?

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) governs oil spills. It evolved from several older agreements and led to a protocol issued in 1978 following several oil spill disasters in the 1970s. India is also a signatory.

The MARPOL Convention has six annexes, covering prevention of pollution from ships by Oil, Noxious liquid substances, Dangerous goods in packaged form, Sewage, Garbage and Air pollution from ships.

It is enforced with the help of domestic legislation, such as the Merchant Shipping Act in India, which has provisions on civil liability and pollution prevention certificates. Indian ships and ships in Indian waters are mandated to follow these regulations. Ports also maintain oil spill contingency plans to handle local cases, while the Indian Coast Guard is the nodal agency.

How Are Oil Spills Cleaned Up?

Common methods:

1. Skimming – Collecting oil from the water surface.
2. In situ burning – Burning concentrated oil patches.
3. Chemical dispersants – Breaking oil into smaller droplets for natural breakdown.

Challenges:

- Oil spreads fast.
- Cleanup is hard in rough seas or remote areas.
- Some methods (like dispersants) may harm marine life.

What Should the Public Do?

The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) has issued these advisories:

- Do not touch any cargo or oil that washes ashore.
- Report immediately to the police if anything is spotted.
- Oil films may appear along the coast.

According to the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), coastal areas like Alappuzha, Ambalapuzha, Arattupuzha, and Karunagappally could be affected within 36–48 hours if a spill occurs.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

13. Bharat Forecast System to Sharpen Local Rain Alerts

IMD Adopts Advanced Forecasting Model

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has officially adopted the Bharat Forecast System (BFS) to deliver more accurate and localized rain forecasts, down to the panchayat level.

More Accurate Short- and Medium-Term Forecasts

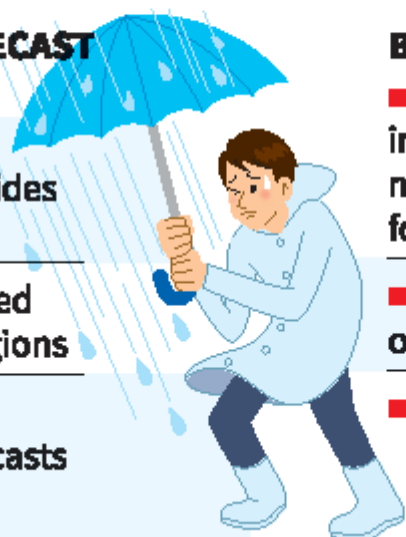
- The BFS will significantly improve 3-day and 7-day forecasts.
- Long-range forecasts (monthly or seasonal) will not see major changes yet.

Precision technology

The BFS developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, aims at improving weather forecast models

EXISTING FORECAST MODELS

- Use square grids of 12-km sides to map a region
- Use equal-sized grids to map regions
- Able to give block-level forecasts 5 days ahead



BFS MODEL

- Breaks down a region into 6-km sides for mapping, leading to a four-fold improvement
- Uses a triangular-cubic octahedral structure
- Able to give forecasts up to the level of panchayats

Developed by IITM with Improved Technology

- The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) developed BFS.
- The system has been tested since 2002 and shows notable accuracy in predicting heavy rainfall events.
- The model now uses 6 km x 6 km grids, compared to the earlier 12 km x 12 km, improving forecast resolution by four times.

Forecasts Now Reach Panchayat Level

Previously, forecasts were provided at the block level. With BFS, forecasts can now reach the panchayat level, covering small clusters of villages.

New Grid System Enhances Forecast Accuracy

- BFS uses a new triangular-cubic octahedral grid.
- This offers higher resolution in tropical regions, which are more prone to weather volatility, making forecasts more relevant for India.

Thunderstorm Forecasts Still Limited

The BFS won't yet improve sudden severe thunderstorm predictions.

To address this, 34 new Doppler Weather Radars will be installed across India within a year.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

14. What Are Sugar Boards?

Introduction

'Sugar boards' are visual displays in schools showing how much sugar is present in popular food items like soft drinks and packaged juices.

For example:

- A 300 ml soft drink = 8 teaspoons of sugar
- A 125 ml mango drink = 5 teaspoons of sugar

These boards:

- Help students understand the sugar content in everyday foods.
- Show health risks linked to high sugar intake.
- Promote healthier food choices.
- Are part of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) activity involving students.



CBSE's Directive

- Over 24,000 CBSE schools have been instructed to install sugar boards.
- Schools are encouraged to submit reports and photos of the activity by July 15.
- The initiative aims to raise awareness among nearly 2 crore students and their families.

Why Are Sugar Boards Needed?

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) pushed for sugar boards in all schools (not just CBSE).

- Type-2 diabetes, once rare in children, is now increasing due to high sugar intake and the easy availability of sugary snacks.
- Estimated cases of Type-2 diabetes in Indian children: 397 per lakh, second only to China.

Key Facts:

- Children aged 4–10 get 13% of calories from sugar.
- Ages 11–18 get 15%, which is 3 times the recommended limit (5%).

Where Does India Stand on Regulation?

- FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) is working on defining High Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS) content in school meals.
- As of now, there's no fixed definition for HFSS in school food.
- India currently follows WHO guidelines:
 - o Limit sugar intake to 25 grams per day (6 teaspoons).
- Experts believe Indian standards should be stricter due to higher genetic risks for heart disease.

What's Next?

- NCPCR plans to extend this initiative to tackle high salt and trans-fat foods.
- Workshops will be held by paediatricians in schools.
- Parent-teacher meetings will include discussions on healthy eating.
- Data on children with diabetes is being collected from hospitals.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

1. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman Launches New Startup 'World' in the US

Why now?

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, has launched a new startup called World in the United States. Its first store opened in San Francisco this week. The startup offers a device called the Orb, which scans your eye to check if you're human.



What is 'World'?

Previously known as WorldCoin, the startup was created to deal with the rising difficulty of telling humans apart from AI online.

To solve this, World created something called World ID — a digital proof that confirms you're a real person without revealing your identity.

Interestingly, World is addressing problems caused by AI — the same technology developed by Altman's other company, OpenAI.

What Do You Get in Return?

In exchange for signing up and verifying your identity, users get a cryptocurrency called WorldCoin.

You can manage this crypto using the World App, which lets you save, send, and withdraw your coins.

Where Has World Been Active?

World was launched globally in 2023 and quickly became popular in countries like Kenya and Indonesia. It also tested its technology in India by setting up Orbs in 17 locations.

The company avoided launching in the US at first due to strict rules around cryptocurrency under President Biden. That changed when Donald Trump returned to office in January, opening the door for World's US launch.

How Do You Get a World ID?

To get a World ID, you need to have your eyes scanned by the Orb — a white, glowing sphere. World also launched a smaller version called the Orb Mini, which is more portable and shaped like a smartphone. It does the same job as the larger Orb.

Why Is It Controversial?

Even though World claims it doesn't store eye images, its use of biometric data has raised privacy concerns. Several countries have banned or suspended its operations, including Kenya, Portugal, Spain, Hong Kong, and Brazil.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. For the first time, 2 new genome-edited rice varieties: Why is this such a major breakthrough for ICAR and India's agriculture?

Why in News?



Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan released two genome-edited varieties of rice, the first achievement of its kind in the country.

These two varieties, which are climate-resilient, conserve water, and boost yields, have been developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) using cutting-edge genome

editing technology.

Which are these two genome-edited varieties of rice?

These have been named 'Kamala' and 'Pusa DST Rice 1'. They have better stress tolerance, improved yields, and climate adaptability without any compromises with their existing strengths.

DRR DHAN 100 (KAMALA): Developed by the ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research (ICAR-IIRR), Hyderabad, this variety promises significantly higher yields, improved drought tolerance, and early maturity compared to its parent variety, Samba Mahsuri (BPT 5204).

According to the ICAR, DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) has been developed using genome editing technology targeting the Cytokinin Oxidase 2 (CKX2) gene (also known as Gn1a), to increase grain numbers per panicle.

PUSA DST RICE 1: This new genome-edited variety has been developed over the widely cultivated fine-grain variety called MTU1010 by ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-IARI), New Delhi.

Developed through Site Directed Nuclease 1 (SDN1) genome-editing, the new variety, Pusa DST Rice 1, targets the Drought and Salt Tolerance (DST) gene to improve the plant's resilience to harsh soil and climate conditions.

But what specific practical benefits will derive from cultivating these two new varieties?

BIGGER YIELDS, LESS EMISSIONS: According to ICAR, cultivation of DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1 varieties in about 5 million hectares of the recommended area will produce 4.5 million tonnes of additional paddy, and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 20% (32,000 tonnes).

LESS WATER CONSUMPTION: Due to shorter duration of Kamala, three irrigations will be saved resulting in saving of a total of 7,500 million cubic metres of irrigation water, which can be used for other crops.

Development of these varieties

The ICAR scientists have used the revolutionary CRISPR-Cas9 genome-editing technology to develop these two varieties.

This technology enables scientists to make targeted changes in the native genes of living organisms, creating new and desirable traits without introducing foreign DNA.

Why is this breakthrough in paddy so significant?

Paddy is India's principal crop of the kharif season, and is grown on one-third of the entire area under all foodgrain crops. It contributes about 40% to the country's foodgrain basket, and is critical to the nation's food security.

As per the Agriculture Ministry, paddy (kharif and rabi together) accounted for 45 million hectares of area, which was the highest in the world in 2020. However, in terms of production, India (186.5 million tonnes) ranked second after China (211 million tonnes). The reason is the lower yield in India. India's paddy yield (4,138 kg/ha) was lower than the world's average of 4,717 kg/ha, China's (7,043 kg/ha), Indonesia's (5,128 kg/ha) and Bangladesh's (4,809 kg/ha).

Is India developing other genome-edited varieties of crops as well?

Yes, research programmes on genome-editing have been initiated for other crops including oilseeds and pulses as well, officials said. The government has allocated Rs 500 crore for genome-editing in agricultural crops, and the University of Delhi has developed a genome-edited variety of mustard.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. 'Wonder drug' Ozempic could reverse liver disease

Why in News?

A drug originally developed to treat diabetes, and now prescribed for weight loss, may have yet another significant application: stopping, perhaps even reversing, liver disease.



Findings

In a phase 3 clinical trial researchers found that a weekly dose of semaglutide was effective at treating Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH), a serious form of fatty liver disease. Semaglutide is the key component of diabetes drug Ozempic and weight loss drug Wegovy.

Fatty Liver

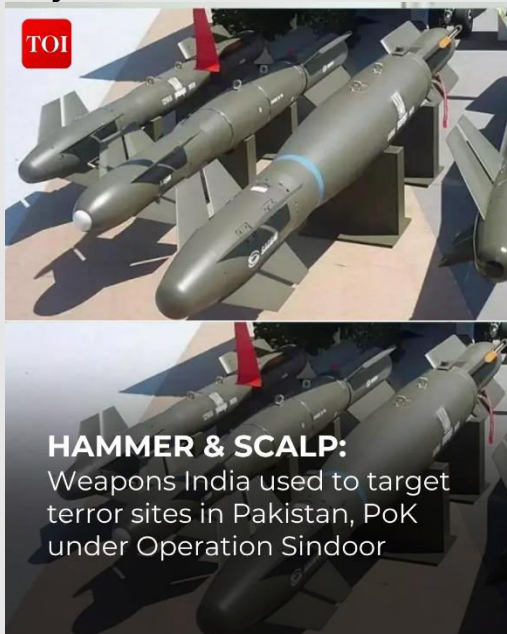
MASH describes a spectrum of conditions marked by fat buildup in the liver not caused by alcohol use. It is a metabolic syndrome usually caused by overnutrition, and leads to inflammation and scarring of the liver.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

4. Operation Sindoor: Precision guided long range weapons in Indian military's arsenal

Why in News?



India has not revealed what weapons were used in Operation Sindoor. The official statement said that the Indian Armed Forces carried out precision strikes, hitting terrorist infrastructure deep inside Pakistan and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Over the past several years, the Indian military has built up a formidable arsenal of new-age weapons that includes a range of precision-guided long-range weapons and drones, including loitering munitions. Among them:

HAMMER: The Highly Agile and Manoeuvrable Munition Extended Range (HAMMER) air-to-ground precision-guided weapon system for the Rafale fighter aircraft has a range of up to 70 km, and can also be fitted to bombs and various guided systems.

Built by the French aerospace, defence, and security corporation Safran, the HAMMER weapon system is highly versatile, and can be used for precision strikes against a range of targets in medium-range tactical operations.

SCALP: This is an air-launched cruise missile with stealth features, designed for long-range deep strikes. SCALP-EG (Système de Croisière Autonome à Longue Portée — Emploi Général), known as Storm Shadow in Britain, can be operated at night and in all weather conditions.

The missile, manufactured by the European multinational MBDA, has a range of 450 km, and is difficult to detect due to its low-flying capability when fired from an aircraft.

METEOR: The Meteor is a new-generation Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) system which is effective in dense electronic-warfare environments.

According to its manufacturer MBDA, the missile's solid-fuel 'ramjet' motor provides it with thrust all the way to the target intercept, and thus the largest 'No Escape Zone' of any air-to-air missile system.

BRAHMOS: These supersonic cruise missiles, which have been operationalised in all three defence services, are built by BrahMos Aerospace, a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya.

BrahMos missiles operate at close to Mach 3 speed in the cruise phase, which ensures reduced flight time, lower dispersion of targets, and quicker engagement time and non-interception.

LOITERING MUNITIONS: They are used for surveillance and identification of targets, and can carry out precision strikes, autonomously or otherwise. The Armed Forces in the last few years have been procuring a range of drones, including loitering munitions.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

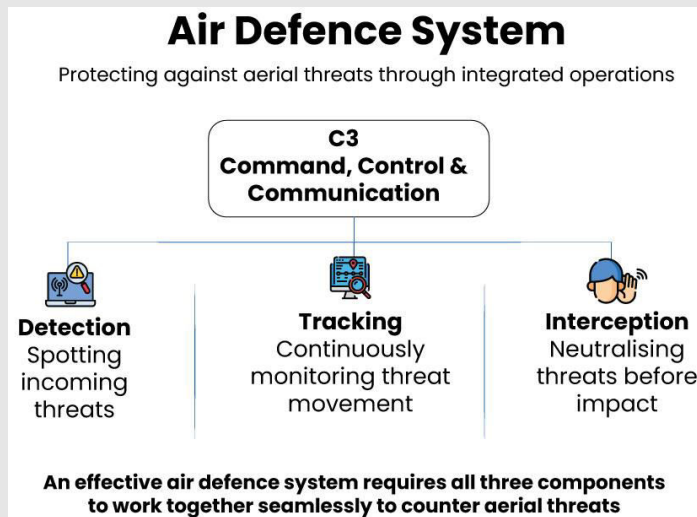
Source: Indian Express

5. How Air Defence Systems work

Objective

The primary objective of an air defence system is to take out threats from the skies — be it enemy fighter aircraft, unmanned drones, or missiles.

An air defence system can be sub-categorised into three interlinked operations.



DETECTION: Key to the success of any air defence system is its ability to detect threats in the first place. This is typically done by radar, although satellites may be used in certain circumstances — such as an enemy launching an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM).

Radar send out beams of electromagnetic radio waves through a transmitter. These waves are reflected by the objects that they hit — such as an enemy aircraft. A

receiver then collects the returning radio waves — based on which it makes inferences such as the distance of the threat, its speed, and its specific nature (what kind of aircraft/ missile).

TRACKING: The efficiency of an air defence system is also determined by its ability to constantly and accurately track — and not merely detect — an aerial threat. This is typically done using a combination of radar and other sensors such as infrared cameras or laser rangefinders.

More often than not, an air defence system is not just dealing with a single threat — it has to identify and track multiple, fast-moving threats in complex and cluttered environments, which may also include friendly aircraft.

The accuracy of tracking is crucial for effectively neutralising the enemy without targeting false threats.

INTERCEPTION: Once the threat has been detected and tracked, it must be neutralised. Here, the specifics of the threat — its range, type (what kind of missile/ aircraft), speed, etc. — determine the ways in which air defences work.

All these three aspects of an air defence system have to work together as a cogent whole. This requires what in military parlance is called “C3” or a “command, control and communication” system.

Beyond the technical capabilities of detecting, tracking, and intercepting aerial threats, superior communication and decision-making capabilities are crucial for an effective air defence.

HOW THEY INTERCEPT

Depending on the challenges they foresee, nations utilise a wide assortment of weapons to neutralise aerial threats. These include the following.

FIGHTER AIRCRAFT: Interceptors are fighters that take on attacking enemy aircraft, especially bombers. These agile aircraft can be scrambled at a moment's notice, and they climb quickly to altitude and neutralise an enemy aircraft before it deploys its weapons.

India can deploy any of its Sukhoi Su-35s, MiG-29s, HAL Tejas, Mig-21 Bisons, and Dassault Rafales for interceptor missions.

SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES (SAMS): Today, SAMs are the bread-and-butter of most air defence systems. This is because they are more effective than anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), and do not put pilots in danger like interceptors.

SAMs can be used to target enemy fighters, helicopters, and missiles. They are generally radar-, infrared-, or laser-guided. In addition to being operated from the ground, SAMs can also be launched from ships.

The three, oft-used but unofficial classes of SAMs are:

- * Heavy long-range systems which are fixed or semi-mobile;
- * Medium-range vehicle-mounted systems that can fire on the move;
- * Short-range man-portable air-defense systems (or MANPADS).

Each SAM class has a different function.

The heaviest SAMs, such as the Russian-made S-400 system used by India, take on enemy ballistic missiles or aircraft at long range, as much as a few hundred kilometres. Medium range SAMs have the capability to hit targets in the 50-100 km range but are more mobile, and can be launched in next-to-no time.

MANPADS are used for low-lying targets such as hovering helicopters or drones, or fixed-wing aircraft engaged in ground attack roles. These are far more cost-effective than the other classes, and have been used extensively not only by militaries but also non-state actors in unconventional warfare.

India's arsenal of SAMs include the indigenously-developed medium-range Akash missiles, the medium-to-long range Barak missiles, and the long-range S-400 missiles.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY (AAA): Once the cornerstone of ground-based air defence systems, the development of SAMs and capabilities of modern fighter jets have greatly reduced the salience of AAA. But augmented with automated fire-control systems, they remain crucial last-ditch defences, and are also used for specialised anti-unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) roles.

AAA fire shells rapidly, at rates of over 1,000 rounds per minute. AAA shells are designed to explode at predetermined altitudes so as to disperse shrapnel over a wide area. This makes an AAA battery effective even if it does not achieve a direct hit.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE (EW): It is not necessary to actually shoot down an enemy aerial threat in order to neutralise it. EW systems are designed to disrupt, deceive, or destroy threats using the power of the electromagnetic spectrum.

In the context of air defence, EW is most often used to jam enemy radar and targeting systems, so as to impede its ability to accurately and effectively deploy its weapon. EW can confuse attack drones or prevent enemy air-to-surface missiles from homing in on targets.

Several highly sophisticated EW systems are in use today. These can operate from both land and air, including from specialised EW aircraft, such as the US Navy's Boeing EA-18G Growler, the EW version of the F/A-18 Super Hornet.

TAKING DOWN ADs

Establishing air superiority allows an Air Force to operate with a degree of impunity, and without fear of attrition in bombing, tactical air support, paratroop insertion, or supply-drop missions.

To establish air superiority over enemy territory, the enemy's air defence systems have to be neutralised. Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) operations target enemy air defences with missiles, EW, bombs, UAVs or even ground attacks. An analysis published in 2005 found that a quarter of American combat sorties in (then) recent conflicts had been SEAD missions (Christopher Bolkcom, 'Military Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD): Assessing Future Needs').

Given the role of air superiority in providing a protective umbrella for ground forces, taking down enemy air defences also lays the ground for deeper ground attacks into enemy territory.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

6. HAROP: UAV believed to have been used by India against Pakistan

Why in News?

A day after India hit terror bases in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) under Operation Sindoor, India also targeted multiple air defence systems in Pakistan and successfully hit one in Lahore. It is understood that the latest Israeli HAROPs, a type of unmanned combat aerial vehicle, were used.

HAROP INDIA'S SUICIDE DRONE

From surveillance to strike, these can eliminate threats across the LoC

Combination of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and a missile

Can hover over an area before attacking its target

ENDURANCE
6-9 hours

MAX SPEED
400 km/h

PAYLOAD
16-23 kg explosive warhead

GUIDANCE
Electro-optical, IR seeker

WINGSPAN
3 m

LENGTH
2.5 m

LAND AND NAVAL APPLICATIONS

ATTACK AND ABORT CAPABILITY

COMMUNICATION RANGE
200 km

OPERATIONAL RANGE
1,000 km

ALTITUDE
4,600 m

Source: Israel Aerospace Industries | Graphic: Muskan Arora & Subham Singh



What are HAROPs

HAROP is a kind of loitering munition. This category of weapons is named so because they loiter (to stand or walk around) in the air close to the designated target. They cause destruction by crashing into their targets with the explosive payload that they carry, earning names such as "suicide drones" and "kamikaze drones".

Usually, loiter munitions carry a camera which is nose-mounted and can be used by the operator to see the area of operation and choose targets. These munitions also have variants which can be recovered and reused in case they are not used for any strike. This is new compared to how older precision-guided weapons were traditionally used, because they

required the exact location of the targets before launch.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

7. Operation Sindoor: India's air defence shield explained

Why in News?

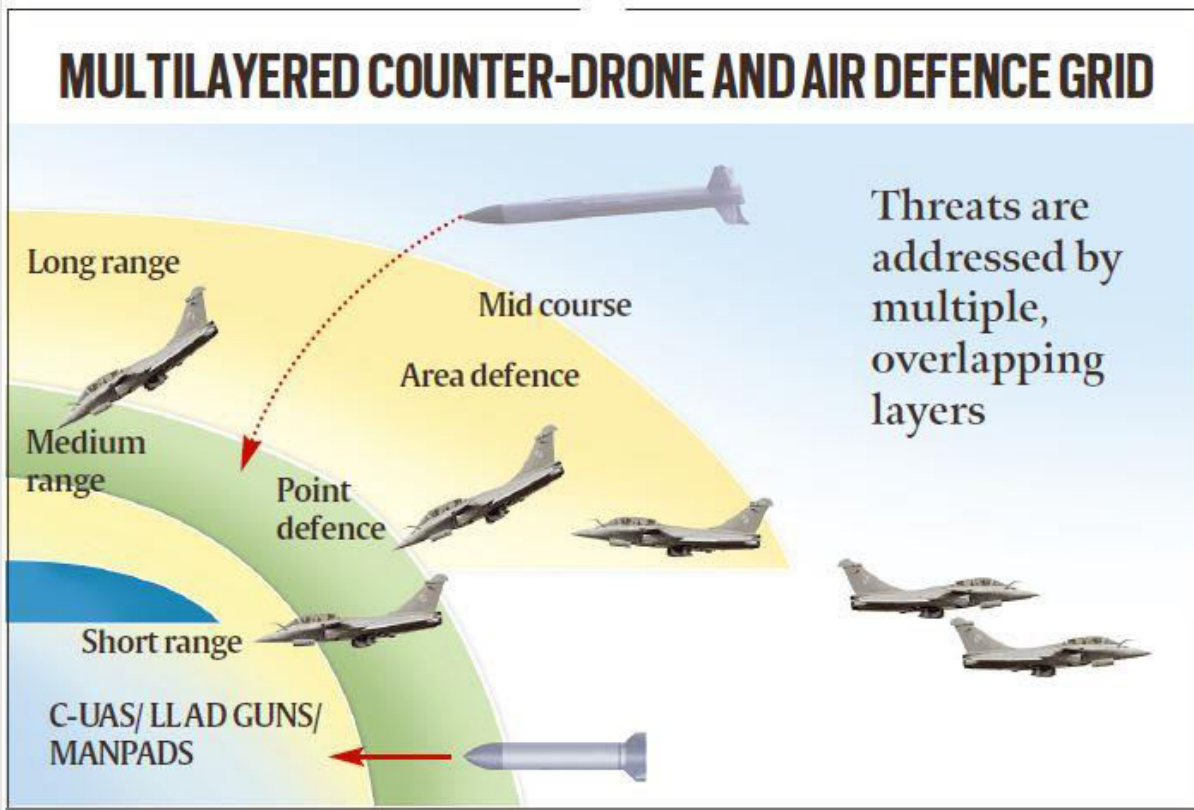
At the media briefing on Operation Sindoor, military officers displayed a picture of the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) node of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

India's Air Defence Shield Explained

1. Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) – Indian Air Force's System

- Developed by: Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)
- Function: Automated command and control system for air defence.
- Components Integrated: Ground radar, airborne sensors, civilian radar, communication nodes, and IAF command centres.
- Benefits:
 - Real-time situational awareness.
 - Faster threat detection and response.
 - Centralised control with decentralised execution.

- Effective airspace management due to overlapping radar coverage.

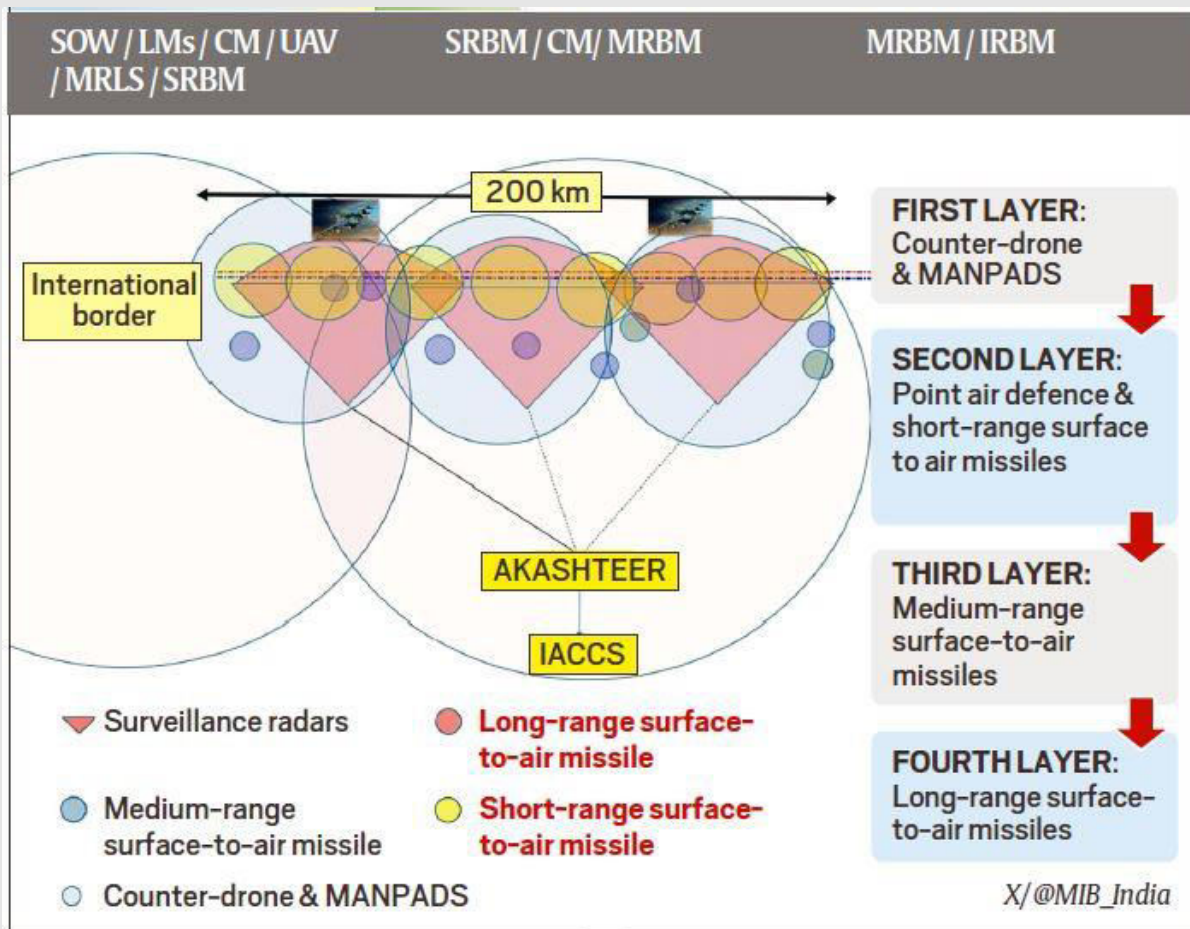


2. Akashteer – Indian Army's Air Defence System

- Also developed by: BEL
- Purpose: Air defence control and reporting for Army units.
- Features:
 - Monitors low-level airspace over battle zones.
 - Controls ground-based air defence weapons.
- Scale: Smaller than IACCS; currently being integrated with it for better coordination between Army and Air Force.

3. India's Multilayered Air Defence Umbrella

- Structure:
 - First Layer: Counter-drone systems and MANPADS (shoulder-fired weapons). MANPADS stands for Man-Portable Air Defense Systems.
 - Second Layer: Point air defence systems and short range surface to air missiles
 - Third Layer: Medium-range surface-to-air missiles.
 - Fourth Layer: Long-range surface-to-air missiles.
- Surveillance: Network of ground-based and airborne radars like AWACS and AEW&C systems.
- Objective: Detection, identification, interception, and destruction of hostile threats.



4. Future of IACCS

- Improvements Made: Expanded radar and missile system integration at sensitive bases.
- Role in Modern Warfare:
 - Enables joint coordination among Army, Navy, and Air Force.
 - Will integrate emerging technologies like AI for advanced threat analysis.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

8. NOAA slashes its weather balloon launches: Why is this significant?

Introduction

In the wake of budget cuts by the Trump administration, a Silicon Valley startup will soon start to replace the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) weather balloons with AI-powered alternatives, which are supposed to be much cheaper.



Weather agencies across the world use weather balloons to make upper air observations that are crucial for forecasts. Upper air refers to the Earth's atmosphere above about 5,000 feet, and it is from here that the planet gets its rain and drought, wind and calm, and heat and cold at the surface.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) also uses weather balloons to measure meteorological variables.

Enduring significance

Currently, twice a day, about 900 weather stations around the world launch weather balloons in a coordinated international programme to measure conditions in the upper atmosphere. The launch takes place at 0000 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) and 1200 UTC. This corresponds to 5.30 AM and 5.30 PM Indian Standard Time (IST).

The balloons are launched at the same time so that meteorologists can create a comprehensive picture of atmospheric conditions, which is essential for accurate weather forecasting.

Typically, today's weather balloons, made of latex and filled with helium, can reach an altitude of 1,15,000 feet (35 km) in a journey lasting up to two hours. The radiosonde is suspended 66 feet below the balloon. The radiosonde is a small instrument package that is suspended below balloon filled with either hydrogen or helium. As the radiosonde is carried aloft, it measures pressure, temperature, and relative humidity.

Concerns

NOAA's slashing of its weather balloon launches has made experts across the world concerned. They believe the move will severely impact weather forecasts.

When Russia tried to cut its radiosonde launches in half, between January 2015 and April 2015, European forecasters saw a decline in their model's forecast quality.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

9. India Develops First Genome-Edited Rice: What You Need to Know

Historic First for India

India has become the first country in the world to develop rice varieties using genome editing technology, according to Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The seeds will be available to farmers after necessary approvals, likely within six months.



What Are the New Rice Varieties?

The two new genome-edited rice varieties are:

- **DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala):** Developed from Samba Mahsuri, a high-yielding green rice variety.
 - **Pusa DST Rice 1:** Developed from the Maruteru 1010 (MTU1010) variety.
- Both were created by researchers under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Key Benefits of These Varieties

Kamala (DRR Dhan 100):

- Higher yield: 5.37 tonnes/hectare (vs. 4.5 tonnes in Samba Mahsuri)

- Drought-tolerant and early-maturing (saves water and fertilizer)
- More nitrogen-efficient
- Reduces methane emissions

Pusa DST Rice 1:

- Improved yield under stress: 3,508 kg/hectare (vs. 3,199 in MTU 1010)
- Better performance in salty soils:
 - 9.66% more yield under inland salinity
 - 14.66% more under alkaline conditions
 - 30.4% more under coastal salinity

What Technology Was Used?

The varieties were created using genome editing techniques called:

- SDN-1 (Site-Directed Nuclease 1)
- SDN-2 (Site-Directed Nuclease 2)

These techniques edit the plant's native genes without inserting foreign DNA. The process has been used in other countries for crops and even fish, but this is the first time it's been used for rice.

Are These Genetically Modified (GM) Crops?

No, these are not considered GM crops:

- No foreign genes were introduced.
- The mutations happened within the plant's own DNA, using precision tools.
- Many countries don't regulate SDN-1 and SDN-2 methods as GM technologies.

This means they may not face the same restrictions as traditional GM crops.

Why Are Some Groups Objecting?

Farmer Concerns:

Venugopal Badaravada, a former farmers' representative in ICAR, said:

- The claims are premature and lack transparency.
- More field-level data is needed before rollout.

He was later removed from ICAR, which accused him of spreading misinformation.

Activist Groups:

The Coalition for a GM-Free India raised concerns:

- Gene editing is being falsely portrayed as safe and precise.
- These technologies are often patented, which can threaten seed sovereignty.
- They argued the regulatory process was bypassed, making the rollout illegal.
- Demands were made for the government to clarify Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) involved.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

10. Indigenous Weapons Prove Highly Effective: Government

India's Strikes Were Precise and Successful



All Indian strikes on Pakistani military targets during Operation Sindoor on May 10 were carried out without any loss of Indian assets, according to an official statement. This highlights the strength of India's surveillance, planning, and precision strike capabilities.

Indian Systems Outperformed Chinese, Turkish Weapons

Indian defence systems, including the indigenous Akash short-range surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), successfully intercepted threats, while Pakistan's Chinese-supplied HQ-9 SAMs failed to stop Indian guided munitions.

The Indian Air Force also jammed and bypassed Pakistan's air defences, completing its mission in just 23 minutes, demonstrating India's technological edge.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Boosts Defence Sector

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's office highlighted the growth of India's indigenous defence capabilities, stating:

- Defence exports rose from ₹686 crore in 2013–14 to ₹23,622 crore in 2024–25.
- This 34-fold increase reflects the impact of the Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiative.

Several countries in Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Africa have shown interest in Indian systems like Akash and BrahMos, following their successful performance.

India's Air Defence Network Shows Strength

Over five days since Operation Sindoor began on May 6, Pakistan launched hundreds of drones, missiles, and UAVs. Most were intercepted by Indian forces, with minimal impact on Indian targets.

India also struck multiple Pakistani air defence sites, disabling key systems like the HQ-15 SAM system in Lahore.

Cutting-Edge Systems like Akashteer Deliver Results

The Akashteer air defence automation system, developed by Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL), was fielded just one year after a ₹2,000-crore contract was signed in March 2023. It played a vital role in defending India during the conflict.

BEL said Akashteer performed “beyond expectations” and made “Pakistan’s air adventures hell.”

India’s defence included:

- Akashteer (Army)
- Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) (Air Force)

Hostile Foreign Tech Neutralised

Operation Sindoor provided proof of hostile foreign weapons neutralised by Indian systems, including:

- Chinese PL-15 air-to-air missiles
- Turkish-origin UAVs
- Long-range rockets
- Quadcopters and commercial drones

These were recovered and identified, confirming India’s superiority over foreign-supplied weaponry used by Pakistan.

Current Situation Along the Border

As of May 13–14, the western border remains calm, with no immediate plans for talks between the Directors-General of Military Operations (DGMO) of India and Pakistan.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

11. AI hallucinations: What does it mean, why is this significant?

Introduction

A technical report released by artificial intelligence (AI) research organisation OpenAI last month found that the company’s latest models — o3 and o4-mini — generate more errors than its older models. Computer scientists call the errors made by chatbots “hallucinations”.



What are AI hallucinations?

When the term AI hallucinations began to be used to refer to errors made by chatbots, it had a very narrow definition. It was used to refer to those instances when AI models would give fabricated information as output. For instance, in June 2023, a lawyer in the United States admitted using ChatGPT to help write a court filing as the chatbot had added fake citations to the submission, which

pointed to cases that never existed.

Today, hallucination has become a blanket term for various types of mistakes made by chatbots. This includes instances when the output is factually correct but not actually relevant to the question that was asked.

Why do AI hallucinations happen?

ChatGPT, o3, o4-mini, Gemini, Perplexity, Grok and many more are all examples of what are known as large language models (LLMs). These models essentially take in text inputs and generate synthesised outputs in the form of text.

LLMs are able to do this as they are built using massive amounts of digital text taken from the Internet. Simply put, computer scientists feed these models a lot of text, helping them identify patterns and relationships within that text, and predict text sequences and produce some output in response to a user's input (known as a prompt).

Note that LLMs are always making a guess while giving an output. They do not know for sure what is true and what is not — these models cannot even fact-check their output against, let's say, Wikipedia, like humans can.

As a result, when an LLM is trained on, for example, inaccurate text, they give inaccurate outputs, thereby hallucinating.

However, even accurate text cannot stop LLMs from making mistakes. That's because to generate new text (in response to a prompt), these models combine billions of patterns in unexpected ways. So, there is always a possibility that LLMs give fabricated information as output.

And as LLMs are trained on vast amounts of data, experts do not understand why they generate a particular sequence of text at a given moment.

Why is OpenAI's new report significant?

Hallucination has been an issue with AI models from the start, and big AI companies and labs, in the initial years, repeatedly claimed that the problem would be resolved in the near future.

It did seem possible, as after they were first launched, models tended to hallucinate less with each update.

However, after the release of the new report about OpenAI's latest models, it has increasingly become clear that hallucination is here to stay. Also, the issue is not limited to just OpenAI. Other reports have shown that Chinese startup DeepSeek's R-1 model has double-digit rises in hallucination rates compared with previous models from the company.

This means that the application of AI models has to be limited, at least for now. They cannot be used, for example, as a research assistant (as models create fake citations in research papers) or a paralegal-bot (because models give imaginary legal cases).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

12. ISRO's 101st Satellite Launch Fails: A Rare Setback for PSLV

Recent Mission Failure: PSLV-C61



The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) 101st satellite mission failed recently. The PSLV-C61 rocket, carrying the EOS-09 Earth observation satellite, experienced a failure in its third stage. The exact cause is still under investigation.

This was only the third failure out of 63 PSLV launches—a rare event for India's most reliable launch vehicle.

What is a PSLV?

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) is a type of rocket used to carry satellites into space. PSLV is

ISRO's most-used and most reliable launch vehicle. It successfully launched major missions like:

- Chandrayaan-1 (2008)
- Mars Orbiter Mission (2013)
- A record 104 satellites in a single launch (2017)

Structure of PSLV

PSLV has four stages:

1. PS1 – Solid fuel with 6 strap-on boosters
2. PS2 – Liquid-fueled engine (Vikas engine)
3. PS3 – Solid fuel for high thrust post-atmosphere
4. PS4 – Two liquid-fueled engines for final adjustments in orbit

It is also cost-effective, making it popular globally for launching foreign satellites.

Previous PSLV Failures

1. 1993 – PSLV-D1 Failure

- Mission: To launch IRS-1E, a remote sensing satellite
- Cause: Software failure
- Outcome: The rocket failed to reach orbit and crashed into the sea

2. 2017 – PSLV-C39 Failure

- Mission: To launch IRNSS-1H, a regional navigation satellite
- Cause: Heat shield failed to separate
- Outcome: Satellite couldn't be deployed, and the mission failed

The heat shield protects the satellite during launch. It is supposed to separate at ~120 km altitude. In this case, the satellite remained trapped inside the shield, preventing deployment.

About the Recent EOS-09 Mission

- Payload: 1,700-kg Earth observation satellite with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)
- Orbit Targeted: 597 km Sun-synchronous polar orbit (same time pass over a location daily)
- Use: High-resolution imaging in all weather conditions

This failure follows another setback earlier in 2025, when a GSLV mission failed to place the NVS-02 navigation satellite in the correct orbit.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

13. Astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar passes away: What is the Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity?

Introduction

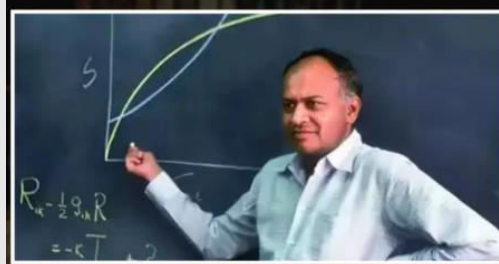
Eminent Indian astrophysicist, science communicator, and Padma Vibhushan awardee Jayant Narlikar passed away in Pune recently at the age of 87.

He was best known for propounding the Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity (also known as conformal gravity), which he developed with English astronomer and professor Fred Hoyle in 1964. The theory sought to improve on Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, published in 1915.

Link to Mach's principle

At the heart of the Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity is the Mach's principle, which says that the mass of every object in the universe is affected by its interaction with every other object. Einstein was greatly inspired by the principle, but could not incorporate it into his theory.

Dr. Narlikar, in collaboration with Fred Hoyle, developed the Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity, a Machian and conformal theory that challenged conventional cosmological models.



Hoyle and Narlikar took Mach's principle more literally and claimed to have successfully included it in their theory. They said that the inertia of an object, that is the tendency to resist change in its state of motion, arises from its interaction with all other matter in the universe.

"As Hoyle and Narlikar see it, a universe with nothing in it is impossible. There must be at least two particles, each to give mass to the other. The masses, and therefore the gravity, of the sun and the earth are partly due to each other, partly to more distant objects such as the stars and galaxies".

Concept of C-field

The Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity also proposed a "creation field" (C-field), a hypothetical negative-energy field responsible for the continuous creation of matter. This helped explain the steady-state cosmology, which said that the universe had no beginning and will endure forever.

The steady-state concept of the universe is essentially an alternative to "Big-Bang" cosmology, which proposed that the universe originated 13 billion years ago with an expansion and has been expanding ever since. Hoyle and Narlikar said that if the universe were this old and always expanding, we would not see anything in the sky.

Hence, Dr Hoyle and other proponents of a steady-state situation have proposed that hydrogen atoms are continually being created in space to fill the void resulting from such expansion. It is to account for this that Dr Hoyle has proposed the existence of an unseen force, or C-field. When this field becomes strong enough, at any point in space, a new hydrogen atom appears."

Challenges to the Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity

The Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity was not widely accepted, especially after the discovery of the cosmic microwave background (CMB) radiation in 1965. The Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) is the cooled remnant of the first light that could ever travel freely throughout the Universe. This 'fossil' radiation, the furthest that any telescope can see, was released soon after the Big Bang. Scientists consider it as an echo or 'shockwave' of the Big Bang.

However, the theory continues to draw attention for its attempt to integrate Mach's principle in cosmology.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

14. China's Tianwen-2 Mission: Why It Matters

China's First Asteroid Sample Mission

This week, China will launch Tianwen-2, its first mission to collect samples from a near-Earth asteroid. The target is asteroid 469219 Kamo'oalewa, which orbits the Sun close to Earth.



If successful, China will join the U.S. and Japan as the only countries to return asteroid samples to Earth.

What is Kamo'oalewa?

- Discovered in 2016 by a telescope in Hawaii.
- A quasi-satellite: it orbits the Sun, but stays close to Earth due to its gravitational influence.
- From Earth, it appears to orbit our planet, though it actually doesn't.
- It's been in its current orbit for 100 years and will likely stay for another 300.

Why Study This Asteroid?

Scientists are interested in Kamo'oalewa for two reasons:

1. Unusual Orbit – Learning about its orbit may offer clues about quasi-satellites and their origins.
2. Possible Lunar Origin – Some researchers believe it could be a fragment of the Moon, ejected during a collision in the distant past.
 - o Its light spectrum closely matches Moon rock samples from NASA's Apollo missions.
 - o Studying the samples in labs on Earth could confirm this theory.

How Will Tianwen-2 Collect Samples?

Tianwen-2 will use two main techniques:

- Touch-and-Go: A robotic arm briefly touches the surface, using gas or force to collect material.
- Anchor and Attach: Four robotic arms dig into the asteroid's surface to collect deeper samples.

Once the samples are collected, the probe will return them to Earth, and then continue on to explore the main asteroid belt.

A Technically Challenging Mission

Kamo'oalewa is very small — just 40 to 100 meters wide — which makes the mission especially tricky.

The spacecraft will need advanced systems like precision cameras, computers, and control systems to succeed.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

15. Why Covid cases are rising, but there is no need to worry?

What is triggering the increase in cases?

The health authorities pointed out that periodic waves of Covid-19 — like other endemic respiratory diseases — were expected throughout the year.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19, has not disappeared, but it no longer behaves like an unpredictable emergency — rather, it has become part of a recurring cycle of illnesses, similar to the flu.

Several factors could be contributing to the rise in cases:

1. Waning immunity: Protection from vaccination or past infection decreases with time, leaving individuals more vulnerable to reinfection.

2. New variants: Like other viruses, SARS-CoV-2 continues to mutate. Some of these new variants may spread more easily or evade immunity to a greater extent, triggering fresh surges.

3. Seasonal patterns: Respiratory viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, often spread more efficiently in colder or more humid periods. Notably, several cities in India are currently experiencing a rise in other viral flu infections, which may reflect broader seasonal trends in respiratory illness.

4. Not enough testing: Reduced surveillance in many countries, including India, means rising case numbers may remain undetected for longer. Covid-19 is now considered endemic, and testing and genome sequencing efforts have been scaled back, delaying the identification of outbreaks.

5. High-risk groups: Individuals with weakened immune systems or severe comorbidities remain especially vulnerable. With relaxed public health measures, they face a greater risk of severe outcomes during periodic waves.

Which new variants have emerged, and which one is currently widespread?

Three categories of variants are closely monitored.

- **Variants of Concern (VOC)** are those that spread more easily, cause more severe illness, present different symptoms, evade the immune system, or reduce the effectiveness of vaccines and treatments. No variant is currently classified as VOC.

- **Variants of Interest (VOI)** include those with mutations that are suspected or known to significantly alter their behaviour compared to the original strain. These changes may impact the spread of the virus or the way it interacts with the immune system.



• **Variants Under Monitoring (VUM)** are those that experts are observing to see if they might pose a greater risk in the future. The WHO is currently monitoring eight SARS-CoV-2 variants, including one VOI — JN.1 — and seven VUMs.

In India, the virus in most samples sequenced over the past couple of months has been identified as either BA.2 or JN.1. Health officials have said there is no indication that they are more transmissible or cause more severe disease compared to earlier variants.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

1. Raghuji Bhonsle's sword returned

Why in News?



The Maharashtra government reclaimed the iconic sword of Maratha warrior Raje Raghuji Bhonsle I at an auction in London for Rs 47.15 lakh. Raghuji Bhonsle was ruler of Nagpur kingdom, one of the kingdoms in the Maratha Confederacy.

What are the features of the sword?

The spine of the sword is inlaid in gold with an inscription in Devanagari script. The inscription reads Shrimant Raghuji Bhosale Sena Saheb Subah Firang, suggesting that the sword could be ceremonial.

Sena Saheb Subah was a title of high military rank that was associated with the Maratha Empire, and would be usually conferred by the Chhatrapatis of Satara. The person receiving the title would also get a sword and robe.

This particular sword is likely a gift from Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj to Raghuji Raje Bhonsle who was conferred with the title of Sena Saheb Subah.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

2. Starbase

Why now?

Residents of a 3.5 sq km area in Cameron County, Texas, approved the formation of a new municipality called Starbase. The area surrounds the SpaceX facility in the region and most of these residents are SpaceX employees.

So, What Is Starbase?

Starbase is the newest 'city' in Texas, coming up in the area where Elon Musk-owned SpaceX operates. Essentially, it is the latest company town.

And What is a Company Town?

A company town is a township where a single company employs most of the residents and owns the majority of the housing and stores. Jamshedpur in Jharkhand is one example.

In the US, company towns call back to a bygone era where industrialists held the kind of power to physically concentrate their workforce around their site of operations. Pullman in Illinois is one such example, named after industrialist and rail mogul, George Pullman.

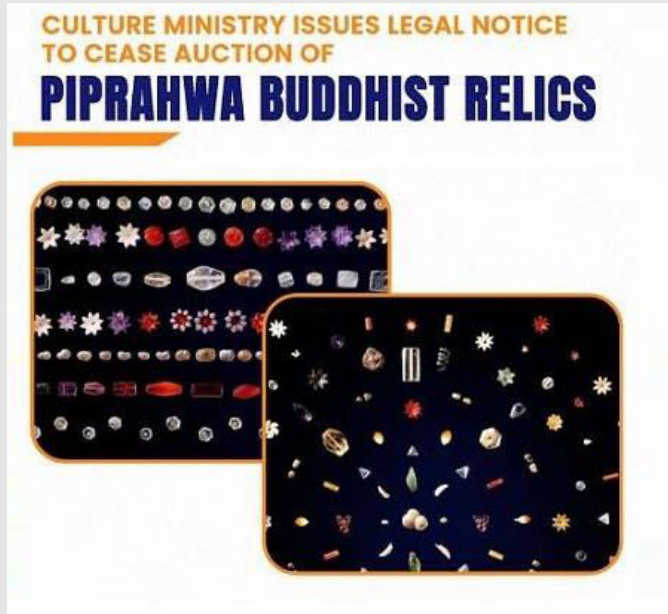


Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous
Source: Indian Express

3. What are the Piprahwa relics, and why is India trying to stop their auction?

Why in News?

India is trying to stop the auction of an extraordinary historical treasure – relics that were found more than 125 years ago at an archaeological site intimately connected with the life of Lord Buddha, which was carried away by the British colonial landowner who discovered them.



On May 5, the Ministry of Culture served notice on Sotheby's and the family of William Claxton Peppé, the man who carried out the excavation at Piprahwa in Siddharthnagar district in UP close to the Nepal border, demanding "immediate cessation" of the auction and repatriation of the relics to India.

According to the Indian legal notice, the collection includes "bone fragments, soapstone and crystal caskets, a sandstone coffer, and offerings such as gold ornaments and gemstones", which were "excavated...from the Piprahwa Stupa – widely identified as ancient

Kapilavastu", the capital of the Shakya "republic" of the 5th-6th centuries BCE where Prince Siddhartha lived before leaving home in his search for the truth.



The relics, the notice says, are an "inalienable religious and cultural heritage of India and the global Buddhist community", and their sale "violates Indian and international laws, as well as United Nations conventions".

How were the relics discovered?

In 1898, Peppé, an English estate manager and engineer, during an excavation found a stupa at Piprahwa, just south of Lumbini believed to be the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Upon further excavation, he discovered an enormous stone coffer, which contained gems, precious metals, and some of the cremated remains of the Buddha, who died about 480 BC.

William Peppé had seemingly unearthed one of the original eight stupas said to contain the ashes and bone fragments of the Buddha, distributed after his cremation. It is believed that the Buddha's own Sakya clan had built this stupa to honour the relics of their 'illustrious kinsman' Gautama Buddha".

The British Crown claimed the found relics from Peppé under the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act. Most of the gems and precious metals (nearly 1,800 pearls, rubies, topaz, sapphires, and patterned gold sheets) went to what is now the Indian Museum in Kolkata.

However, a fifth of the total find — consisting of duplicates of the main collection — were retained by Peppé. It is these gems that are now being auctioned by Sotheby's.

Why are there objections to the auction?

Buddhist academics and monastic leaders have condemned the auctioning of the ancient Indian gem relics, asserting that they are part of Buddhist heritage.

It also said that Chris "lacks authority" to sell the relics and they are protected under Indian laws — the 1972 Antiques and Art Treasures Act, the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, and the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Culture

Source: Indian Express

4. Crisis at Kaleshwaram— why Telangana's massive irrigation project is distressed

The mega project



The Kaleshwaram project on the Godavari will be the world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project. It is on Godavari river in Telangana's Jayashankar Bhupalpally district.

Work on the project began in 2019. In lift irrigation projects, water does not rely on gravity to flow in canals from higher ground to lower; rather, water is lifted by means of pumps or surge pools to a main delivery chamber at the highest point in the project, from where it is distributed to beneficiary fields.

The project sprawls over approximately 500 km in 13 districts, with a canal network of 1,800 km. Most of the water under the project is to be sourced from the Medigadda Barrage. Two other barrages in the project are Annaram and Sundilla.

Crisis at Medigadda

On October 21, 2023, one of the pillars — No. 20 of block 7 — of the Medigadda Barrage sank, which led to flooding. The state government asked the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), a statutory body set up under the National Dam Safety Act, 2021, for a thorough inspection.

Findings of the NDSA

The NDSA's report, made public in April 2024, revealed serious structural issues, including:

- Design flaws and construction defects
- Failure of modelling studies
- Lack of quality control
- Ignored dam safety standards

Medigadda Barrage showed cracks and tilting of piers in Block-7. Annaram and Sundilla barrages also had seepage and structural stress.

Recommended Structural Repairs

The NDSA has advised:

- Rehabilitation of designs
- Stabilisation measures to prevent further damage
- Comprehensive geo-technical and geophysical studies
- Hydraulic and structural redesigns using advanced modelling tools

Political Fallout

The project, initiated by former CM K Chandrashekar Rao (KCR), was considered the flagship achievement of the State government.

However, current Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy has called KLIP the "biggest man-made disaster since Independence."

He claims:

- Telangana is paying ₹16,000 crore annually in debt servicing
- Barrages were overloaded, designed for 2 TMC but stored over 10 TMC, causing foundation failures.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Geography

Source: Indian Express

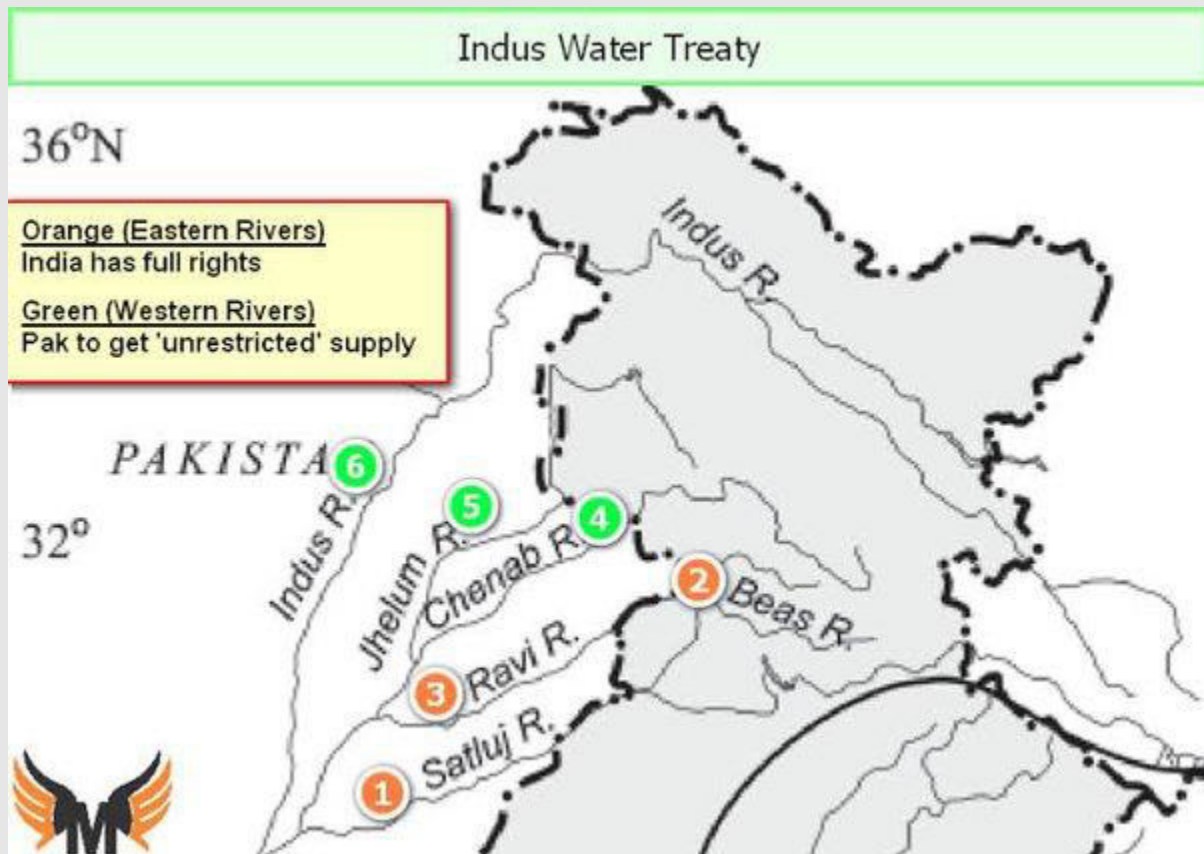
5. Why Water from Punjab Flows Unused into Pakistan

Why in News?

Despite facing severe water shortages, Punjab is unable to use a large portion of its river water, which ends up flowing into Pakistan. This is due to the lack of proper storage and water management infrastructure.

The Indus Water Treaty: What It Allows

Under the Indus Water Treaty, India has full rights over the Eastern Rivers — Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi. Pakistan gets water from the Western Rivers — Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab.



However, India cannot fully utilize its share from the Eastern Rivers due to the absence of adequate storage systems. During monsoons, when river levels rise, surplus water is released — some of it flowing into Pakistan, which then accuses India of flooding its territory.

Punjab's Water Crisis

Punjab faces a significant water deficit:

- Total annual water demand: 66.12 billion cubic meters (BCM)
- Available water: 52.85 BCM
- Deficit: 13.27 BCM

Breakdown of water sources:

- Rainfall: 20.98 BCM
- Groundwater (replenishable): 17.07 BCM
- Canal water: 14.80 BCM

Despite having major rivers, Punjab uses just a fraction of their water due to interstate allocations and lack of infrastructure. This forces the state to rely heavily on groundwater, which is rapidly depleting.

Why Punjab Can't Store or Use This Water

- Only major rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi) have dams. Smaller rivers and rivulets remain unmanaged and often cause flooding.

- Canal infrastructure is outdated and needs remodeling to handle excess water and redirect it for irrigation or groundwater recharge.
- Floodplain encroachments and lack of mini-dams or embankments worsen the problem.

Conclusion

Punjab's inability to manage and store river water is leading to wastage and worsening its own water crisis. Better infrastructure, canal remodeling, and floodplain regulation are urgently needed to make full use of its rightful share of water.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: Indian Express

6. Met Gala

Why now?

The Met Gala, formally called the Costume Institute Benefit, is the annual haute couture fundraising festival held for the benefit of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute in Manhattan.



Fashion event

The Met Gala is popularly regarded as the world's most prestigious and glamorous fashion event. Attendees are given the opportunity to express themselves through fashion, often producing elaborate and highly publicized outfits inspired by the evening's theme and broader cultural context. The event is known as "fashion's

biggest night".

Personalities who are perceived to be culturally relevant to contemporary society amongst various professional spheres, including fashion, film, television, music, theater, business, sports, social media, and politics, are invited to attend the Met Gala.

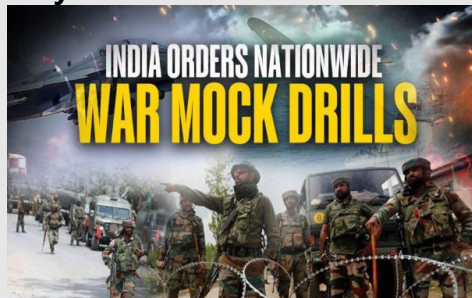
The Gala is an event held annually on the first Monday of May, which marks the opening of the Costume Institute's annual fashion exhibit hosted on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Many of the attendees are depicted on the covers and pages of Fashion magazine, Vogue. Each year's event celebrates the specific theme of that year's Costume Institute exhibition, which sets the tone for the formal attire of the night.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

7. Govt ordered mock drills, boosting civil defence: What does this entail?

Why in News?



Amid rising tensions between India and Pakistan following the Pahalgam attack, the Centre directed all states and Union Territories to conduct mock drills on May 7 and strengthen civil defence mechanisms across categorised Civil Defence Districts in the event of a hostile attack.

What are Civil Defence Districts?

Civil Defence Districts are demarcated areas or regions, including towns and districts, which the government designates for implementation of civil defence programmes. These are demarcated on the recommendation of the Ministry of Defence. These demarcations are made based on the location of the towns or districts (such as near the borders), vulnerability to attacks, location of vital installations (such as defence installations, nuclear plants, thermal power plants, key government buildings, etc) and critical infrastructure (such as key highways, railways, ports etc.).

There are in all 259 Civil Defence Districts, notified by the MHA in 2010. These are spread across all states and UTs and divided into three categories. Category I districts (13) require full implementation of civil defence programmes, while category II (201) and Category III (45) require partial implementation in varying degrees.

What is civil defence?

World over, civil defence refers to government programs which provide guidance and assistance in preparing for, responding to and recovering from public emergencies due to conflict or natural disasters.

Civil defence or civil protection is an effort to protect the citizens of a state (generally non-combatants) from military attack. It uses the principles of emergency operations: prevention, mitigation, preparation, response, emergency evacuation and recovery.

Under the Civil Defence Act of 1968 in India, civil defence organisations were established to protect individuals, properties, and establishments against any hostile attacks. These are manned by volunteers from different walks of life who are given the necessary training.

In the event of any untoward incidents like flood, earthquake, terror attack, fire, explosion etc., the civil defence organisation would have a corpus of trained employees and volunteers, who can render assistance and relief before the official agencies reach the site. The first few minutes are always crucial to rescue and relief operations.

What prompted India to opt for a formal civil defence unit?

Until the declaration of a national emergency in 1962 (amid the India-China war), the Civil Defence Policy of the Government of India was in place. However, it was confined to making the states and UTs conscious of the need for civil protection measures and to ask them to keep ready civil protection paper plans for major cities and towns. This was under the Emergency Relief Organisation (ERO) Scheme.

The Chinese aggression in 1962 and the India-Pakistan conflict in 1965 led to a rethinking of the policy and scope of civil defence. The Parliament thus passed the Civil Defence Act in May 1968.

The Act has been suitably amended by the Civil Defence (Amendment) Act, 2009, by Notification No. 3 of 2010, to include disaster management as an additional function for the Civil Defence Corps, while retaining its primary role. The additional role in disaster management will be enacted by the Civil Defence Personnel before, during and after emergencies arising out of calamities/disasters, whether natural or man-made.

What was the May 7 mock drill entail?

In its communication to states and UTs sent on May 2 and May 5, the Ministry of Home Affairs has asked them to ensure operationalisation of Air Raid Warning Sirens; operationalisation of Hotline/Radio Communication Links with the Indian Air Force; activation and Manning of Control Rooms / Shadow Control Rooms; training of civilians, students, etc, on the Civil Defence aspects to protect themselves in the event of hostile attack; activation of Civil Defence Services, especially, warden services, firefighting, rescue service, depot, etc.; provision of crash black out measures (a sudden switching off of lights to reduce a potential target's visibility); provision for early camouflaging of vital plants / installations; updation of Civil Defence Plan and its rehearsal; updation of evacuation plan and its rehearsal; and cleaning of bunkers, trenches, etc.

How does this impact the general public?

While Civil Defence preparedness involves direct participation civil defence units such as district controllers, various district authorities, civil defence wardens/volunteers, home guards, National Cadet Corps, National Service Scheme volunteers, Nehru Yuva Kendra volunteers and students in general, normal life of the public tends to get affected in notified districts.

For example, notified towns and cities may have to deal with sudden power outages for a brief period. Following an air raid warning, all vehicular traffic in a notified area would have to come to a halt and passenger would be expected to take shelter and other precautionary measures. Occupants of vulnerable villages and towns may be evacuated and moved to shelters, bunkers or trenches.

The Civil Defence Act of 1968, under which these mock drills would be conducted, empowers the government, in times of emergencies, to restrict movement, impose curfews, control assemblies or gatherings, close roads, ports, and transport services as needed. The government may detain or arrest a person without the usual legal processes and even order killing of animals.

It also allows the government compulsory acquisition of property, requisitioning services, and controlling the supply and distribution of goods (especially essentials).

The government under the law can direct individuals or classes of persons to perform certain work or duties, and control industries crucial to national security. It also empowers government to regulate or censor communications, publications, and broadcasts.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: Indian Express

8. Story of the infamous Alcatraz prison, which Trump wants to reopen now

Why in News?



US President Donald Trump said that he had directed the government to reopen and expand Alcatraz, the notorious former prison on an island off San Francisco, closed more than 60 years ago.

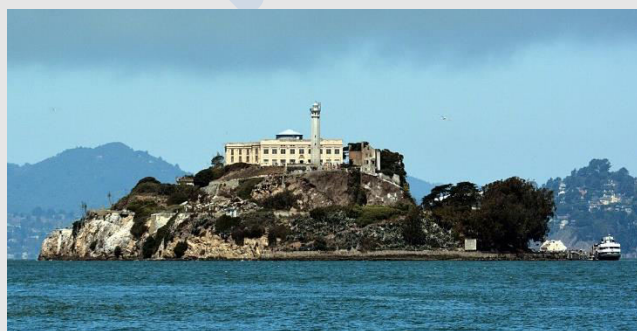
Also called "The Rock" and "Devil's Island", the facility housed some of the most infamous criminals in the United States. It has captured the public imagination for decades and featured in several books and movies, such as *The Rock* starring Sean Connery and *Nicolas Cage*. Here is a look at the history of Alcatraz and why

it was shut down.

From fort to prison

The prison was originally a defence fort on Alcatraz Island, about 22 acres in size and located about 2 kilometres offshore from the city of San Francisco.

In 1846, the US gained control of the island after John C Frémont, then military governor of California, bought it from naturalised Mexican citizen Francis Temple in the name of the federal government.



Four years later, then US President Millard Fillmore recognised the island's strategic military value. A fort was thus constructed on the island, with the initial structure completed in 1858. Around 100 cannons and military men were stationed. The West Coast's first operational lighthouse was also built on Alcatraz in 1854.

However, over time, the island's necessity for defence purposes diminished (Alcatraz never fired its guns in combat). As it was isolated from the mainland due to the strong ocean currents and cold Pacific waters, the island began to be seen as a secure detention centre. By the late 1850s, the Alcatraz Fort was being used as a military prison to house various military personnel, including those convicted of offences by court-martial, deserters, and those deemed a security risk.

Morphing into Devil's Island

Alcatraz stopped operating as a military prison in 1933 due to the increasing maintenance costs. After the prison shut down, the military left the island, and it was acquired by the US Department of Justice, which turned it into a federal prison.

Closure and later years

Much like the US military, the Federal Bureau of Prisons found it extremely expensive to run the Alcatraz prison. A 1959 report found that its operation costs were three times those of a comparable prison.

Another issue was that the perpetual salt exposure due to the surrounding waters corroded its structures. An estimate suggested that it would cost \$5 million to repair the damage. These factors eventually led to the prison's closure on March 21, 1963.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

9. Russia honours Biju Patnaik: What did he do during Battle of Stalingrad?

Why in News?



Former Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov inaugurated a memorial plaque dedicated to the late Biju Patnaik at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi.

The plaque is meant to honour Biju Patnaik's role in the Battle of Stalingrad, one of the most decisive Allied victories over Nazi

Germany in World War II. Patnaik, who at the time was flying for the Royal Indian Air Force, had made multiple sorties dropping off supplies to the besieged Red Army in Stalingrad.

Operation Barbarossa

On June 22, 1941, the Wehrmacht (unified armed forces of Nazi Germany), at the time in control of almost all of western Europe, launched a massive invasion of the Soviet Union — Operation Barbarossa. By the spring of 1942, much of what is now Belaruss and Ukraine were under Nazi control.

After the Red Army managed to rebuff German advances toward Moscow, the Wehrmacht looked southwards. And the city of Stalingrad was chosen as a major objective.

Stalingrad

Stalingrad was a major industrial centre on the river Volga, and home to the Red Army's artillery production centre. The River Volga itself made up one of the USSR's most important shipping routes, connecting western Russia to the Caspian Sea and the country's vast eastward expanse. More importantly, given that the city bore the name of Josef Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, it was also a target of great symbolic significance.

The 6th Army of the Wehrmacht, under Gen Friedrich Paulus began the assault on Stalingrad on August 23, 1942. The fighting got very bloody, very quickly. The Red Army, suffering massive losses, slowed down the German advance into the city. But it could not stop it.

By the fall of 1942, constant artillery shelling and bombing had turned Stalingrad into a pile of ruins. And the Germans controlled almost 90% of the city. But the Russians kept fighting, even as Stalin instructed his forces to take "not one step back".

Tables turned

The tide of the battle turned in November, when the Soviets launched a counterattack called Operation Uranus. Gathering all available troops in the region, the Red Army effectively formed a defensive cordon around the city, trapping the nearly 300,000 Axis troops. And then the Russian winter set in.

With supply lines cut off and unprepared for a protracted winter war, the Germans were slowly pounded into submission by Red Army forces surrounding them. And even though they "controlled" most of the city, Russian resistance within Stalingrad continued to inflict heavy losses.

Gen Paulus surrendered on January 30, 1943. By February, the Red Army had retaken Stalingrad, capturing nearly 100,000 German troops in the process. The defeat in Stalingrad all but turned the tide for the Allies in World War II. The Wehrmacht lost all of its momentum, and never set a foot further in the east.

The Red Army, on the other hand, was galvanised. Over the two-and-a-half years, it fought its way towards Germany, ultimately arriving in Berlin on May 2, 1945. The Germans formally surrendered on May 9, which is till date observed as Victory Day in Russia.

The bravery of Biju



"Flying is my first love and though it has dimmed with age, it still remains so," Biju Patnaik had once reminisced during an interview. Born in Cuttack in 1916, the man who would later become the Chief Minister of Orissa, had always been fascinated with aviation.

Patnaik joined the Royal Indian Air Force in 1936, mostly flying supply and transport planes such as the Douglas C-47 Skytrain, more commonly known as 'Dakota'.

As World War II heated up and Imperial Japan advanced through Southeast Asia, Biju flew numerous sorties rescuing British officials and their families. He was integral in the evacuation of British officials from Rangoon. Patnaik also flew supply missions to assist China's Chiang Kai-Shek.

He would do the same in Stalingrad. The Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov wrote to Naveen Patnaik, "Among the heroes who we pay tribute to is your late father, Honourable Shri Biju Patnaik ji, a towering personality and a valiant pilot of the Indian National Airways, who had participated in the Stalingrad Operation, supplying weapons to the besieged Red Army."

While the troops encircling the city were well-supplied, those inside were in the same boat as their German counterparts, cut-off from the rest of the world. And like their German counterparts, the Russian civilians and troops inside the city were completely dependent on aerial supplies to continue their war efforts.

Note that this is not the first time the Russians have recognised Biju Patnaik's contribution. In 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the War's end, the Russian Embassy in New Delhi had honoured the then Chief Minister of Orissa. After his passing in 1997, his coffin was wrapped in the national flags of three different countries: India, Indonesia (whose Independence effort he had aided), and Russia.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

10. Blackouts in over 15 cities amid India-Pakistan tensions: What the measure is, how it can help

Indian City Blackout Measures

Amid the ongoing India-Pakistan tensions, blackouts were imposed in over 15 cities in India – from Srinagar to Chandigarh to Bhuj. In this context, a blackout is when all lights are turned off or restricted in a given area.

What is meant by blackout measures in the event of an attack?

Such measures ensure the elimination of all light sources visible from the open air. They are part of lighting restrictions and primarily meant to help strengthen civil defence mechanisms, which is the preliminary line of defence of the citizens, by the citizens.

No light should be visible at a height of 5,000 feet above ground level under normal visibility conditions.



How exactly do blackouts help?

The aim is to enable people to protect themselves and physical infrastructure from enemy aircraft at night, "without incurring the discomfort of total darkness". Blackouts make locking ground targets difficult for advanced high-speed aircraft.

The order further read: "The anxiety level of the enemy pilot in the cockpit would be more if the area is dark. This holds even with significant changes in the threat perception and technological advancement over time."

How are lighting restrictions to be imposed?

The order states that it is not practical for all lighting restrictions to be imposed all at once. The best approach is to do so in gradual stages, so that civilians can carry out their normal activities with "less and less light". These include street lights, those in buildings and vehicles, and larger complexes.

For example, for street lights:

- *The number of street lights should be reduced to the absolute minimum.

- *The power of the remaining lights is to be reduced as far as possible, ensuring that no light is reflected on the ground.

In the case of buildings, or open ground, "The total light reaching the outside of the building in any place is not greater than that thrown on the ground by a 25 watt bulb at a distance of 20 ft. or an ordinary hurricane lantern held at a distance of 6 ft," the order reads.

And what is a 'crash blackout'?

A 'crash blackout' is applicable to factories and commercial premises in case of an air raid warning.

The purpose is to prevent conspicuous buildings from being picked out at night as targets for an air attack. It is also aimed at depriving an easy means of checking geographical positions.

This makes it a protection measure for not just these larger premises, but also for the entire neighbourhood.

Auxiliary or supplementary lighting, if used, should be provided from another source rather than the main electric supply of the commercial building. Batteries or a small petrol-driven generator are considered suitable in such cases.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security
Source: Indian Express

11. India's Bid for the 2036 Olympics

Why in News?

India has expressed interest in hosting the 2036 Olympic Games, submitting a Letter of Intent to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Officials are promoting the bid by highlighting potential benefits such as economic growth, tourism boost, and greater health awareness.

But what do past Olympics tell us about these promises?

Study Examines Real Impact of Hosting Olympics

A recent study published in *Social Science & Medicine* used data from 19,000+ residents in London and Paris to assess the health, happiness, and economic impact of hosting the Olympics. The research spanned three years — before, during, and after the 2012 London Olympics — using Paris (a non-host city) as a comparison.

1. Short-Lived Happiness Boost

- During the Games, 65% of Londoners described it as “a summer like no other.”
- 69% believed it would inspire more adults to play sports; 81% of children agreed.
- Economists found a genuine rise in happiness and well-being.

But:

This happiness faded quickly. Within weeks of the closing ceremony, well-being returned to pre-Games levels. There were no lasting improvements in mental health or life satisfaction.

2. Temporary Increase in Physical Activity

One major goal of hosting the Olympics is to encourage healthier lifestyles. London's bid claimed it would inspire widespread physical activity.

- The study found no major increase in average physical activity.
- However, among previously inactive individuals, there was an 18% increase — a short-term improvement lasting about 100 days.
- No significant changes were observed in:
 - Already active individuals
 - Smoking or alcohol habits

3. Questionable Economic and Health Returns

FUTURE OLYMPIC HOST CITIES



In chronological order

2026 MILAN/CORTINA, ITALY WINTER OLYMPICS	2028 LOS ANGELES, USA SUMMER OLYMPICS	2030 FRENCH ALPS WINTER OLYMPICS	2032 BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA SUMMER OLYMPICS	2034 SALT LAKE CITY, USA WINTER OLYMPICS
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Hosting the Olympics comes with massive costs:

- Beijing 2008: \$52 billion
- Paris 2024: ~\$9.5 billion
- Athens 2004: Went over budget and contributed to Greece's financial crisis

London 2012:

- Healthcare savings estimated at £4.2 million
- But £40 million was spent on promoting physical activity
- Result: Net loss of over £35 million

The study concluded the Games didn't provide value for money in terms of public health.

Conclusion: A Mixed Legacy

While hosting the Olympics can bring short-term joy and international prestige, the long-term health and economic benefits are limited or unsustainable, according to research.

As India prepares its bid, it may need to weigh the costs against realistic outcomes—and ensure any promised legacy is carefully planned and monitored.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: The Hindu

12. Anita Anand Becomes Canada's First Hindu Woman Foreign Minister: What It Means for India

Historic Appointment

Anita Anand has become Canada's first Hindu woman to be appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. A Member of Parliament from the Liberal Party, she has previously served as Minister of National Defence and Minister of Transport. Her appointment comes under the newly elected government of Prime Minister Mark Carney, amid ongoing tensions between India and Canada.



Indian Roots

Born in 1967 in Nova Scotia, Anand is the daughter of Indian immigrants—her father from Tamil Nadu and her mother from Punjab. Her parents met in Ireland, married in England, and eventually moved to Canada in 1965. Anand proudly embraces her Indian heritage, frequently attending Hindu and Sikh events, hosting Diwali celebrations, and participating in Indian Independence Day

events.

Political and Academic Background

Anand holds degrees from Queen's University, the University of Oxford, Dalhousie University, and the University of Toronto. Before entering politics in 2019, she had a long academic career.

In 2019, she became the first Hindu woman elected to Canada's Parliament and the first Hindu to become a Cabinet Minister. Her key roles include:

- **Defence Minister (2021–2023):** Oversaw military aid to Ukraine during Russia's invasion.
- **President of the Treasury Board (2023–2024)**
- **Minister of Transport and Internal Trade (2024)**

Implications for India-Canada Relations

India-Canada relations soured under former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, especially after he alleged India's involvement in the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023. The diplomatic fallout included the expulsion of envoys.

In response, Anand called for unity and stressed the importance of law and order. She supported the need for security agencies to conduct their investigations independently and emphasized the seriousness of foreign interference.

Stance on Anti-India Sentiment

Anand has consistently spoken out against anti-India activities in Canada:

- Condemned hate imagery at parades targeting Indian leaders.
- Opposed vandalism of Hindu temples and Indian monuments.
- Criticized extremist symbolism, including a controversial float depicting Indira Gandhi's assassination.

Hopes for Improved Ties

Her appointment has been received with cautious optimism in India. Prime Minister Modi expressed his willingness to work with Mark Carney to strengthen bilateral ties. Carney has also shown interest in rebuilding relations with India, focusing on shared commercial values and strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Indian Diaspora

Source: The Hindu

13. Can the Italian Open Become the Fifth Grand Slam?

Italy Challenges Tennis Tradition

The Italian Tennis Federation is pushing to elevate the Italian Open to Grand Slam status, questioning the century-old dominance of the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and the US Open. Federation President Angelo Binaghi argues it's time to reconsider the status quo:

"Why are there always four and always the same four? It doesn't help tennis grow."



How Did the Grand Slams Originate?

- The four existing Grand Slam events evolved from national championships of the strongest tennis nations: the US, UK, France, and Australia.
- These tournaments were officially recognised by 1923.
- The term "Grand Slam" came into use in the early

20th century, drawing from bridge and golf terminology.

Why It's an Uphill Battle

Tradition and Resistance

- Tennis is steeped in tradition, and the current Grand Slams are protected by history and structure.
- Other strong tennis nations like Spain, Serbia, and China never succeeded in upgrading their events.

Practical Challenges

- The Italian Open's proximity to the French Open, both being played on clay, may raise scheduling and player fatigue issues.

Conclusion

While Italy has strong players and impressive infrastructure, achieving Grand Slam status for the Italian Open faces major resistance from tradition, scheduling constraints, and the global tennis establishment. The push may spark debate, but real change seems unlikely in the near future.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

14. Shirui Lily Festival Returns to Conflict-Hit Manipur

Why in News?

The Shirui Lily Festival has resumed in Manipur on May 20, 2025, after a two-year break due to ongoing ethnic conflict. This marks the first major tourism event in the state since the violence erupted in May 2023, making security a top priority this year.

What is the Shirui Lily Festival?

Organised by Manipur's Department of Tourism, the festival was first held in 2017. It is one of two major state tourism festivals, the other being the Sangai Festival, named after the state animal.

Held in Ukhrul district, home to the Tangkhul Naga community, the event promotes eco-tourism and highlights the unique Shirui Lily flower, which blooms around this time.



What Makes the Shirui Lily Special?

The Shirui Lily (*Lilium mackliniae*) is a rare and endangered flower, found only in the upper reaches of Shirui Hills (2,673 m) in Ukhrul.

Locals call it 'Kashong Timrawon', linked to local legends. It was officially discovered in 1946 by botanist Frank Kingdon-Ward, who named it after his wife Jean Macklin.

Current Situation and Security Concerns

The festival is happening:

- Two years into the ethnic conflict
- Three months into President's Rule
- Under the supervision of Governor Ajay Bhalla

Though held in Naga territory (considered neutral), concerns remain about travel safety.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

15. Banu Mushtaq's Journey: From Karnataka's Rebel Literature to the Booker Prize

A Historic Win for Indian Literature

Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* won the 2025 International Booker Prize, becoming the first full-length English translation of her work. Originally written in Kannada, the book has already been translated into Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam. Mushtaq is now among India's most internationally recognized protest writers.



She is the second Kannada author to receive Booker recognition, after UR Ananthamurthy in 2013.

Voice of Resistance: Literature Born of Protest

Mushtaq began writing in the 1970s and 1980s and was a rare woman voice in the Bandaya Sahitya (Rebel Literature) movement, alongside Dalit and Muslim writers reshaping Kannada literature.

She said, "My stories are about women — how religion, society, and politics demand obedience and inflict cruelty on them."

Her writing challenges caste, class, patriarchy, and religious orthodoxy.

A Life Committed to Literature and Activism

- Born in 1948, in Karnataka.
- Profession: Lawyer, activist and author

Heart Lamp brings together stories written since 1990, selected intuitively rather than academically. Mushtaq writes straight from personal emotion: "My heart itself is my field of study."

About International Booker Prize

The International Booker Prize is a prestigious literary award given annually for a book translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland. It celebrates both the author and the translator, with the £50,000 prize money split equally between them. The prize recognizes exceptional fiction from around the world, aiming to promote cultural exchange and showcase the best of global literature in English translation.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous
Source: Indian Express

16. What Was the Radical Students Union?

Background

The Radical Students Union (RSU) was a left-wing student organization in India, mainly active in Andhra Pradesh during the 1970s and 1980s. It played a key role in spreading Maoist ideology among the youth and became a recruiting ground for future Maoist leaders.

Origins and Ideology

- The RSU was inspired by Maoist principles, especially those related to armed revolution and agrarian struggle.
- It aimed to mobilize students against state oppression, feudalism, and social injustice.

Activities and Influence

- The RSU organized rallies, protests, and study circles on issues like poverty, land rights, and police brutality.
- It helped spread left-wing radical ideas among young people in colleges and universities.
- Some of its members later joined armed Maoist movements, especially the People's War Group, which later merged into the CPI (Maoist).

Legacy

- Although the RSU has weakened over the years, it left a lasting impact on left-wing activism in India.
- Many Maoist leaders trace their roots to student activism with RSU.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: Indian Express

