

1. FASTag Annual Pass Scheme Announced

Objective:

To provide hassle-free highway travel for private vehicles through a one-time annual fee of ₹3,000.

Launch Date:

Effective from August 15, 2025

Eligibility:

Only for non-commercial private vehicles – cars, jeeps, and vans.

**Key Features**

- One-time Fee: ₹3,000
- Validity: 1 year or 200 trips (whichever is earlier)
- Coverage: Only for National Highways (NH) and National Expressways (NE)

What is FASTag?

FASTag is an electronic toll collection system managed by NPCI and NHAI. It uses a tag pasted on the vehicle's windshield to enable automatic toll payments.

How the Annual Pass Works

- Allows free passage at NH/NE toll plazas without per-trip charges.
- Saves up to ₹7,000 annually, with the average cost per trip reduced to ₹15.
- After 200 trips or one year, it reverts to regular FASTag usage.
- Can be re-purchased even before one year if trip limit is exhausted.
- Non-transferable – only valid for the registered vehicle.

What Counts as a Trip?

- Point-based tolls: One crossing = one trip; round trip = two trips.
- Closed toll systems: One entry and exit = one trip.

Is the Annual Pass Mandatory?

No. Regular FASTag usage will continue for users who do not opt for the Annual Pass.

How to Activate

1. Verify vehicle eligibility and existing FASTag status.
2. Pay ₹3,000 via the Rajmargyatra app or NHAI website.
3. Receive SMS confirmation after activation.

Note: No need to buy a new FASTag if your current one meets all criteria (valid, linked, properly affixed, not blacklisted).

Where is the Pass Applicable?

- Only at NH and NE toll plazas.
- Not valid on toll plazas on state highways or locally managed roads – regular FASTag rates will apply there.

Can the Pass Fee Change?

Yes. The government may revise the fee annually, effective from April 1 each year.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

2. Who is Ayatollah Ali Khamenei?

Introduction

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the Supreme Leader of Iran and the most powerful figure in the country since 1989. At age 85, he continues to dominate Iranian politics, military, and foreign policy.



Why is Khamenei in the News?

- Israel and the US have hinted that removing Khamenei could be a goal in their conflict with Iran.
 - Israeli Defence Minister said Khamenei “can no longer be allowed to exist.”
 - US President Trump also threatened action, though not immediately.
- Khamenei responded firmly, rejecting threats and affirming Iran’s resistance.

What is the Role of the Supreme Leader?

- Highest authority in Iran — above president, parliament, and judiciary.
- Controls military forces including the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) and Quds Force.
- Appoints heads of judiciary, state media, and security.
- Can veto laws, dismiss officials, and declare war/peace.
- Based on “velayat-e faqih” (guardianship of the Islamic jurist) — a system introduced by his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini.

Khamenei’s Early Life and Rise

- Born in 1939 in Mashhad, Iran.
- Came from a clerical family; studied religion in Qom.
- Joined Ayatollah Khomeini’s anti-Shah movement in the 1960s.
- Imprisoned several times.
- Became President of Iran (1981–1989), then succeeded Khomeini as Supreme Leader in 1989.

What Does He Believe?

- Critic of Western liberalism and capitalism, which he sees as materialistic and anti-Islam.
- Believes in taking useful parts of Western culture while rejecting harmful elements.
- Strongly anti-US and anti-Israel; refers to them as "Great Satan" and "Little Satan".

How Has He Shaped Iran?

Foreign Policy:

- Built a regional power network using proxy groups like:
 - Hezbollah (Lebanon)
 - Hamas (Palestine)
 - Houthis (Yemen)
 - Militias in Iraq and Syria
- Allows Iran to challenge enemies without direct war.

Economy:

- Promotes "resistance economy" to reduce reliance on oil and sanctions.
- Focus on China, Russia, and subsidy cuts — though impact is mixed.

Nuclear Policy:

- Supports nuclear development for sovereignty, not weapons.
- Approved 2015 nuclear deal but criticized the US for withdrawing.

Domestic Politics:

- Centralized power; filled top posts with loyalists.
- Suppressed dissent

Who Might Succeed Him?

- Has not publicly named a successor.
- The Assembly of Experts will choose the next leader secretly.
- Mojtaba Khamenei, his son, is seen as the frontrunner.
 - Previously mocked dynastic rule, but now seems to support Mojtaba's rise.

However, internal power struggles and foreign intervention could disrupt this plan.

What Lies Ahead?

Khamenei's health and global tensions raise uncertainty about Iran's future leadership. His death — especially if caused by external forces — could spark political chaos in Iran and across the region.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

3. Why Is Iran Considering Leaving the NPT?

Introduction

Amid recent Israeli airstrikes on Iran's nuclear sites and rising military tensions, Iran's Parliament is preparing a Bill that could lead to withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Israel claims Iran is close to developing a nuclear bomb, but Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.



What Is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)?

- Signed: 1968 | In force since: 1970
- Goal: Prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and technology, promote peaceful use of nuclear energy, and support disarmament.
- Signatories: 191 countries (including Iran)

- Nuclear-weapon states: Only 5 recognized – US, UK, France, Russia, China (based on pre-1967 testing)

Key Features of the NPT

- Non-nuclear states agree not to pursue nuclear weapons.
- In return, they receive support for peaceful nuclear energy and agree to IAEA inspections to ensure compliance.
- IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) monitors civilian nuclear programs to prevent misuse.

Who Has Not Signed the NPT?

- India, Pakistan, and Israel never signed.
- North Korea joined in 1985 but withdrew in 2003 and built nuclear weapons.

How Can a Country Leave the NPT?

- Article 10 allows withdrawal if a country believes its “supreme national interests” are threatened.
- Must give 3 months’ notice to all treaty members and the UN Security Council, with reasons explained.

What Would Happen if Iran Leaves?

1. No More IAEA Inspections
 - Iran would no longer be required to allow daily inspections of its nuclear sites.
 - Transparency would be lost, making it harder for the world to monitor Iran’s nuclear intentions.

2. Global Precedent

- Other countries might follow Iran’s example, weakening the global nuclear control system.

Why Is Iran Facing Scrutiny?

- The IAEA Board recently accused Iran of failing to disclose nuclear materials and activities since 2019.
- Iran denies these charges and insists it follows its safeguards.

Would Leaving the NPT Mean Iran Will Build a Bomb?

Not necessarily.

- Some NPT members have secretly developed nuclear weapons (e.g., North Korea).
- Iran claims it has no plans to make a nuclear bomb.
- However, rising tensions make its future direction uncertain.

Does the NPT Still Matter?

Yes. Even with violations, experts like Joseph Nye argue the NPT has slowed nuclear proliferation and created international pressure against building nuclear weapons.

"Even if not perfect, global treaties can still constrain dangerous behavior," Nye says.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

4. INS Arnala Commissioned into Indian Navy

Introduction



The Indian Navy has commissioned INS Arnala, the first in a new class of Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC) ships. It was inducted into the Eastern Naval Command on June 18, 2025, at Visakhapatnam.

Built Under 'Make in India'

- Designed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata
- Built in partnership with L&T Shipbuilders

- Features 80% indigenous content
- Involves 55+ Indian MSMEs, promoting domestic defence manufacturing

About INS Arnala

- Named after: Arnala Fort in Maharashtra
- Length: 77.6 metres

Key Capabilities

- Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) operations in shallow coastal waters
- Subsurface surveillance
- Search & Rescue missions
- Mine-laying and low-intensity maritime operations

Why It Matters for Coastal Defence

- Can detect and target midget submarines and Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) in depths under 30 metres

- Highly manoeuvrable in shallow waters — more effective than heavier warships in coastal areas
- Enhances India's ability to defend offshore assets and monitor maritime threats near the shore

What's Next: 15 More ASW-SWC Ships

The Navy will induct 16 ASW-SWC ships in total, including INS Arnala. These will have Advanced underwater sensors and sophisticated Weapon systems:

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

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