

1. India-Armenia Alliance Proves Crucial Amid Iran-Israel Conflict

Evacuation Route Through Armenia

As tensions rise between Iran and Israel, India has successfully evacuated over 110 stranded students from Iran using a land route through Armenia. With Iranian airspace shut and most neighboring borders inaccessible, the Iran-Armenia crossing at Nurduz-Agarak became the most viable option. The evacuees were transported to Yerevan and flown to India from there.



Border Challenges

Due to strained relations with several of Iran's neighbors, India faced limited evacuation options:

- Pakistan: Border closed; relations hostile post-Operation Sindoor.
- Turkey & Azerbaijan: Unfriendly due to their support for Pakistan.
- Afghanistan: No official ties with Taliban regime.
- Iraq: Risky due to ongoing conflict and closed airports.
- Turkmenistan: Logistically difficult due to sparse population and infrastructure.

Why Armenia Matters

India's strategic relationship with Armenia has been key:

- Defense Partnership: India has become Armenia's largest arms supplier, surpassing Russia.
- Political Support: Armenia backs India's stance on Kashmir and supports India's UNSC bid.
- Trade Corridor: Armenia is part of the International North-South Transport Corridor, crucial for India's access to Europe via Iran.

Conclusion

India's long-term diplomatic investment in Armenia has proved valuable, ensuring a safe and efficient route for evacuating its citizens during the Iran-Israel crisis.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. Uttarakhand Chopper Crashes: Why Flying in the Hills Is So Risky

Recent Crashes Raise Alarm

A helicopter crash near Gaurikund on June 15 killed seven people, including a pilot and an infant. This was not an isolated incident:

- May 2025: Six dead in crash near Gangotri.
- June 2025: Emergency landing due to technical snag.
- April 2024 & October 2022: Fatal crashes during Char Dham yatra.



Why Helicopter Flights Are Risky in Uttarakhand

1. Harsh Terrain and Unpredictable Weather
 - Sudden weather changes, strong winds, and low visibility make flying hazardous.
 - Pilots face narrow valleys and high-altitude conditions.
2. Inadequate Infrastructure
 - Kedarnath helipad lacks proper Air Traffic Control (ATC) and navigation aids.
 - No on-site weather monitoring with qualified personnel.
 - Communication often relies on VHF radios, which get blocked by mountains.

Oversight and Regulations

DGCA & UCADA Roles

- DGCA handles aviation rules nationally.
- UCADA, a state body, coordinates local operations and maintains government helipads.

Operator Rules

- Helicopter operators need UCADA approval for all activities, including breaks.
- They are fined for withdrawing helicopters without permission, even during bad weather.
- A maximum of 4 helicopters can fly in Kedarnath valley at once.
- Pilots must be specially trained in hill flying.

Profit Pressure Compromising Safety

Unrealistic Contracts and Penalties

- Operators pay ₹5,000 per landing, leading to more sorties for profit.
- Each pilot can fly up to 50 landings per day.
- Operators must offer 10 free flying hours each season or face a ₹2 lakh penalty per shortfall.
- They are discouraged from grounding aircraft, even during bad weather or low demand.

Veteran Aviators Speak Out

- Experts say these conditions encourage unsafe flying and poor maintenance.
- The short flying window (just four months) adds further pressure.

Booking a Helicopter

- Bookings can be made directly on operators' websites or via travel agents.
- Char Dham tours may include just Kedarnath/Badrinath or all four shrines.
- Helicopter travel from Gaurikund to Kedarnath (16 km) takes only 15 minutes versus hours by mule or pony.

Conclusion

Frequent chopper accidents in Uttarakhand reveal deep-rooted problems in private aviation regulation, infrastructure, and commercial pressure. Without better oversight and safer flying protocols, lives remain at risk during the Char Dham pilgrimage season.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: Indian Express

3. Chandigarh Tops School Education Rankings, Meghalaya at the Bottom: Govt Report

Overview of the Report

The Union Education Ministry has released the Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0 for the academic year 2023–24, assessing school education across States and Union Territories based on 1,000 points.

Key evaluation areas include:

- Learning outcomes
- Access and equity
- Infrastructure
- Governance
- Teacher training

Top and Bottom Performers

- Best Performer: Chandigarh, with a score of 719, the only one in Grade Prachesta-1 (701–760).
- Lowest Ranked: Meghalaya, scoring 417, placed in Grade Akanshi-3 (401–460).

States by Performance Grade

Prachesta-3 (Score: 581–640)

Includes 10 States/UTs:

- Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala, Haryana, Goa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli with Daman & Diu.

Akanshi-1 (Score: 521–580)

14 mid-performing regions:

Chandigarh tops, Meghalaya at bottom of Centre's school education performance grading index



- Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, UP, J&K, Uttarakhand, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Akanshi-2 (Score: 461–520)

10 low-performing States:

- Telangana, Assam, Jharkhand, Tripura, Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh.

Akanshi-3 (Score: 401–460)

- Only Meghalaya falls in this lowest category.

Progress Highlights

- 24 States/UTs improved their PGI scores over last year.
- 12 States/UTs saw declines in performance.
- Bihar and Telangana showed the most progress in access to education.
- Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, and Telangana made the most improvement in infrastructure.

Conclusion

While Chandigarh leads the rankings, no State scored above 760, indicating significant room for improvement nationwide in school education quality and delivery.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

4. Why States Deserve a Fairer Share in Tax Revenue

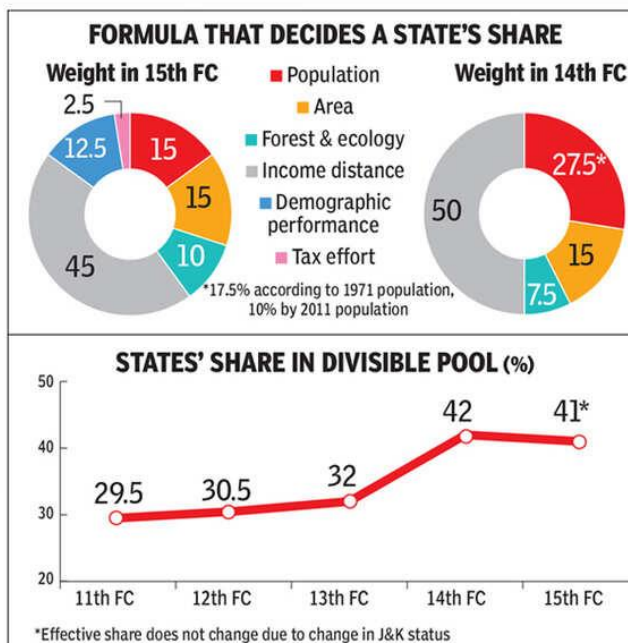
Background: Upcoming Finance Commission Decisions

The Sixteenth Finance Commission (SFC), led by Arvind Panagariya, is preparing recommendations on how tax revenues should be shared between the Centre and the States from April 1, 2026. A major point of contention is the 41% share currently given to States from the divisible tax pool.

States Demand More

- 22 out of 28 States — including BJP-ruled ones — are demanding their share be raised from 41% to 50%.
- Their demand is seen as legitimate because the Centre has increased its own earnings through cesses and surcharges, which are not shared with the States.

HOW THE BOOTY IS DIVIDED



How the Centre Reduced States' Effective Share

- Cesses and surcharges have increased from 12.8% to 18.5% of gross tax revenue.
- As a result, the States' actual share dropped from 35% to about 31% over recent years.

Why This Hurts the States

- After the introduction of GST, States have limited ways to raise their own revenue.
- Though GST collections are healthy, they don't make up for the loss of independent revenue streams.
- Southern States, which are more developed, feel penalized by the current formula, which heavily weighs population and income gaps.

Challenges for the Finance Commission

- The Centre is unlikely to accept a sharp increase in devolution due to its own high spending needs, like defence.
- The Commission may retain the 41% share, despite widespread demand for change.

What Needs to Change

- A modest increase (not necessarily to 50%, but more than 41%) would show respect for cooperative federalism.
- There should be a limit on how much revenue the Centre can raise through cesses and surcharges, and any surplus should be shared with States.
- The formula for horizontal sharing (among States) should also balance need, area, and performance, not just population and poverty.

Conclusion

Keeping the status quo would weaken India's federal structure. A fairer and more transparent revenue-sharing model is vital for empowering States and upholding the spirit of cooperative governance.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

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