

1. What Happened at the UN Oceans Conference?

Introduction

The third United Nations Oceans Conference (UNOC) took place in France and focused on accelerating action to protect international waters. The main highlight was progress on the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, also called the High Seas Treaty.



What Is the BBNJ Agreement?

The BBNJ treaty aims to:

- Create marine protected areas beyond national borders.
- Regulate the use of marine genetic resources.
- Require environmental impact assessments.
- Support developing countries in marine conservation.

To become legally binding, 60 countries must ratify (legally adopt) the treaty. So far, 56 countries have ratified it, with more expected by September 2025. India and the U.S. have not yet ratified it.

Why Is the BBNJ Important?

The treaty deals with protecting the high seas, areas that lie beyond any single nation's control. These regions are vulnerable to overfishing, deep-sea mining, and unregulated exploitation. The BBNJ supports the global goal of protecting 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.

What Are the Challenges?

The main hurdle is sharing commercial benefits from marine resources found in the high seas. Since these areas do not belong to any country, deciding how profits should be distributed remains unresolved. Environmental groups argue that without stricter bans on exploitation, ocean degradation will continue.

Key Outcomes and Global Commitments

The conference led to several voluntary commitments, including:

- European Union: €1 billion for ocean conservation.
- French Polynesia: World's largest marine protected area (~5 million sq km).
- New Zealand: \$52 million for Pacific Ocean governance and science.
- Germany: €100 million to remove WWII munitions from its seas.
- Panama & Canada: Launched the "Quiet Ocean" coalition to reduce ocean noise pollution.
- Italy: €6.5 million for coast guard surveillance and protection.
- Canada: \$9 million for climate resilience in small island states.

- Spain: Creation of five new marine protected areas (to cover 25% of its marine territory).
- UN Agencies: Initiated the One Ocean Finance project to fund the blue economy.

What's Next?

With 60 ratifications expected soon, the treaty could become legally binding by late 2025, paving the way for the first BBNJ COP (Conference of Parties) in 2026, similar to annual climate summits.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. Why Has the Election Commission Issued New EVM Rules?

Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has released revised guidelines for checking and verifying Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) when a losing candidate challenges the result. These rules allow second- and third-place candidates to request a verification process.



What Triggered These New Rules?

- The rules were revised after a May 7, 2025, Supreme Court order.
- Petitioners, including Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), asked the court to improve the verification process.
- Earlier, on April 26, 2024, the SC had rejected full VVPAT counting but allowed limited EVM verification for losing candidates.
- Based on that, the ECI issued initial SOPs in June and July 2024, allowing checks on 5% of EVMs in a constituency.

How Does the EVM Checking Process Work?

- Candidates who came second or third can request checking of EVM memory/microcontroller.
- They can conduct a mock poll of up to 1,400 votes per EVM.
- If the EVM result matches the VVPAT slip count, the machine is considered accurate.

Why Were the SOPs Revised Again?

- Petitioners asked the court to:
 - Stop deleting data from EVMs during verification.
 - Include the Symbol Loading Units (SLUs) in the verification process.
- SLUs are devices that load candidate symbols onto VVPATs and are seen as a potential point of tampering.
- On February 11, 2025, the Supreme Court directed the ECI not to delete data and to revise the SOP accordingly.

What's New in the Revised SOP (June 2025)?

1. Two Payment Options

- ₹23,600 per EVM for just a self-diagnosis test
- ₹47,200 per EVM for full mock poll verification

2. Symbol Loading Choice

- Candidates can choose to use existing symbols on VVPATs or request a reloading of the symbols from SLUs for the mock poll.

3. Longer Record Storage

- Verification records, slips, and video footage will now be stored for 3 months (previously 1 month) after the verification process.

4. Technical Process Remains Same

- EVM units (Control Unit, Ballot Unit, and VVPAT) are turned on in front of candidates.
- If the self-check passes, the mock poll can be conducted.

Criticism of the SOP

- ADR co-founder Jagdeep Chhokar criticized the process, saying it only fulfills the formality of the SC order.
- He argued that just turning the machines on and conducting mock polls isn't enough to verify the integrity of actual voting.

Conclusion

The revised SOP improves transparency by stopping data deletion, offering more options, and extending record storage. However, concerns remain over how effective the process truly is in ensuring election integrity.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. What Is the Green India Mission (GIM)?

Introduction

The Green India Mission (GIM) is part of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

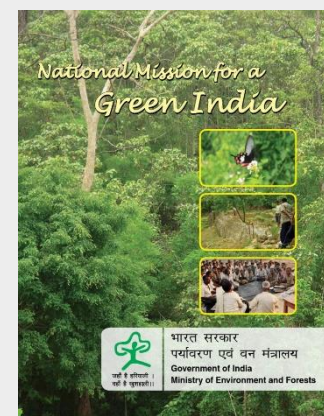
Launched in 2014, it aims to:

- Increase and restore forest and green cover
- Combat climate change
- Improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities

The original goal:

- Add 5 million hectares of new forest/tree cover
- Improve the quality of forest cover on another 5 million hectares

What Has GIM Achieved So Far?



- From 2015-2021, green efforts covered 11.22 million hectares under various state and central schemes.
- Between 2019-2024, the Centre released ₹624.71 crore to 18 states, with over ₹575 crore utilized.
- Areas were selected based on ecological vulnerability, land degradation, and carbon sequestration potential.

Why Was the GIM Revised?

The roadmap was updated to:

- Reflect on-ground climate impacts
- Incorporate feedback from states and scientific bodies
- Focus on vulnerable regions needing urgent attention

What's New in the Revised GIM?

The revised plan emphasizes landscape-specific restoration in:

- Aravalli ranges (Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi)
- Western Ghats
- Himalayas
- Mangrove ecosystems

It introduces:

- Best practices tailored to local conditions
- Stronger coordination with projects like the Aravalli Green Wall

What Is the Aravalli Green Wall Project?

- Aims to combat desertification and dust pollution from the Thar Desert
- Plans to restore 8 lakh hectares across 29 districts in 4 states
- Will use native species and cover forests, grasslands, and water systems
- Estimated cost: ₹16,053 crore
- Goal: Create a 5 km wide green buffer zone along the Aravalli range

What About the Western Ghats and Himalayas?

- In the Western Ghats, the focus is on:
 - Stopping deforestation and illegal mining
 - Recharging groundwater
 - Eco-restoration of abandoned mines
- In the Himalayas, the mission targets:
 - Landslide-prone and glacial melt-affected areas
 - Strengthening natural ecosystems

How Will It Help Fight Land Degradation and Climate Change?

- As per ISRO data (2018–19), 1/3rd of India's land (97.85 million hectares) is degraded.
- India aims to restore 26 million hectares by 2030
- India's global climate goal: Create a carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ via forests

How Much CO₂ Can Be Removed by Forest Restoration?

According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI):

- Open forest restoration alone can sequester 1.89 billion tonnes of CO₂ over 15 mha.
- If all schemes align and afforestation intensifies, India can expand forest/tree cover by 24.7 million hectares.
- This would yield a carbon sink of 3.39 billion tonnes CO₂, exceeding national targets.

In Summary

The revised Green India Mission:

- Expands beyond tree planting to region-specific restoration
- Integrates with other national programs like the Green Wall
- Plays a critical role in climate action, biodiversity conservation, and land restoration

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

4. Why Is PM Modi's Visit to Croatia Important?

Introduction

PM Modi's visit to Croatia (June 2025) is the first by any Indian Prime Minister and comes during the last leg of a three-nation tour that also included Cyprus and Canada.

This visit is strategically significant for India's engagement with Central and Eastern Europe and forms part of India's broader outreach to the European Union (EU) amid global geopolitical shifts.



Croatia's Strategic Location

- Croatia lies on the Adriatic Sea, making it a key gateway to Europe.
- It connects to major transport routes like the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).
- Croatian ports such as Rijeka, Split, and Ploče could play a vital role in India's trade through the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
- Croatia is also a member of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI)—a trade and energy cooperation group of 12 Central and Eastern European countries.

Why Now? The Changing Geopolitical Landscape

- The visit aligns with India's strategic push in EU relations, especially after:
 - The Ukraine war
 - The return of Donald Trump to the White House
 - EU's efforts to reduce dependency on China
- Recent visits by Indian leaders to various EU nations signal a deepening India-EU partnership.

Historical Context: From Yugoslavia to Croatia

- Croatia was once part of Yugoslavia, a federation formed in 1918 and reorganized in 1929.
- Yugoslavia was dissolved in the early 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union.

- Croatia declared independence in 1991 and became a UN member in 1992, joined NATO in 2009, and the EU in 2013.

India-Croatia Relations Over the Years

- India recognized Croatia's independence in 1992 and set up an embassy in Zagreb in 1996.
- Relations date back to Yugoslav times, when trade was strong.
- Former Yugoslav President Tito, of Croat-Slovenian descent, had close ties with India and was a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement.
- Even during Croatia's internal conflicts in the 1990s, ties with India remained friendly.

Economic Ties Are Growing

- Bilateral trade has grown from \$199 million (2017) to \$337 million (2023).
- India exports: medicines, chemicals, machinery, garments
- Croatia exports: chemicals, timber, precision instruments, rubber goods, oils

A Cultural and Civilisational Connection

- Croatia has a surprising link to India's cultural history:
 - Filip Vezdin, a Croatian scholar, printed the first Sanskrit grammar in Latin in 1790 after studying in Kerala.
 - During the visit, Croatian PM Andrej Plenković gifted a reprint of this book to PM Modi.
- Croatian contributions also include the Church of Sao Braz in Goa (built in the 1560s).
- Indian culture is studied and appreciated in Croatian universities even today.

Broader Goals of the Visit

PM Modi's visit aims to:

- Strengthen India-Croatia ties in trade, culture, and strategic cooperation
- Expand India's reach in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in response to China's rising influence through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
- Push for support on India's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

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