

News Juice Monthly

JULY 2025 EDITION

Made from The Hindu,
Indian Express and PIB

Covers June 2025
Current Affairs

For Prelims and Mains

1. CPM Named in Money Laundering Case: Can a Political Party Be an Accused?

Introduction

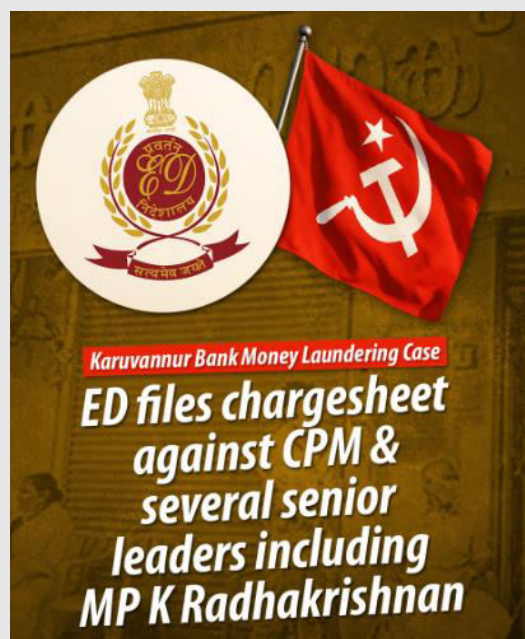
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has named the Communist Party of India (Marxist) — or CPI(M) — as an accused in a major money laundering case linked to the Karuvannur Cooperative Bank. This raises an important legal question:

Can an entire political party be held responsible for a crime?

What Has the ED Done?

On May 27, 2025, the ED submitted a chargesheet (a formal legal document listing those accused of a crime) in a special court in Kochi, Kerala.

In this case, the CPI(M) has been listed as the 68th accused out of a total of 83.



Who Else Has Been Accused?

Among the 83 people accused:

- Seven are leaders or former members of CPI(M).
- Three senior leaders — K Radhakrishnan (MP), A C Moithen (former minister), and M M Varghese — are accused of using their positions as district secretaries of the party between 2011 and 2021 to help others get illegal loans.

Under Which Law Was CPI(M) Booked?

The CPI(M) was charged under Section 70 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

What Does Section 70 Say?

- This section deals with crimes committed by “companies”.
- According to the law, a company doesn’t just mean a business — it can also mean a group or association of people.
- The ED argued that the CPI(M), as a registered political party, qualifies as an association of individuals and can therefore be treated like a company under this law.

What Is the Karuvannur Cooperative Bank Case?

The case began in 2021 when the Kerala Crime Branch investigated the Karuvannur Cooperative Bank.

What Was Found?

- Around ₹300 crore (₹3 billion) was allegedly illegally withdrawn or siphoned off from the bank.

- The ED took over the case under the PMLA, which focuses on investigating and punishing money laundering.

How Is CPI(M) Allegedly Involved?

According to the ED:

- The three CPI(M) leaders helped people get illegal loans from the bank.
- Some of the money was diverted into the party's fund.
- A bank employee, Biju M K, who later became a witness, told the court that party leaders pressured bank staff to approve the loans.
- The party reportedly maintained five illegal accounts at the bank where money from these loans was deposited.

Can a Political Party Be Accused of a Crime?

Usually, individuals within a party are held responsible for crimes — not the party itself.

But in this case, the ED is treating the CPI(M) as an entire organisation responsible for the crime, based on Section 70 of the PMLA.

This is only the second time ever the ED has done this.

What Was the First Time?

In 2023, the ED named the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as an accused in the Delhi liquor policy case — making that the first such instance.

Why Is This Case Important?

- It raises new legal questions about accountability of political parties as organisations.
- If proven in court, it could set a legal precedent — meaning other parties could also be held responsible in similar cases.
- It also highlights the influence political figures can have on cooperative banks and financial institutions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

2. Mizoram First State to Achieve Full Functional Literacy

First Fully literate State

Mizoram was officially declared as a fully literate state. With this achievement, Mizoram became the first state in India to attain full literacy.

Mizoram had crossed the full literacy mark, i.e., above 95% literacy rate (to be considered equivalent to Full literacy) as defined by Ministry of Education, Govt. of India.

First administrative unit to declare full literacy



Earlier, on 24.06.2024, Ladakh became the first administrative unit to declare full literacy.

Goa became second

Government declared the State of Goa to be officially fully literate. This makes Goa the second state of the country to cross the nationally prescribed 95% benchmark for full literacy.

New India Literacy Programme

ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram or New India Literacy Programme (NILP) is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented from 2022-2027.

The scheme, aligned with NEP 2020, targets adults (aged 15 years and above) who couldn't go to school. The scheme has five components- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, Critical Life Skills, Basic Education, Vocational Skills and Continuing Education.

The vision of the ULLAS Scheme is to make Bharat - Jan Jan Saakshar and is based on the spirit of Kartavya Bodh and is being implemented on volunteerism.

Under ULLAS scheme more than 1.77 crore learners (neo literates) have appeared in the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) till now across the country. More than 2.37 crore learners and 40.84 lakh volunteer teachers have been registered on the ULLAS Mobile app.

Towards a Fully Literate India by 2030

With Mizoram and Goa leading the way, India's goal of achieving full literacy by 2030 under NEP 2020 is steadily progressing.

These success stories serve as inspiring examples of community-driven development and educational inclusion, laying the foundation for a truly Viksit Bharat (Developed India).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: PIB

3. First Batch of Women Graduates from NDA: A Milestone for the Armed Forces

Introduction

The first 17 women cadets ever admitted to the National Defence Academy (NDA) graduated on Friday from the 148th batch at the tri-services training institute in Khadakwasla. This historic event signals a major step toward gender inclusion and leadership opportunities for women in the Indian armed forces.

A Long Road to Equality

- **1888:** Military Nursing Service introduced during British rule.
- **1958:** Regular commissions granted to women doctors in the Army Medical Corps.
- **1992:** Women allowed into select non-combat branches through the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES).
- **2008:** Permanent Commission (PC) granted to women in two branches.
- **2019:** PC extended to eight more non-combat streams, but command roles still restricted.
- **2020:** Supreme Court ruled women must be given PC and command roles, rejecting gender stereotypes.
- **2021:** Court ordered NDA to admit women cadets; the first batch joined in 2022.



First batch of women cadets graduates from NDA in Pune

Training and Integration at the NDA

- **Gender-Neutral Training:** NDA maintained the same rigorous curriculum for both male and female cadets.
- **Squadron Integration:** Initially housed separately, women cadets were later integrated into NDA's 18 squadrons, living and training alongside men.
- **Equal Participation:** At the passing out parade, women marched in the same uniforms, indistinguishable from their male counterparts.

Significance of the Graduation

- **Leadership Pathway:** For the first time, women have access to early military training and leadership grooming, paving the way to senior roles like service chief.
- **Combat Role Opportunities:** NDA graduates are better positioned to take on command roles in combat arms — a key requirement for top ranks.
- **Long-Term Careers:** With access to permanent commissions and full career trajectories, women can now build 35–40 year military careers.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

4. Centre's new regulations for jobs and domicile in Ladakh, where they fall short

Background: Why the New Rules?

After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, Ladakh was made a Union Territory (UT) without a legislature. Unlike Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh didn't receive constitutional safeguards. This caused fears over jobs, land ownership, ecological damage, and cultural erosion. Civil society, including groups like the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), have since demanded protection under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Centre's New Regulations for Ladakh

On June 2 and 3, 2025, the central government issued five key regulations to address Ladakh's concerns:

1. Domicile-Based Job Reservation

- **Regulation:** Ladakh Civil Services Decentralization and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025
- **Key Feature:** Only domiciles (those living in Ladakh for 15 years or studying for 7 years) can apply for government jobs.

2. How to Get Domicile Certificate

- **Rules:** Ladakh Civil Services Domicile Certificate Rules, 2025
- **Process:** Applications (online/offline) go to the Tehsildar; appeals can be made to the Deputy Commissioner.

3. Reservation Policy Expanded

- **Regulation:** Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025
- **Reservation Cap:** 85% for SC, ST, OBC and other backward classes (EWS 10% extra)
- **Now Applies To:** Medical, engineering and other professional institutions.

4. Recognition of Local Languages

- **Law:** Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025
- **Recognised Official Languages:** English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi
- **Support for Other Dialects:** Shina, Brokskat, Balti, Ladakhi

5. Women's Representation in Hill Councils

- **Regulation:** Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Amendment) Regulation, 2025
- **Change:** One-third of the seats reserved for women in LAHDC Leh and Kargil.

Why These Regulations Matter

- First effort to create laws specific to Ladakh's identity, jobs, and language.
- Responds to key protestor demands like job security and cultural recognition.
- Comes in the absence of Sixth Schedule inclusion, offering limited executive solutions.

What Ladakhis Were Demanding

- **Sixth Schedule Status:** To provide constitutional protection for tribal identity, resources, and culture.
- **Land Ownership Limits:** To stop non-locals from acquiring land.
- **Local Legislature:** For political representation and law-making power.



Activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike and mass mobilisations brought national attention to these issues.

How This Differs From Earlier Rules

- Previously, Ladakh followed J&K's laws without specific protections.
- No domicile clause, no regional job preference, and no local language recognition existed before.

How It Compares with Jammu & Kashmir

Feature	Jammu & Kashmir	Ladakh
Domicile Jobs	Yes	Now introduced
Land Ownership Protection	Yes	Still missing
Legislature	Yes	No
Cultural/Language Recognition	Partial	Now included

Key Shortcomings

- 1. No Constitutional Backing:** All changes are executive decisions under Article 240; can be reversed anytime.
- 2. No Land Safeguards:** Still no restriction on outsiders owning land.
- 3. No Legislature or Law-Making Body:** LAHDCs remain only administrative.
- 4. Limited Language Promotion:** Cultural steps symbolic; not integrated into governance or education.

What Local Leaders Say

Sajjad Kargili (KDA leader):

- Welcomes the new rules as a "small step forward"
- Wants 30-year domicile condition instead of 15
- Says major issues like land, environment, and political representation remain unaddressed
- Promises continued push for Sixth Schedule inclusion

Next Steps

Ladakhi groups plan to meet with the Union Home Ministry to press unresolved demands. Earlier meetings with Home Minister Amit Shah have promised ongoing discussions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

5. Why Did the Supreme Court Order West Bengal to Pay DA Arrears?

What Happened?

The Supreme Court (SC) has directed the West Bengal government to pay pending Dearness Allowance (DA) arrears — worth ₹11,000 crore — to state government employees. This comes after a prolonged legal battle between employees and the state.



What is Dearness Allowance (DA)?

- DA is a cost-of-living adjustment paid to government employees and pensioners.
- It is revised regularly based on inflation and is meant to help employees deal with rising prices.

Background: The Dispute

- In 2009, the 6th Pay Commission recommendations were implemented across India, including DA increases.
- However, the West Bengal government did not fully implement DA hikes as per central rates.
- State government employees argued this was unfair and discriminatory.

Legal Battle Timeline

1. 2016: West Bengal state employees approached the Calcutta High Court.
2. 2023: The High Court ruled in favour of employees, directing the state to pay DA at Central government rates.
3. State Govt Appeal: The West Bengal government challenged this order in the Supreme Court.
4. 2025: The Supreme Court upheld the High Court's decision, ordering the state to pay ₹11,000 crore in arrears.

Supreme Court's Key Observations

- DA is not a gift, but a legitimate part of salary.
- All employees doing equal work must receive equal pay.
- The court said that the state cannot delay or deny DA payments without valid financial or administrative reasons.

What the Court Ordered

- The state must now clear all DA dues owed to its employees, amounting to over ₹11,000 crore.
- The court did not fix a payment deadline but made it clear that the dues cannot be denied.

Why This Matters

- This is a major victory for West Bengal state employees, many of whom have been protesting for years.

- The verdict reinforces that governments must honour financial entitlements of their staff.
- It may pressure other states that have not fully matched central DA rates to do so.

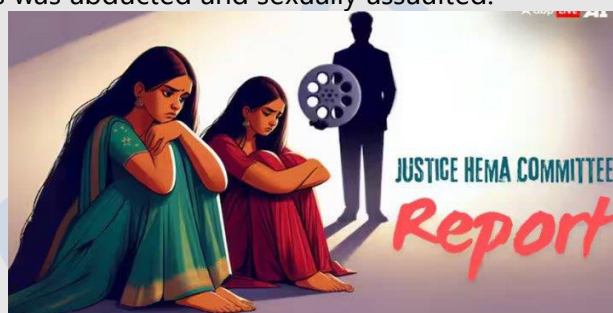
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

6. Justice Hema Committee Report: Why Kerala Police Dropped Sexual Assault Cases in Malayalam Film Industry

Background: Formation of the Justice Hema Committee

- In February 2017, a leading Malayalam actress was abducted and sexually assaulted.
- Actor Dileep was accused of orchestrating the attack.
- This led to the formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), which demanded a government inquiry.
- In July 2017, the Justice Hema Committee was formed by the Kerala government to examine sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the Malayalam film industry.
- It was India's first such inquiry into the film industry.



Delayed Release of the Report

- The Committee submitted its report in December 2019 to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.
- The government withheld the report, citing concerns about protecting the privacy of women who gave testimonies.
- After pressure from RTI activists, the Kerala State Information Commission ordered its partial release in July 2024.
- The redacted report (63 pages removed) was made public on August 14, 2024.

Findings of the Report

- The report exposed a widespread culture of sexual harassment in the Malayalam film industry.
- Issues included:
 - Casting couch practices
 - Vulgar comments and sexual advances
 - Drunken male co-stars invading women's personal spaces
- Many women did not report incidents due to fear of retaliation.

Impact of the Report's Release

- Numerous women came forward publicly with their experiences.
- Several top actors faced allegations.
- Kerala police filed around 60 cases, both on their own and based on survivors' complaints.

Why the Police Dropped the Cases

- Recently, 35 cases were dropped due to:
 - Lack of evidence, especially for older incidents (over a decade old)
 - Non-cooperation from survivors, many of whom didn't want formal police action
- Survivors said:
 - They only wanted to share their experiences, not go through legal battles.
 - Some are now facing defamation suits by the accused.

What Survivors Want

- Women in the industry are calling for:
 - Systemic changes in how the industry functions
 - Establishment of internal complaints committees and support systems
- Many feel legal action alone isn't enough, and cultural reform is needed to ensure safety and dignity in the workplace.

This report highlights the gaps between testimony and justice, and the urgent need for institutional reform beyond just criminal cases.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

7. Mizoram and Goa Declared 'Fully Literate' under ULLAS Program

What is ULLAS?

- ULLAS stands for Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society.
- Launched in 2022, the program aims to educate 5 crore non-literate Indians aged 15+ by 2027.
- It teaches basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and life skills like digital and financial literacy.
- Literacy materials are developed by NCERT, with local language versions created by states.
- Learning can be done via a mobile app or offline with help from student and community volunteers.



States Achieving Full Literacy under ULLAS

- Goa: Literacy rate – 99.72%
- Mizoram: Literacy rate – 98.2%
- Ladakh: Declared fully literate in June 2024 with literacy over 97%

How "Full Literacy" is Defined

- As per Ministry of Education (2023), a state can be considered fully literate if it achieves 95% literacy.
- Literacy includes: reading, writing, numeracy, digital and financial skills.
- Linked to UN Sustainable Development Goals aiming for universal adult literacy by 2030.

How ULLAS Works

- States identify non-literate individuals through door-to-door surveys.
- Volunteers (school/college students, teachers, community members) provide instruction.
- Learners take the Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) – a 150-mark exam.
- Those who pass receive certification from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Other Literacy Statistics and Surveys

- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24:
 - Goa literacy rate (age 7+): 93.6%
 - Ladakh: 81%
 - Mizoram : 98.2%
- 2011 Census:
 - National literacy: 74.04%
 - Adult literacy (15+): 69.3%
 - Non-literate population (2011): 25.76 crore (9.08 crore males, 16.68 crore females)
 - Goa: 88.7%, Mizoram: 91.3%, Kerala: 94% (highest)

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

8. Why the Government Capped MGNREGS Spending—and What's Wrong With It

What Is the New Rule?

- The Union Finance Ministry has capped spending on MGNREGS at 60% of its annual budget for the first half of the 2025–26 financial year.
- This is the first time such a cap has been introduced.
- MGNREGS has now been brought under the Monthly/Quarterly Expenditure Plan (MEP/QEP), a spending control system introduced in 2017.

What Is MGNREGS?

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme promises up to 100 days of employment annually to any rural household that demands it.
- It is a demand-driven law-backed programme and has been exempt from budget caps in the past.



Why the Government Introduced the Cap

- Spending has been front-loaded in recent years:
 - Over 70% of the budget often gets used up by September.
 - This leads to large unpaid dues by year-end (Rs 15,000–25,000 crore in past years).
 - On average, 20% of the next year's budget goes to clearing old dues.
- The Finance Ministry wants to:
 - Control overspending
 - Avoid the need for extra funds mid-year
 - Ensure money is available for the second half of the year

But There's a Problem: Demand Is Not Fixed

- MGNREGS work demand changes throughout the year:
 - It's highest between April–June and again after kharif sowing in September.
 - Unpredictable weather can suddenly increase demand (e.g. droughts).
- Example: In 2023, poor rainfall caused a 20% increase in work demand in July and August. States like Karnataka used up over 70% of their budget early due to drought. The cap does not allow flexibility to handle such situations.

Legal Concerns: Can the Government Limit a Legal Right?

- MGNREGS is not just a scheme—it's a legal right under the 2005 Act.
- Citizens have a right to work on demand, and to be paid within 15 days.
- The Finance Ministry's cap could block access to this right once the budget ceiling is reached.
- Courts have ruled (e.g., *Swaraj Abhiyan v Union of India*, 2016) that financial constraints cannot justify violating statutory or constitutional rights.

Unclear Outcomes: What Happens When Funds Run Out?

- No clarity on:
 - Will workers be denied work even if they ask for it?
 - Will they be unpaid for work done?
 - Both would violate their legal rights under the Act:
 - Section 3: Employment must be provided within 15 days of demand.
 - Schedule II, Para 29: Wages must be paid within 15 days of completing work.
- Delays in wage payments and non-payment of unemployment allowance are already common.

Conclusion: Fixing Finances but Breaking the Law?

- The cap may help control spending, but it goes against the core purpose of MGNREGS: guaranteed rural employment.
- Instead of restricting funds, the government needs a better long-term financial plan to support this crucial safety net.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

9. Why is Actor Dino Morea Being Questioned by ED?

Introduction

Bollywood actor Dino Morea appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on June 12, 2025, in connection with an alleged multi-crore scam related to the Mithi river desilting project in Mumbai. His residence was also raided earlier.

Background: What is the Mithi River Project?

The Mithi river, a 18.64 km-long seasonal river flowing through Mumbai, is crucial for stormwater drainage during monsoons. Due to dumping of waste and sewage, it had become clogged. After the 2005 Mumbai floods, authorities began efforts to clean and desilt the river.

- Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) was given the task of cleaning 11.84 km of the river.
- The rest was handled by Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

What is the Mithi River Scam?

In August 2024, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) under Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) was set up to investigate alleged corruption.

- The SIT looked into Rs 1,100 crore spent between 2005 and 2021.
- An FIR was filed on May 6, 2025, against 13 people for causing a loss of Rs 65.54 crore to the BMC.
- Those named include BMC officials, contractors, and companies like Matprop, Virgo Specialities, and Vodar India LLP.

How Was the Scam Allegedly Carried Out?

- Bogus contracts and fake documents were used to claim silt had been removed.
- Landowners' names were misused—one even died 20 years ago.
- Machines were hired from select vendors in return for bribes.
- Payments were made without verifying if the silt was actually dumped.

What Did ED Find in Its Probe?

The ED is investigating the scam under money laundering charges, based on the EOW's findings:

- A cartel of contractors and middlemen allegedly manipulated tenders.
- Shell companies were used to hide illegal profits.
- Desilting amounts were artificially inflated without scientific backing.
- Only about 60% of the actual desilting work was done in many years.

Why Was Dino Morea Involved?



- Ketan Kadam, one of the arrested middlemen (Vodan India LLP), has been associated with Morea for 25 years.
- There were 5–7 transactions worth Rs 14–18 lakh between Morea and Kadam.
- Morea's brother and Kadam's wife are directors in the same firm.
- Morea was questioned, along with his brother, to determine the nature of these ties.
- He is not named as an accused but is considered a person of interest.

Political Angle

- Morea is known to be close to Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray.
- The party has controlled the BMC for over 20 years.
- The scam could become a major election issue ahead of the upcoming BMC polls.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

10. 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

11. 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 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.

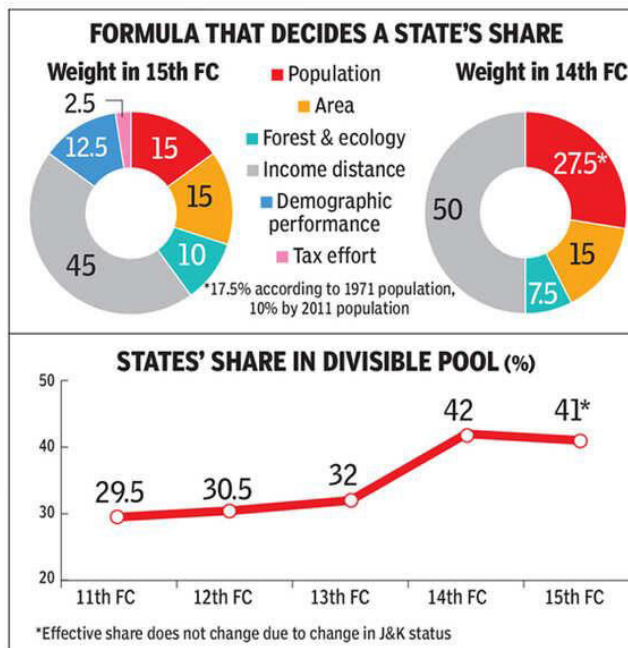
Conclusion

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

HOW THE BOOTY IS DIVIDED



12. 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

13. 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

14. 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

15. Why the Government Wants QR Codes on Rural Roads

Introduction

To improve road quality and ensure accountability, the Centre has asked states to install QR codes on display boards along roads built under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). This will allow citizens to give feedback on road conditions.



What is PMGSY?

- Launched: December 25, 2000
- Objective: Provide rural road connectivity

Key Facts:

- Over 8.36 lakh km of roads sanctioned
- 7.81 lakh km completed
- Target (2024–29): 62,500 km at ₹70,125 crore
- Funding: 60:40 split between Centre and states (90:10 for NE/Himalayan states)

How Is Road Maintenance Managed Now?

- 5-year maintenance by the contractor after road completion
- System used: e-MARG (mobile/web platform)
- Monitoring:
 - Contractors submit maintenance bills on e-MARG
 - Field engineers conduct Routine Inspections (RI)
 - Geo-tagged photos required for assessment
 - State governments are responsible as rural roads are a state subject

What's the Problem with the Current System?

- Substandard work has been reported in the past
- Lack of citizen feedback: No direct way for locals to report poor road quality
- Monitoring was limited to internal inspections and official reports

How Will the QR Code System Work?

- QR code will be placed on roadside display boards
- Public can scan the code using mobile phones
- Access:
 - Road details
 - Option to upload photos
 - Submit maintenance complaints
- Instructions will be available in English and local languages

What Happens After Citizens Submit Feedback?

- Photos submitted by users will be linked to the official inspection records
- AI/ML tools will analyse photos to assess road quality
- Engineering teams will use this data to assign performance scores
- Ensures a transparent and real-time feedback system

Why This Matters

This initiative allows citizen participation in ensuring road quality, improves transparency, and enhances the government's ability to track and evaluate road maintenance effectively.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

16. Supreme Court Backs Free Speech in Film Case

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has upheld the right to screen the film *Thug Life*, starring Kamal Haasan, in Karnataka despite protests and calls for a ban. The Court strongly reaffirmed that once a film is certified by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), it cannot be blocked due to claims of "hurt sentiments."



Background: Language Controversy Sparks Outrage

Controversy arose after Kamal Haasan said at a pre-launch event that "Kannada was born from Tamil." While factually incorrect—both languages share a proto-Dravidian origin—his remarks led to protests in Karnataka. The Karnataka High Court even suggested that Haasan should apologise.

Supreme Court Rejects Extra-Judicial Bans

The Supreme Court disagreed with the Karnataka High Court's moral stand and clarified that once a film is certified, no further restrictions should apply. It ruled that banning a certified film based on protest violates the rule of law and freedom of speech under the Constitution.

Role of CBFC and Rule of Law

The Cinematograph Act, 1952, gives the CBFC the exclusive authority to certify films. Once cleared, no group or individual can block the release through intimidation or unofficial pressure. Allowing such bans would harm not only free speech but also the livelihoods of those in the film industry.

State's Duty to Maintain Order, Not Restrict Expression

The Court emphasized that maintaining law and order during disagreements is the state's job—not the responsibility of filmmakers or artists. It also clarified that certified films are not the same as hate speech, which can be legally restricted.

Way Forward: Protect Certified Films from Disruption

The Supreme Court's ruling sets the stage for stronger protections against extra-judicial bans. States may now need to:

- Hold theatre owners accountable for unjust cancellations
- Provide clear policing guidelines to prevent intimidation
- Ensure audiences can watch certified films without fear

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

17. What Is the Registration Bill, 2025?

Introduction

The Registration Bill, 2025 aims to replace the 117-year-old Registration Act of 1908. It introduces a modern, citizen-friendly approach to registering property-related documents, focusing on digital processes, transparency, and better legal safeguards.



Key Features of the Bill

1. Digital and Offline Registration

- Documents can be registered either in person at a Sub-Registrar's office or online.
- Aadhaar-based identity verification is allowed, but not mandatory.

2. Wider Range of Compulsory Registrations

- Now includes:
 - Agreements of sale
 - Power of attorney
 - Mortgage by title deed
 - Mergers and demergers under the Companies Act

3. Optional Registration

- Section 13 allows optional registration of documents not covered under compulsory registration, though it doesn't clearly list which documents this applies to.

4. New Officer Roles

- Introduces Additional and Assistant Inspector Generals of Registration to support administration.

Refusal and Cancellation of Registration

- Section 58: A document may be refused for registration if:
 - It lacks a true translation
 - Content is erased or altered
 - Submitted late (beyond four months)
 - The person involved is a minor, mentally unfit, or deceased
- Section 64(3): The Inspector General can cancel a registration if it:
 - Was based on false information
 - Violated the law
- Affected parties can appeal within 30 days.

Penalties: Reduced Jail Term

- Under the old law: Up to 7 years in prison + fine
- New Bill: Up to 3 years, a fine, or both

Why Was Reform Needed?

- The old 1908 Act was outdated and required in-person visits for all processes.
- Many states had already introduced digital features within the old law.
- Rising demand for secure, fast, and efficient property transactions made legal reform necessary.

Concerns and Criticisms

- Cybersecurity risks due to digital records and e-signature archives.
- Delegating roles to Common Services Centres (CSCs) may cause confusion, especially in complex legal matters like stamp duty and title transfers.
- Lack of clarity on which documents fall under optional registration.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

18. Why Sonia Gandhi's Custody of Nehru's Papers Has Sparked a Legal Dispute

Background: Sonia Gandhi Took Back Nehru's Papers in 2008

- In 2008, Sonia Gandhi reclaimed 51 cartons of Jawaharlal Nehru's documents from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), now called the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library (PMML).
- She also restricted access to other parts of the collection, which had originally been donated by Nehru's family.
- Now, the PMML Society, chaired by PM Modi, has decided to legally challenge this and seek the return of those papers, calling them a "national treasure."



What Are Private Papers?

- Private Papers are personal documents and correspondence of eminent personalities, often involving public or political matters.

- These are not the same as strictly personal papers (like diaries or family letters) or official government records.
- Nehru's Private Papers cover both pre- and post-Independence periods, and were gradually transferred to NMML from 1971 onward.

PMML's Collection of Private Papers

- PMML holds India's largest collection of Private Papers, from over 1,000 public figures like:
 - Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar, Abul Kalam Azad
 - Charan Singh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sundarlal Bahuguna, and more
- These papers offer critical insights into modern Indian history, making them vital for researchers and scholars.

Can Donors Impose Conditions on Private Papers?

- Yes, donors can impose embargoes or restrictions on public access.
- For years, some donors placed undefined or indefinite limits on access.
- In response, PMML recently decided:
 - Embargoes should be limited to 5 years, extendable to 10 years in rare cases.
 - It will now declassify several collections long held in its custody, including papers from G.D. Mavalankar and Nayantara Sahgal.

Legal and Ethical Questions Around Ownership

- Nehru's papers were initially transferred by Indira Gandhi, and more were added by Sonia Gandhi.
- The legal ownership of these documents is contested, especially after their donation to a public institution.
- PMML argues that once donated, they become part of the national historical record and cannot be privately reclaimed.

Who Else Manages Private Papers in India?

- Apart from PMML, the National Archives of India (NAI) also collects private collections — but only if donors agree to make them public.
- NAI holds papers of Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, Mahatma Gandhi, among others.

How Declassification Works in India and Abroad

- In India, official documents are generally declassified after 25 years, as per the Public Records Rules, 1997.
- For Private Papers, the decision to declassify depends on ownership and donor terms.
- In the US, private collections are held by the Library of Congress, while official records are with the National Archives. Public access is often ensured through agreements at the time of donation.

What's Next?

- If the government proceeds legally, it could set a precedent on whether private ownership overrides public access to historically significant documents.
- The outcome may also affect how future donations to archives are handled and whether national interest can override donor restrictions.

Conclusion: Preserving History vs Private Control

This case reflects a deeper debate: Should important historical records be protected by families, or shared with the public? The legal battle over Nehru's papers will shape future policies on access to the private documents of public figures.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

19. Banakacherla Reservoir Sparks Fresh AP–Telangana Water Dispute

Introduction

A new water project planned by Andhra Pradesh (AP) has triggered strong opposition from Telangana, reviving long-standing tensions over river water sharing. Telangana CM Revanth Reddy has challenged former CM K. Chandrashekar Rao to a debate on who truly protected the state's water interests.

What Is the Banakacherla Reservoir Project?

AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has proposed a major plan to:

- Link the Godavari, Krishna, and Penna rivers
- Build a large reservoir at Banakacherla in Nandyal district
- Transform drought-hit Rayalaseema into fertile farmland



Why Is Telangana Opposing the Project?

- The Banakacherla project may threaten Telangana's own water projects and overall water security.

Political Significance of the Dispute

- For Andhra Pradesh:

Naidu aims to strengthen his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Rayalaseema, where rival YSR Congress dominates. Solving the water crisis could win political support.

- For Telangana:

Water-sharing has always been a sensitive issue, especially since the state's formation in 2014 after decades of protest over resource inequality.

The project is seen as reopening old wounds of regional injustice.

This latest clash shows how interstate water sharing, especially involving the Godavari and Krishna rivers, remains a complex and politically charged issue in southern India.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

20. Shaktipeeth Expressway: A ₹80,000-Crore Project Facing Roadblocks

What is the Shaktipeeth Expressway?

- A proposed 802-km, six-lane greenfield expressway from Nagpur to Goa, passing through 12 districts of Maharashtra.
- Designed to boost religious tourism by connecting 18 major Shaktipeeth temples, and promote economic growth across central and western Maharashtra.
- The project is led by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), with initial planning by the Public Works Department (PWD).

Project Highlights

- Estimated Cost: Over ₹80,000 crore.
- Land Needed: 8,615 hectares (8,149 ha privately owned).
- Key Funding: ₹20,787 crore allocated for land acquisition; ₹12,000 crore secured from HUDCO.
- Construction Model: EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) — one contractor handles the entire process.

Why Was the Project Proposed?

- Announced in September 2022 by then-Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis.
- Aims to reduce current 21-hour travel time from Nagpur to Goa.

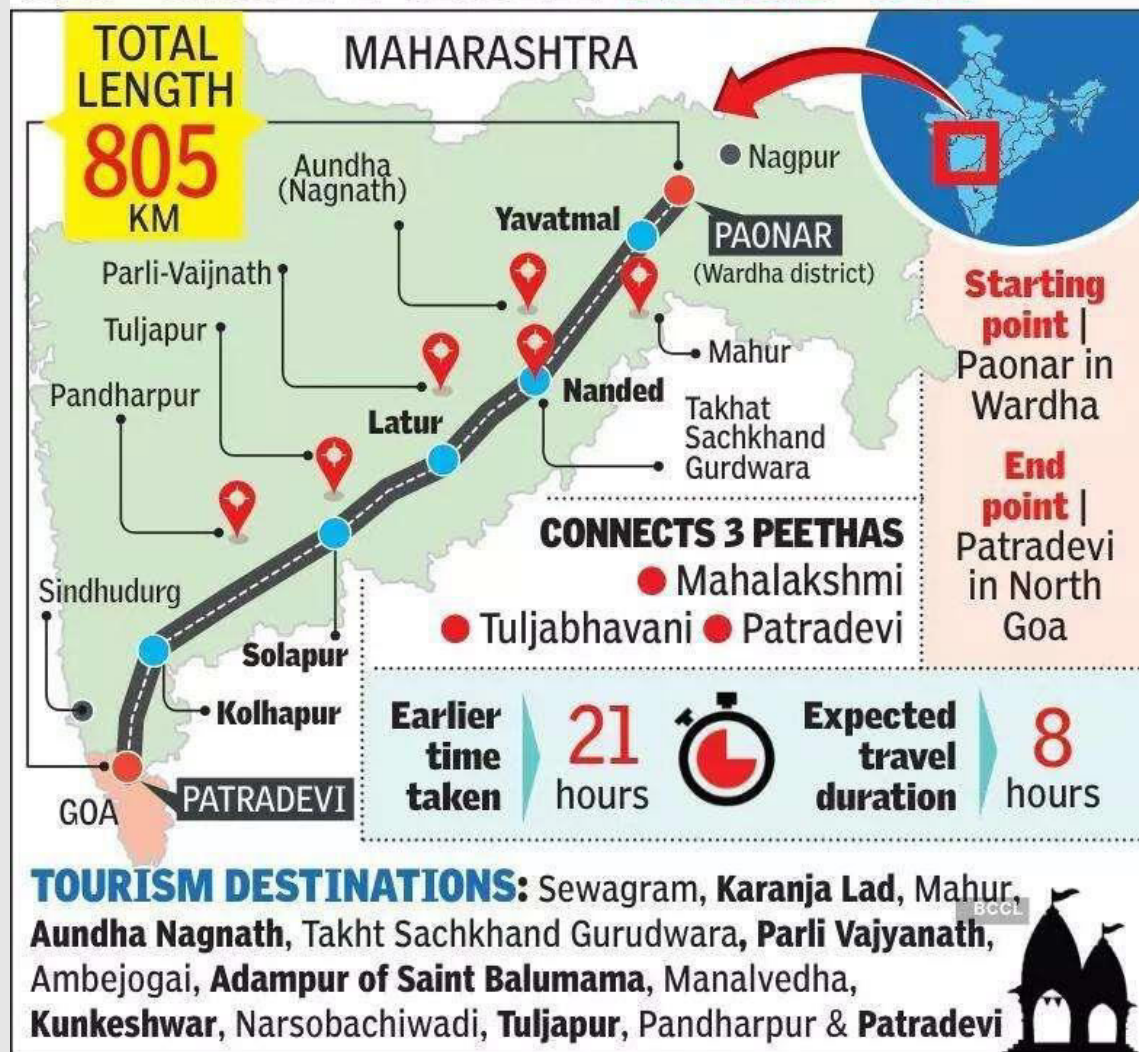
Current Status (as of June 2025)

- Land acquisition resumed in February 2025 after BJP returned to power in Maharashtra.
- On June 24, the state cabinet approved funds for acquisition and planning.
- Full-scale construction yet to begin, pending clearances and resolution of land acquisition issues.

Why Are Farmers Protesting?

- The expressway cuts through fertile, agriculturally productive areas, especially in Western Maharashtra.
- Key districts like Solapur, Yavatmal, and Kolhapur are set to lose large swathes of private farmland.
- Farmers, especially sugarcane and cash crop growers, fear loss of livelihood and low compensation.
- The expressway became a major election issue in 2024, with local leaders like Raju Shetti and Ashok Chavan openly opposing it.

GO GOA FROM NAGPUR



Concerns Over Redundancy and Environment

- Critics argue that the Nagpur–Ratnagiri National Highway, already being expanded, covers a similar route.
- Environmentalists worry about ecological damage in the Western Ghats and Konkan, both biodiversity hotspots and ecologically sensitive zones.

State Government's Stand

- CM Fadnavis defends the project as a game-changer, saying it will boost connectivity to ports, airports, and pilgrimage centres.
- He compares its potential impact to that of the Samruddhi Expressway, which helped transform the economy along its route.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

Bilateral Relations and International Organizations

1. Historic First: Woman and African Leader for IOC

Introduction

Kirsty Coventry, 41, has become the first woman and the first African to lead the International Olympic Committee (IOC). She is also the youngest president since the IOC's founder, Pierre de Coubertin. Hand-picked by outgoing president Thomas Bach, she was initially seen as a continuation of his legacy. However, insiders believe she will bring her own approach to the role.

A Unique Background

Coventry is a former Olympic swimmer from Zimbabwe, and served as a Minister under President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Her experiences as a white woman in a racially tense country and her political career may shape a more inclusive and collaborative leadership style, contrasting with Bach's stricter approach.



Geopolitical Hurdles and Big Decisions

Her role goes beyond sports administration. She must also navigate:

- Russia's potential return to the Olympics
- Interactions with U.S. President Donald Trump ahead of the 2028 Los Angeles Games
- Global conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia, affecting future Olympic bids
- Possible bids from India, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia for the 2036 Olympics

Support and Early Steps

On her first day, IOC member Nita Ambani was seen as a close ally. Coventry will lead a two-day closed-door session with IOC members to share ideas and gather early feedback.

A Bold Start

With limited experience in global sports administration, Kirsty Coventry is diving into the deep end. But her background, values, and early actions suggest she is ready to reshape the future of the Olympic movement.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

2. Pause on US student visa interviews: Why lens on social media

Introduction

The Donald Trump administration has asked US embassies around the world to stop scheduling appointments for student visas as it expands scrutiny of applicants' social media posts.

The pause on interviews will likely slow down student visa processing, and could impact American universities that are heavily reliant on international students for revenue.



Trump administration view

The Trump administration has been cracking down on some of America's most elite universities, including Harvard and Columbia. It has accused these institutions of allowing antisemitism on campus.

However, the Trump administration has repeatedly spoken about cancelling student visas, scrapping permanent residency status ("green cards") and scrutinising the social media history of foreign visitors in the context of backlash over Israel's war in Gaza. (Protests against the war had swept several campuses last year.)

US student visas

The US offers three types of student visas — F-1, M-1, and J-1. An F-1 visa is required for international students to attend an academic institution such as a high school or college. An M-1 visa is for students in vocational or technical training programs at recognised schools. A J-1 visa is needed for exchange program students.

In the Financial Year 2024, the US issued 4,00,737 F-1, 6,322 M-1, and 3,22,820 J-1 visas, according to State Department data. The number of international students in US institutions touched an all-time high of 1.13 million in the 2023-24 academic year, according to the annual Open Doors report.

India on top of list

According to the Open Doors report, 71.5% of international students who enrolled in the US between 2023 and 2024 were from Asia.

India was the biggest source – 3,31,602 students from India enrolled in US universities and colleges, an increase of 23% over the previous year.

China was in second position with 277,398 students, a 4% decline compared to the previous year, according to the report. South Korea, which sent 43,149 students to the US, was in third place.

Europe sent 90,600 students to the US, making up 8% of the overseas student population.

The likely impact

The pause is temporary and only applies to new visa interviews. Already scheduled visa interviews will not be cancelled.

However, the order will likely cause delays in student visa processing, according to experts. Estimated appointment wait times at US embassies around the world currently range from days to months. A backlog of appointments or more intensive vetting could extend this further.

There is also concern that expansive vetting of social media posts could discourage international students from coming to the US. During the 2023-2024 academic year, international students contributed approximately \$43.8 billion to the US economy through tuition and fees, and living expenses.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

3. Gaza's Human-Made Hunger Crisis: UNRWA Official Explains

Aid Blockade Led to Worsening Hunger

Gaza faced a total blockade for nearly three months, severely limiting food and humanitarian aid. During this period, famine-like conditions emerged.

Jonathan Fowler from United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), the largest aid agency in Gaza, says the situation has now turned into a "human-made hunger crisis".



Mothers are rationing pieces of bread to feed children. Even before the ceasefire (Jan 19–Mar 18), the aid entering Gaza was insufficient. After the ceasefire ended on March 2, almost no aid entered for 11 weeks, worsening food insecurity.

Using Food as a Weapon Violates International Law

Blocking aid is considered a violation of international humanitarian law, specifically Article 54 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits starving civilians as a military tactic.

Aid Deliveries Far Below Minimum Requirement

While Israel claimed 665 aid trucks entered Gaza on May 26, the minimum needed is 500–600 trucks per day. The World Food Programme called this number “a drop in the bucket”.

In the past, some trucks were required to arrive half-empty, limiting the actual aid delivered.

Why UN and UNRWA Refused to Work With GHF

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), supported by the US and Israel, created centralized collection points for aid.

UNRWA refused to cooperate because:

- It violates humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence.
- It excludes vulnerable people who can't reach aid points.
- It increases forced displacement, pushing people into unsafe “safe zones”.

Gaza: Deadliest Place for Aid Workers

Gaza is now the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers:

- Over 400 aid workers killed, including more than 300 UNRWA staff.
- Many aid workers lost family members and continue working under severe emotional and physical stress.
- There have been frequent attacks on hospitals, schools, and shelters, violating humanitarian law.

Israeli Laws Have Disrupted UNRWA Operations

Two Israeli laws, passed in October 2024, have hurt UNRWA's work:

1. Bans UNRWA operations in Israel's sovereign territory, affecting schools and clinics in East Jerusalem.
 - o Around 800 students lost access to education.
 - o Clinics serving 70,000 Palestinians face closure.
2. Bans contact with Israeli officials, affecting coordination for evacuations and safety in Gaza and the West Bank.

UNRWA's Current Role in Gaza

UNRWA continues to operate in Gaza with:

- 12,000 local staff (compared to 300 in the rest of the UN).
- Warehouses and mobile clinics, providing healthcare in refugee tents.
- ‘Back to Learning’ program for over 20,000 children, offering basic education and emotional support.
- Sanitation workers cleaning camps and collecting trash.

UNRWA provides services but does not run refugee camps.

How UNRWA Handles Accusations of Bias

Some have accused UNRWA of ties to Hamas, but:

- The agency follows strict neutrality policies.
- Out of 30,000 staff, only 19 were accused last year.
- UNRWA suspended those involved and handed cases to UN investigators.

- Most accusations lacked evidence; only nine staffers were terminated after internal review.

India and the Role of Global Support

Fowler urges countries like India to support:

- International law and multilateral systems.
- The decisions of the UN and International Court of Justice.

He warns that without global cooperation, the world could become more unstable.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

4. Operation Spider's Web

Why now?

Ukraine recently announced that it had successfully undertaken a stealth operation inside Russian enemy lines. The operation, titled Operation Spider's Web, reportedly took 18 months to plan and execute.

How was this Operation Executed?

According to the Ukraine Secret Service (SBU), its agents moved dozens of short-range drones laden with explosives inside Russia, loading them onto trucks with their containers disguised as wooden sheds. The operation evoked comparison with the mythical Trojan Horse.



What has Ukraine claimed?

1. An official claimed that the attack destroyed 41 Russian warplanes situated in the country's airbases, with strikes conducted in four airbases. The SBU also claimed that it destroyed Russian strategic bomber aircraft worth billions of dollars at different bases by deploying these drones remotely. These include A-50 surveillance planes, the supersonic Tu-160 and Tu-22 bombers, and the Tu-95s, which are capable of carrying nuclear bombs and cruise missiles.

The SBU estimated the damage caused by the drone strikes to be worth \$7 billion.

2. The SBU claimed that the attack struck Belaya air base in Irkutsk, over 2,500 miles (4,000km) from Ukraine. Other targets included the Olenya air base in Murmansk, Dyagilevo air base in Ryazan and Ivanovo Severny air base in Ivanovo.

Why is this Attack Significant?

The attack marks a significant victory for Ukraine in its ongoing war against Russia. Since 2022, Ukraine has found itself on the back foot, due to Russia's military prowess. The use of these attack drones represents a streamlined approach to targeting Russia's military infrastructure.

For one, the airbases themselves were previously believed to be impenetrable given their distance from Ukraine. Olenya, in the Murmansk region, is about 2,000 km away from Ukraine, while Belaya in the Irkutsk region is in south-eastern Siberia and over 4,000 km away from the frontlines.

The aircraft which were struck represent significant losses for the Russian side: the A-50s are early warning aircraft, while the bombers have been used to carry heavy missile attacks on Ukrainian cities.

Russia's Defence Ministry confirmed attacks on airbases in five regions in the country, and claimed that "all attacks were repelled" on military airbases in the Ivanovo, Ryazan and Amur regions. The Amur airbase was not mentioned by the SBU.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

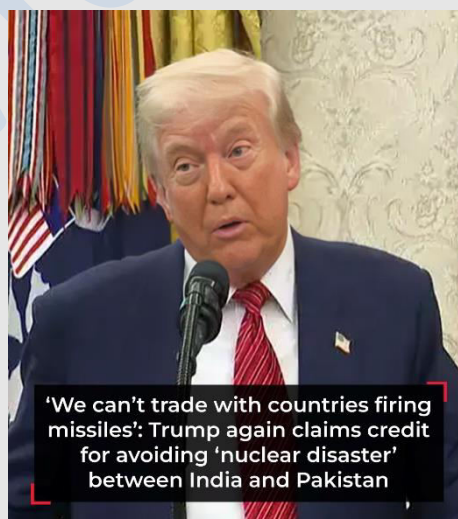
5. Trump's Claims and India's Objection

Background

Recently, Donald Trump claimed he stopped India and Pakistan from fighting by using US trade talks as leverage. He said, "We can't trade with people who are shooting at each other and potentially using nuclear weapons."

India rejected this claim, saying the ceasefire (Operation Sindoor) came from bilateral talks with Pakistan, and not due to US pressure. India objects to:

- Being grouped or "hyphenated" with Pakistan, as if both are equal parties to a conflict
- Third-party interventions, which India has long opposed
- The US historically being more supportive of Pakistan in conflicts



What Is 'Hyphenation'? Why Does India Oppose It?

Hyphenation is what you do when you use a dash-like punctuation mark to join two words into one or separate the syllables of a word. India opposes being viewed as part of a "India-Pakistan" conflict package because:

- It reduces India's global identity to a regional dispute
- It places India and Pakistan on the same footing, even though India sees itself as a victim of aggression
- India prefers bilateral resolution of issues without foreign intervention
- India wants global recognition as an independent major power, not defined by its conflict with Pakistan

The UN and the Beginning of the Hyphenation

- In 1947, soon after independence, Pakistan-backed forces attacked Jammu and Kashmir
- India took the matter to the United Nations on Jan 1, 1948
- However, the UN renamed the issue from "Jammu and Kashmir" to the "India-Pakistan question," effectively equating both countries
- This felt like a symbolic defeat for India and created deep mistrust of third-party involvement
- Since then, Pakistan has sought internationalisation, while India insists on bilateral dialogue

Why the West Sided with Pakistan (Historically)

- During the Cold War, Pakistan was seen as a US ally against the USSR
- In contrast, India was non-aligned, making it less reliable in the eyes of the West
- US dependence on Pakistan during the Afghanistan war and war on terror further deepened the bias
- India, aiming to lead the Global South, prefers to manage its own conflicts

US Role in Four Key Wars Between India and Pakistan

1. 1947-48 War (First Kashmir War)

- US wanted a bilateral settlement, but was willing to back a UN-supervised Kashmir referendum if needed
- India expected UN support for its legitimate claim but felt betrayed when the issue was reframed as an India-Pakistan conflict

2. 1962 India-China War

- US supported India with military aid
- But it used the opportunity to pressure India to talk to Pakistan about Kashmir
- US President John F. Kennedy stopped Pakistan from opening a front during the war
- However, the pressure to compromise on Kashmir was seen as unfair to India

3. 1971 India-Pakistan War

- US strongly supported Pakistan because it had helped the US-China diplomatic breakthrough
- US warships moved toward the Bay of Bengal in a show of support
- Global backlash over Pakistan's crackdown in East Pakistan limited US support
- US lost credibility in both India and Pakistan for its handling of the crisis

4. 1999 Kargil War

- Marked a turning point in US policy
- US blamed Pakistan for violating the Line of Control
- President Bill Clinton pressured Pakistan to withdraw
- Clinton's extended visit to India (and brief stop in Pakistan) reflected a shift toward stronger US-India ties

US Mediation in Recent Incidents

- The US has helped defuse tensions, such as after:
 - The 2001 Parliament attack

- The 2008 Mumbai attacks

But India continues to reject foreign mediation, especially in Kashmir. Trump's statements, even if well-meaning, go against India's principle of bilateralism and fuel concerns about unnecessary hyphenation.

Conclusion

India wants to be seen as a global power in its own right, not defined by its tensions with Pakistan. It prefers to handle conflicts bilaterally, without interference. The US role has shifted over time, from tilting toward Pakistan to building closer ties with India—but occasional statements like Trump's still complicate the narrative.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

6. Ukraine's Deepest Drone Strike on Russia Yet

What Happened?



On June 1, 2025, Ukraine launched its most far-reaching drone attack on Russia since the war began in 2022, destroying over 40 aircraft. The operation, called "Spider's Web," used 117 drones to strike targets over 4,000 km away. The attack happened just before peace talks were set to begin in Istanbul.

How the Attack Was Executed

- FPV (First-Person View) drones were reportedly smuggled into Russia
- They were hidden in "mobile wooden

houses"

- Roofs were remotely opened, allowing drones to launch from within Russian territory
- The attack targeted only military sites, according to President Zelenskyy

What Are FPV Drones?

- FPV = First-Person View
- Controlled by an operator using a live video feed from a camera on the drone
- Feed is viewed on goggles, smartphones, or other screens
- Also used for filming, sports, and hobby flying
- In combat, often paired with reconnaissance drones to scout targets

Combat Advantages of FPV Drones

- Cost-effective: One drone can cost as little as \$500 (₹42,000)
- Hard to detect: Small size and low radar visibility
- Deadly precision: Can hit specific targets accurately
- Reduces soldier risk: No need to send humans into danger zones

- Useful in high-defence zones: Where conventional air power is restricted due to anti-air systems

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

7. What would a French nuclear umbrella mean for Europe?

Introduction

On May 14, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that France is "open to dialogue" on potentially stationing its nuclear weapons in other European countries. This development occurred amid security concerns in Europe due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

What lies behind France's offer?

France's consideration of a broader European role for its nuclear deterrent aligns with its "European strategic autonomy" policy, which aims to enhance the EU's capacity to act independently in security and defence matters. President Macron's Sorbonne University speech emphasised Europe's need to bolster its defence capabilities, in order to be a more "sovereign Europe."



Moreover, U.S. President Donald Trump has questioned unconditional U.S. security guarantees to NATO allies, linking support to the 2% GDP defence spending target for security guarantees, prompting European nations to seek additional security assurances. Historically, France has fiercely guarded the independence of its nuclear deterrent, viewing it as a strictly national tool. This openness, thus, signifies an evolution in its strategic thinking.

What is the nuclear sharing model?

"Nuclear sharing" involves a nuclear-weapon state stationing nuclear weapons on allied non-nuclear-weapon states' territory, with specific arrangements for potential use. Within NATO, the U.S. has maintained such arrangements for decades. Currently, U.S. B61 tactical nuclear gravity bombs are understood to be deployed in five NATO states: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye.

Under these arrangements, the U.S. retains legal ownership and custody of the warheads. The U.S. President also retains the power to make the decision to use these weapons, following

NATO consultation. This Cold War-era posture aims to demonstrate alliance solidarity, and share nuclear risks.

Does France have enough weapons?

France's arsenal is around 290 nuclear warheads, deliverable by submarine-launched ballistic missiles and air-launched cruise missiles via Rafale jets. A 2023 Centre for Strategic and International Studies report analysed that extending France's nuclear deterrent by basing warheads abroad would pose logistical and doctrinal challenges with its current arsenal size, suggesting that an increase in warheads might be needed for credible extended deterrence. Such deployments would require stationing French Air Force units, including Rafales and support infrastructure, abroad. Establishing secure command and control systems in a multinational setting would be complex.

Would it strengthen deterrence?

Deploying additional nuclear weapons in Europe has varied security implications. Proponents argue it could enhance deterrence against Russia by increasing NATO's nuclear assets and demonstrating European resolve. Conversely, Russia would likely view such deployments as a significant escalation, potentially leading to "military-technical measures" in response. Russian officials have repeatedly warned against NATO's eastward military expansion. Russia's 2023 stationing of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus is cited by some as a preceding escalatory step.

Is it legal under international law?

The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the primary legal instrument for regulating nuclear weapons. Article I of the treaty prohibits nuclear-weapon states (like France) from transferring nuclear weapons or control over them. Existing NATO nuclear sharing is justified by participants as being NPT-compliant because no "transfer" of legal ownership or control occurs in peacetime; the U.S. maintains custody. Non-proliferation advocates and various research institutions have consistently challenged this legality.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

8. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Loses 'Father of the Nation' Title

Introduction

On June 3, Bangladesh's interim government removed the reference to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the 'Father of the Nation' from a law concerning the 1971 Liberation War. This marks a significant shift from the 2022 Act, which had repeatedly referred to him as 'Jatir Pita' (Father of the Nation).

Currency Notes Also Omit Mujibur's Image

The move followed the release of new currency notes that excluded Mujibur's image, a common feature on Bangladesh's previous notes. The new notes highlight the pluralistic heritage of the country instead.

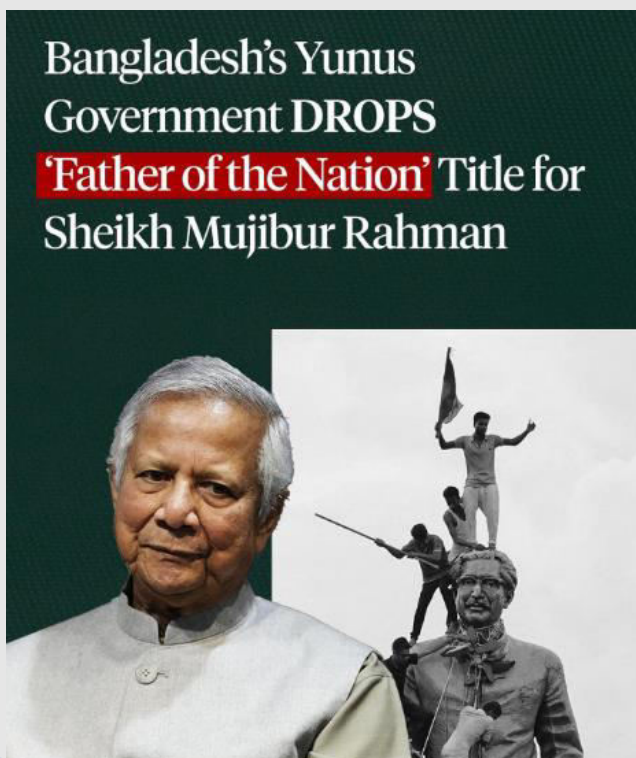
Government's Explanation: Mujibur Still a Freedom Fighter

In its official statement, the interim government clarified that:

- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is still considered a freedom fighter
- Other leaders like Tajuddin Ahmed, Mansur Ali, and AHM Quamruzzaman are also recognized similarly
- The new definition of freedom fighters includes those who supported independence through advocacy, inside or outside Bangladesh

Conclusion: A Controversial Change in National Narrative

By removing both the title and the imagery of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the interim government appears to be redefining the legacy of Bangladesh's founding. This decision is likely to spark political and public debate over national identity and historical memory.



Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

9. Suzuki Suspends Swift Production Over Rare Earth Shortage

Background

Suzuki Motor has halted production of its popular Swift hatchback (except Swift Sport) from May 26 due to a shortage of rare earth components. The company expects a partial restart by June 13, and full production after June 16.

This makes Suzuki the first Japanese carmaker affected by China's new export restrictions on rare earth magnets, which began on April 4 in response to U.S. tariffs.

China's Export Curbs Start Affecting Global Auto Industry

China's new rules don't ban rare earth magnet exports outright but have made the process difficult and slow, causing delays and shortages. Automakers worldwide, including EV makers in India, are beginning to feel the impact.

India's Position: Cautious but Alert

Maruti Suzuki, Suzuki's Indian arm, has stated that there's no immediate impact yet, but the industry is in talks with the Indian government, which has been supportive. However, concerns over future price hikes and delays remain.

Why Rare Earth Magnets Matter for EVs

Rare earth magnets, especially NdFeB (neodymium-iron-boron) magnets, are critical for EV motors and other components like:

- Power steering systems
- Wiper motors
- Braking systems

China dominates the global supply chain for these materials, especially in processing efficiency.

China's Magnet Export Curbs Threaten Indian Auto Industry Shutdown



China Tightens Control: Push for Full Motor Imports

China is reportedly insisting that foreign carmakers either:

- Buy entire electric motor assemblies (not just magnets) from Chinese firms, or
- Wait for export permits, which have only been selectively granted

This shift would force carmakers to redesign vehicles, as full motor assemblies are of standard sizes, unlike magnets that allow for more customized designs.

Limited Global Alternatives to Chinese Supply

While rare earth metals exist elsewhere, processing capability is still concentrated in China. Japan has made some progress in restarting its processing industry, but the U.S. and India remain heavily dependent on Chinese exports.

Background: China's Broader Export Restrictions

In retaliation to U.S. tariffs, China has restricted the export of:

- Seven heavy rare earth metals (like dysprosium and terbium)
- Key materials like gallium, germanium, and antimony, which have military and tech uses

Though US-China trade talks have recently resumed, it remains unclear whether export restrictions will be eased.

Conclusion: A Global Supply Chain Disruption

China's rare earth restrictions are now disrupting global auto production, starting with Suzuki. The situation highlights the urgent need for alternative supply chains and processing capabilities outside China to support the growing EV market.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

10. India Counters Pakistan's UNSC Ambitions

Introduction

India is engaging with its allies at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to limit Pakistan's influence over key anti-terror bodies, after Pakistan failed to secure top posts it had sought.

Pakistan's Demands Rejected

Pakistan had demanded chair positions in major UNSC committees:

- 1267 Sanctions Committee (on Al-Qaeda & ISIL)
- 1540 Committee (Non-Proliferation)
- 1988 Committee (Taliban Sanctions)
- 1373 Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC)

However, these demands faced resistance due to Pakistan's unreasonable attitude and lack of consensus among UNSC members, delaying decisions until June 2025.

Limited Success for Pakistan

Pakistan ended up with only one major post:

- Chair of the 1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee (Vice-Chairs: Russia and Guyana)

Other, less influential roles:

- Vice-Chair of the 1373 CTC (with France and Russia)
- Co-Chair of the Sanctions Informal Working Group (IWG) (with Greece)
- Co-Chair of the Documentation IWG (with Denmark)

These roles fell far short of Pakistan's expectations.

India's Previous Experience in Key Roles

India had previously chaired:

- 1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee and
- 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee (during 2021–22 term)
- 1373 CTC (in 2022 and also in 2011–12)

By contrast, Pakistan's new roles are largely symbolic, especially the Vice-Chair of CTC, which sources say is ceremonial.

UN Limits Pakistan's Influence

In a first, the Sanctions Informal Working Group now has two Co-Chairs, seen as a move to check Pakistan's behavior within the Council.

Despite Pakistan's lobbying at the UN, its limited roles are a reflection of its reputation and standing, according to diplomatic sources.

Pakistan's Terror Links Highlighted

India and its partners continue to highlight Pakistan's deep ties to terrorism:

- Osama bin Laden donated ₹10 million for a terror centre in Muridke
- Ramzi Yousef (1993 WTC bomber) found shelter in Pakistan
- David Headley met UN-listed terrorists at LeT training camps in Pakistan

Over 50 of the 254 individuals and 89 entities under the 1267 Sanctions Committee are linked to Pakistan.

India's Strategy Going Forward

India plans to work closely with friendly countries to:

- Keep pressure on Pakistan
- Ensure its terror links remain under scrutiny
- Prevent Pakistan from using UNSC roles to shield terrorists

This move reflects India's long-term commitment to counter-terrorism diplomacy at the global level.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

11. Israel Detains Gaza Aid Ship, Deports Greta Thunberg

Introduction

Israel's Foreign Ministry confirmed on June 10 that it had deported Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg after seizing the *Madleen*, a British-flagged ship attempting to deliver aid to Gaza. The ship, backed by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC), carried 12 passengers and humanitarian supplies from Italy.

The deportation followed Israel's recent pattern of blocking ships trying to breach its blockade of Gaza. Compared to last month's drone attack on another FFC-backed ship, the *Conscience*, the *Madleen* incident was handled with relative restraint.



Turkey Condemns Israel's Action

Turkey strongly criticized Israel's detention of the vessel, calling the country a "terrorist state" and labeling the action a "clear violation of international law."

Flashback: The 2010 Mavi Marmara Incident

This is not the first time a Gaza-bound aid flotilla has faced Israeli intervention. In May 2010, Israeli commandos raided the *Mavi Marmara*, a Turkish ship part of a six-vessel flotilla trying to deliver aid to Gaza. The operation led to the death of 10 Turkish activists and injured dozens more.

Israel claimed its soldiers acted in self-defence after being attacked by passengers, while a UN report found excessive force was used.

Why Was the Flotilla Headed to Gaza?

The flotillas aimed to challenge the Israeli-Egyptian blockade on Gaza, intensified since Hamas took control of the Strip in 2007. Israel feared weapons could be smuggled in and restricted goods ranging from building materials to food and fuel.

The 2010 flotilla carried 10,000 tonnes of aid, including school supplies and generators. Israel offered to inspect the cargo and deliver it via land but was rejected by flotilla organizers.

Tense Israel-Turkey Relations

Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to recognize Israel in 1949, but ties have fluctuated. After the 2010 raid, Turkey cut diplomatic relations, and only resumed them after Israel apologized in 2013 and offered compensation.

However, the relationship has remained rocky. In 2024, Turkey again severed diplomatic ties with Israel over the continued war in Gaza.

Blockade Intensified Post-2023

The Israeli naval blockade on Gaza was further tightened after Hamas's attacks in October 2023, cutting off fuel, food, and electricity. A brief pause in January 2025 ended in March, with Israel alleging Hamas violated the ceasefire.

Conclusion

The recent deportation of Greta Thunberg and the seizure of the Madleen highlight ongoing tensions over the Gaza blockade. It also revives memories of the deadly 2010 Mavi Marmara raid, reflecting how the humanitarian and diplomatic stakes remain deeply entwined in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

12. India's Population Reaches 146.39 Crore: UNFPA Report

Introduction

According to the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) "State of the World Population 2025" report, India's population is estimated at 146.39 crore as of April 2025. The country remains the most populous nation, ahead of China (141.61 crore).

Fertility Rate Falls Below Replacement Level

India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped to 1.9, below the replacement level of 2.1.

- Replacement TFR: The number of children per woman needed to maintain the population size over generations.

- The Sample Registration System (SRS) report from 2021 had already shown a national TFR of 2.0, indicating this trend.

Population to Peak in 40 Years

The UNFPA projects that India's population will peak at 170 crore before starting to decline in around 40 years, driven by lower fertility rates and an ageing population.

Youth and Working-Age Population Dominates

India has a youth-heavy population:

- 24% are aged 0–14
- 17% are aged 10–19
- 26% fall in the 10–24 age group
- A significant 68% are in the working-age group (15–64 years)

This demographic can support economic growth, if supported with education, healthcare, and employment.

Elderly Population Rising

Currently, 7% of India's population is aged 65 and above, but this figure is expected to grow steadily with rising life expectancy:

- Life expectancy at birth is now 71 years for men and 74 years for women

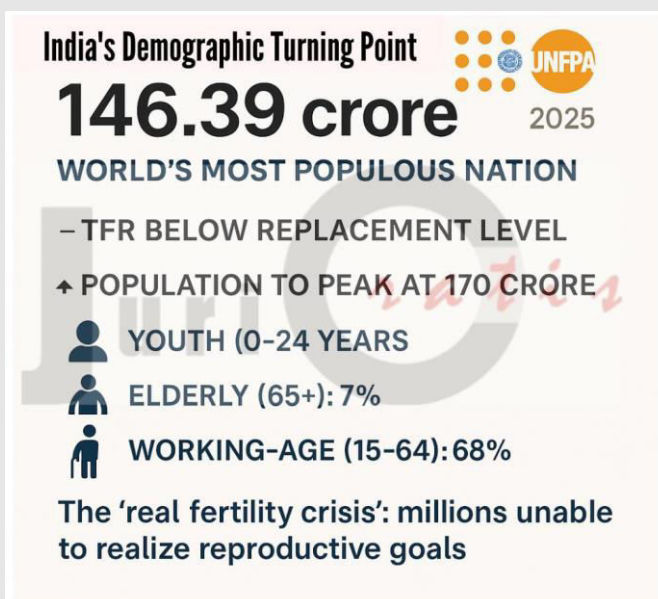
The Real Fertility Crisis: Lack of Reproductive Choice

The report highlights that the real crisis is not overpopulation, but the gap between people's fertility goals and their actual outcomes.

It urges governments to focus on reproductive rights, ensuring people have the freedom and access to make informed choices about sex, contraception, and family planning.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu



13. Pakistan's Key Roles in the UNSC: Should India Be Concerned?

What Roles Has Pakistan Secured?

As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2025–26, Pakistan now holds:

- Chair of the 1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee (TSC)
- Vice Chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)
- Co-Chair in two informal UNSC working groups

How Did Pakistan Get These Positions?

- **Procedural Process:** These roles are usually assigned to elected non-permanent members. Permanent members (like the US or China) do not chair such committees to avoid conflicts of interest.

- **By Rotation:** Each non-permanent member is expected to lead at least one committee during their term.

- **Precedents Exist:** India chaired similar committees during its 2021–2022 UNSC term.

What Do These Committees Do?

1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee (TSC)

- Monitors sanctions against over 130 Taliban-linked individuals.
- Oversees travel bans, asset freezes, and arms embargoes.
- Chair's Role: Procedural — sets agenda and facilitates discussion; cannot unilaterally list/delist individuals.

1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)

- Created after 9/11 through Resolution 1373.
- Focuses on implementation, not enforcement — helps countries build anti-terror capacity.
- Pakistan's Vice Chairmanship reflects this technical and cooperative role.

Does Pakistan's Role Give It Power Over India?

Limited Direct Impact

- The Chair has no unilateral authority — decisions require consensus among all 15 UNSC members.
- Pakistan's capacity to push anti-India measures is highly restricted.

Taliban Dynamics Have Changed

- Taliban now de facto rulers of Afghanistan; international relations have evolved.
- Even India now engages with Taliban officials, despite previously opposing waivers for them.
- Taliban-Pakistan ties have weakened, reducing Islamabad's leverage.

CTC's Scope Is Technical



- CTC does not sanction individuals or investigate attacks.
- Its work is advisory — not punitive — and focused on state capacity-building.

Pakistan's Past Use of Influence

- Pakistan has historically blocked Indian efforts, especially in the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee, often with China's support.
- Example: In 2022, China blocked India's attempt to list Abdul Rauf Azhar (JeM leader).

So, Should India Worry?

Committee Roles: Not a Major Concern

- These committee positions are largely administrative.
- No direct impact on India's diplomatic standing or security.

Rotational UNSC Presidency: A Bigger Concern

- Pakistan will hold the UNSC Presidency in July 2025.
- In 2013, it used this role to highlight Kashmir and shift attention from its own failings on terrorism.
- As President, Pakistan can:
 - Call meetings
 - Set discussion agendas
 - Convene informal consultations

Real Issue: Structural Gaps

- UNSC committees function on consensus — any one member can block decisions.
- The system often lacks debate and fails to hold states accountable, especially for state-sponsored terrorism.

Conclusion

Pakistan's new UNSC roles are symbolic and procedural, not strategic threats. However, its upcoming UNSC Presidency could be used for political messaging against India. India should monitor developments but need not overreact, as these positions do not grant Pakistan unilateral power.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

14. Why India Is Revising Its GDP Base Year and Why It Matters

What Is GDP and What Is a Base Year?

- GDP (Gross Domestic Product) measures the total value of goods and services produced in an economy.
- The base year is the reference year for comparing GDP growth across years. It helps calculate real growth by adjusting for inflation.

Government to revise #GDP base year to 2022-23 by February 2026: #MoSPI Secretary



- Currently, India's GDP base year is 2011–12. This will be revised to 2022–23, with the new data series released in February 2026.

What Other Indices Are Being Updated?

- Index of Industrial Production (IIP) base year will also change to 2022–23.
- Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year will be updated to 2023–24.

Has This Been Done Before?

Yes, this is not the first time. India has changed the GDP base year seven times before:

1. 1948–49 → 1960–61 (1967)
2. 1960–61 → 1970–71 (1978)
3. 1970–71 → 1980–81 (1988)
4. 1980–81 → 1993–94 (1999)
5. 1993–94 → 1999–2000 (2006)
6. 1999–2000 → 2004–05 (2010)
7. 2004–05 → 2011–12 (2015)

These updates also included changes in methodology, data sources, and coverage.

Why Are Base Year Revisions Important?

1. To reflect the changing economy: New sectors emerge (like digital services), and older ones become less relevant.
2. To improve accuracy: More recent data provides a better measure of real economic growth (excluding inflation).
3. To update methods: Improved tools and surveys offer better ways to estimate GDP.
4. To align with global standards and ensure data reliability for domestic and international use.

Why Was the Base Year Not Updated Earlier (in 2017–18)?

- The government had planned to shift the base year to 2017–18.
- However, two key datasets — Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) — showed uncomfortable findings:
 - Unemployment was at a 45-year high.
 - Poverty appeared to rise, reversing a long-term trend.
- The government rejected CES data, and the planned update was dropped.
- Additionally, demonetisation (2016) and GST implementation (2017) disrupted economic data, making 2017–18 an unsuitable base year.
- Later, COVID-19 further delayed revisions, as 2020–22 weren't "normal" years for comparison.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

15. India Drops in Global Gender Equality Rankings

India Ranked 131 in Gender Parity



According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India ranks 131 out of 148 countries, with a gender parity score of 64.1%. This marks a decline from last year, when India ranked 129 out of 146 countries.

Global Overview

- Global average parity: 68.8%
- Full gender equality is still 123 years

away at the current pace

- Top performers:
 - Iceland (1st for 16th year in a row)
 - Finland, Norway, the U.K., and New Zealand follow

South Asia: Mixed Progress

- Best in the region: Bangladesh (ranked 24) – major gains in political and economic participation
- Other South Asian rankings:
 - Nepal: 125
 - Bhutan: 119
 - Sri Lanka: 130
 - Maldives: 138
 - Pakistan: 148 (last)

What the Index Measures

The Gender Gap Index tracks progress in four key areas:

1. Economic Participation and Opportunity
2. Educational Attainment
3. Health and Survival
4. Political Empowerment

India's Performance by Category

Economic Participation:

- Improved score: +0.9%, now at 40.7%
- Estimated earned income parity rose from 28.6% to 29.9%
- Labour force participation rate stayed at 45.9%

Education:

- Scored 97.1% parity
- Better female literacy and college enrolment helped improve the score

Health and Survival:

- Slight improvement due to better sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy

Political Empowerment:

- Dropped for second year in a row
- Female representation in Parliament fell from 14.7% to 13.8%

Conclusion

India continues to show modest improvements in areas like education and economic opportunity, but faces challenges in political representation. Despite some gains, it remains among the lowest-ranked in South Asia for gender equality.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu

16. PM Modi's Visit to Cyprus: Why It Matters

First PM Visit in Over 20 Years

- On June 15, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Cyprus — the first by an Indian PM in over two decades.
- The visit is part of a three-nation tour (Cyprus, Canada for the G7 summit, and Croatia).
- He is meeting Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and will address business leaders in Limassol.

Why Is Cyprus Important to India?

1. Strong Diplomatic Support

- Cyprus is a trusted partner of India.
- It supports:
 - India's bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.
 - India's civil nuclear deal with the US, including support at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and IAEA.
- These help India meet its energy and economic needs.

2. Role in IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor)

- Cyprus lies in a strategic location in the eastern Mediterranean.
- It is a potential transit hub for the IMEC, which aims to connect India to Europe via the Middle East.
- IMEC is expected to boost trade, connectivity, and economic partnerships.

3. EU Leadership Role

- Cyprus will hold the EU Council Presidency in early 2026.



- Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Cyprus days after the India-Pakistan clashes, in which Turkey has come out openly in support of Islamabad, by supplying it with drones, that played a vital role in Pakistani combat.
- Secondly, the Mediterranean island nation will soon take over the rotating presidency of the European Union.

- With India looking to deepen ties with the European Union, Cyprus can be a key ally in trade and security cooperation.

The Turkey Factor: A Strategic Signal

Turkey-Cyprus Conflict

- Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded the island after a failed coup to merge Cyprus with Greece.
- The northern part of Cyprus is controlled by Turkish forces and has declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey.
- This long-standing conflict has made Cyprus and Turkey political adversaries.

India's Stand

- India maintains strong ties with Cyprus, which aligns with India's diplomatic and strategic interests.
- Turkey, on the other hand:
 - Supports Pakistan on the Kashmir issue.
 - Was linked to Pakistani drones used in attacks on India during Operation Sindoor.
- PM Modi's visit is seen as a message to Turkey and a show of solidarity with Cyprus.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

17. War in the Middle East: What's Happening Between Israel and Iran

Overview of the Conflict

As of mid-June 2025, Israel and Iran have exchanged four waves of military strikes in what has become the most intense escalation between the two nations in decades. The conflict began with Israel's unprecedented airstrike on June 13, under "Operation Rising Lion", targeting Iran's nuclear and military facilities and assassinating senior Iranian leaders, including Ali Shamkhani and General Hossein Salami.

Why Did Israel Strike?

Israel's official reason is to eliminate what it calls the "Iranian nuclear threat." Despite past claims that Iran is close to acquiring nuclear weapons, these are not supported by U.S. intelligence or the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).



Israel's goals likely include:

- Weakening Iran's military leadership.
- Hindering Iran's nuclear progress.
- Forcing a hard bargain in U.S.-Iran nuclear talks.
- Signaling strength domestically and internationally.

However, critical nuclear sites like Fordow (deep underground) and Khondab remain untouched. Analysts suggest that Israel is preparing for a prolonged conflict rather than a swift resolution.

How Has Iran Responded?

Iran responded with over 100 drones and ballistic missiles, some of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system. It also struck strategic Israeli locations like the Bazan oil refinery in Haifa.

Iran's leadership, already under economic strain, now faces internal pressure from hardliners to retaliate more aggressively. However, Iran has not yet targeted U.S. bases or embassies, possibly indicating restraint or hope for resumed diplomacy.

The Bigger Picture: Historical and Political Context

- Historical animosity: Israel and Iran have had no formal ties since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- Iran supports groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, while Israel views Iran's regional influence as a threat.
- Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, but enriched uranium found at Natanz raises global concerns.

Global Reactions and Diplomacy

- United States: President Trump denied involvement but urged Iran to resume nuclear talks.
- Saudi Arabia: Strongly condemned Israel's "blatant aggression."
- India: Called for de-escalation and peace, with diplomatic outreach to both countries.
- China and the UK: Warned against further escalation; China emphasized Iran's sovereignty.

Economic Fallout: Global and Indian Impact**Oil Supply and Prices**

- The Strait of Hormuz, through which 20–25% of global oil passes, is at risk of disruption.
- Oil prices are expected to rise, affecting major importers like India.
- Iran's crude exports could drop significantly, while Israel has already shut its Leviathan gas field.

Inflation Risk in India

- India's retail inflation had fallen to a 6-year low of 2.82%, helping prompt an RBI rate cut.
- However, renewed Middle East instability could push energy prices up, straining India's inflation outlook and trade balance.

Shipping and Freight

- The conflict revives fears of Red Sea disruptions, forcing cargo vessels back through the longer Cape of Good Hope route.
- This detour raises freight rates, insurance costs, and slows delivery, hurting global supply chains.

What Could Happen Next?

- Israel might continue targeting Iran's military and leadership but is unlikely to achieve its broader objectives without direct U.S. military involvement.
- Iran, while constrained, may still pursue nuclear capabilities more aggressively as a deterrent.
- Closing the Strait of Hormuz remains unlikely due to potential regional isolation and U.S. intervention.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

18. Historic Appointment: MI6 Gets First Woman Chief

Introduction

Blaise Metreweli has been named as the next chief of MI6, making her the first woman to lead the British foreign intelligence agency in its 116-year history. She will report to the Foreign Secretary. The announcement was made by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Metreweli, 47, currently heads MI6's Q section, responsible for tech and innovation.



UK's spy agency MI6 gets first female chief, marks a first in 116 year history

Slow Progress Compared to Sister Agencies

Unlike MI6, sister agencies MI5 and GCHQ appointed women leaders much earlier.

How British Intelligence Agencies Work

1. MI5 – Domestic Intelligence

- Official name: Security Service
- Focus: Domestic counterintelligence and counter-terrorism
- Indian equivalent: Intelligence Bureau (IB)

2. MI6 – Foreign Intelligence

- Official name: Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)
- Focus: Espionage abroad, foreign intelligence gathering

- Originated from the Foreign Section of the Secret Service Bureau
- Codename "C" used since its first chief, Sir Mansfield Cumming
- Indian equivalent: Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW)
- Became publicly acknowledged only in 1994

3. GCHQ – Signals Intelligence

- Focus: Electronic surveillance and securing UK's communications
- Formerly known as the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS)
- Famous for cracking the Enigma code in World War II
- Exposed in 2013 by Edward Snowden for illegal data collection

Conclusion

Blaise Metreweli's appointment marks a milestone for British intelligence, symbolizing progress in gender representation at the top levels of national security. While MI6 lagged behind its peers in appointing a female chief, her leadership may set a new tone for the traditionally secretive agency.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

19. India Supports Peaceful Resolution of Cyprus Dispute: PM Modi

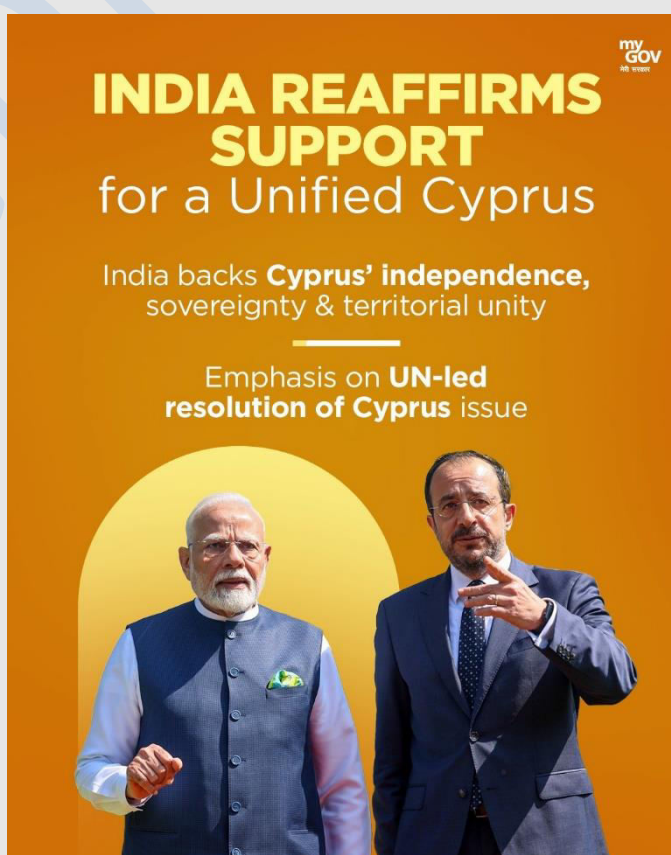
Introduction

During his visit to Cyprus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's support for the unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus and called for a peaceful resolution of the long-standing Cyprus question.

Background: The Cyprus Question

- Since 1974, Cyprus has been divided between the Republic of Cyprus (internationally recognised) and the Türkiye-backed Northern Cyprus.
- This division is known as the Cyprus question.
- India supports a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality as per UN resolutions.

Indirect Message to Türkiye



- PM Modi's visit to Cyprus is seen as a subtle message to Türkiye, a strong ally of Pakistan.
- The joint statement called for avoiding unilateral actions (a reference to Türkiye's role) and stressed negotiations to resolve the conflict.

Strengthening Bilateral Ties

- Cyprus conferred its highest civilian honour — the Grand Cross of the Order of Makarios III — on PM Modi.
- Modi dedicated the award to the friendship and shared values between India and Cyprus.
- The two countries reaffirmed support for each other:
 - Cyprus backs India's bid for a permanent seat in a reformed UN Security Council.
 - India supports Cyprus's position on the Cyprus issue.

Strategic Timing and EU Connection

- This was PM Modi's first foreign visit after Operation Sindoor against Pakistan.
- The visit comes ahead of Cyprus's Presidency of the European Council in early 2026.
- Modi called Cyprus a trusted partner in the EU, pointing to increased cooperation.

Support on Terrorism and Kashmir

- Cyprus has consistently supported India's position on Kashmir and condemned cross-border terrorism from Pakistan.
- It also denounced the terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, 2025.

Conclusion

PM Modi's visit to Cyprus reaffirms India's strategic outreach, diplomatic support, and strong bilateral relationship with Cyprus, while also sending a subtle message to adversarial powers like Türkiye and Pakistan.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

20. New 'Trump Card' Offers US Residency for \$5 Million

What Is the Trump Card?

- A new visa scheme launched by the US Department of Commerce.
- Offers permanent US residency, work rights, and a path to citizenship.
- Requires a \$5 million payment from applicants.
- Intended for wealthy foreign individuals or businesses.
- A sample gold-colored card featuring former President Trump's image was shown in April.

Why the Trump Card Was Launched

- Designed to help reduce the US budget deficit and national debt (\$36.2 trillion).
- Goal: Raise \$1 trillion by selling 200,000 cards.
- Trump claimed the program could generate \$5 trillion if a million cards are sold.

Comparison with Existing EB-5 Visa

Feature	Trump Card	EB-5 Visa
Cost	\$5 million donation	\$1M (\$800K in rural areas) investment
Return on Investment	None – a direct donation	Yes – invest in businesses that create jobs
Legal Framework	Not approved by Congress (yet)	Legally established under immigration law
2024 Issuance (EB-5)	N/A	14,000 visas issued

Legal and Practical Challenges

- No returns: The Trump Card is not an investment — just a \$5 million donation.
- Lack of legal backing: Immigration lawyers warn that it hasn't been approved by Congress.
- Public confusion: Many potential applicants back out once they realize they're not getting a return.
- Bipartisan criticism: Both Democrats and Republicans question the legality of this initiative.

Conclusion

While the Trump Card aims to attract wealthy foreigners and raise funds for the US Treasury, its legality, value proposition, and feasibility remain highly controversial.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

21. India Increases Nuclear Warhead Count to 180 in 2024: SIPRI Report

Key Findings from SIPRI 2025 Report

- India now has 180 nuclear warheads, up from 172 in 2024.
- Nine nuclear-armed nations, including India and Pakistan, are modernising their nuclear weapons.
- The world is entering a dangerous new nuclear arms race amid weakened arms control treaties.

India's Nuclear Developments

- India is developing new types of nuclear delivery systems, including:
 - Canisterised missiles: Can carry nuclear warheads in peacetime.

- Potential to carry multiple warheads per missile in the future.
- Focus is on enhancing mobility, readiness, and survivability.

Pakistan's Nuclear Activity

- Pakistan is also:
 - Developing new delivery systems
 - Increasing fissile material production
- Its nuclear arsenal is expected to grow over the next decade.

India-Pakistan Tensions

- Early 2025 saw a brief armed conflict between India and Pakistan.
- Strikes on nuclear-related military targets and disinformation campaigns increased risk of escalation.
- Experts warn such incidents could trigger a nuclear crisis.

Global Nuclear Stockpile Overview (2025 Estimates)

- Total global inventory: 12,241 warheads
- Warheads in military stockpiles for potential use: 9,614
- Deployed with missiles or aircraft: ~3,912

WORLD NUCLEAR FORCES, JANUARY 2025					
	Military stockpile ^a			Retired warheads ^d	Total inventory ^e
	Deployed warheads ^b	Stored warheads ^c	Total		
USA	1 770	1 930	3 700	1 477	5 177
Russia	1 718	2 591	4 309	1 150	5 459
UK	120	105	225	–	225
France	280	10	290	..	290
China	24	576	600	–	600
India	–	180	180	..	180
Pakistan	–	170	170	..	170
North Korea	–	50	50	..	50
Israel	–	90	90	..	90
Total	3 912	5 702	9 614	2 627	12 241

Call for Arms Control & Caution

- New START Treaty between the US and Russia will expire in February 2026.
- Without new agreements, strategic warhead deployments may rise.
- SIPRI urges global powers to prioritize arms control to avoid escalation.

Summary

India is expanding and modernising its nuclear arsenal, as are several other countries, sparking fears of a renewed global nuclear arms race. SIPRI stresses the urgent need for diplomatic action to control and reduce nuclear weapons worldwide.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

22. 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

23. 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

24. 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

25. China's Response to the Iran-Israel Conflict

What Happened?

Israel launched a major military strike on Iran under Operation Rising Lion, targeting nuclear facilities and killing military generals. Over 600 Iranians and 24 Israelis have died.

China's Stand

China has condemned Israel's actions and called for immediate de-escalation, urging all parties—especially Israel—to act responsibly. It reiterated support for Iran's sovereignty and security.

Why China Is Involved

- China imports 90% of Iranian oil
- It is Israel's second-largest trade partner
- Previously brokered peace between Saudi Arabia and Iran (2023)
- Hosted Palestinian factions, including Hamas, in 2024 for unity talks

Cautious Engagement

While China shows growing interest in Middle East diplomacy, it remains militarily non-interventionist. Its focus remains on stability for economic interests, not conflict.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

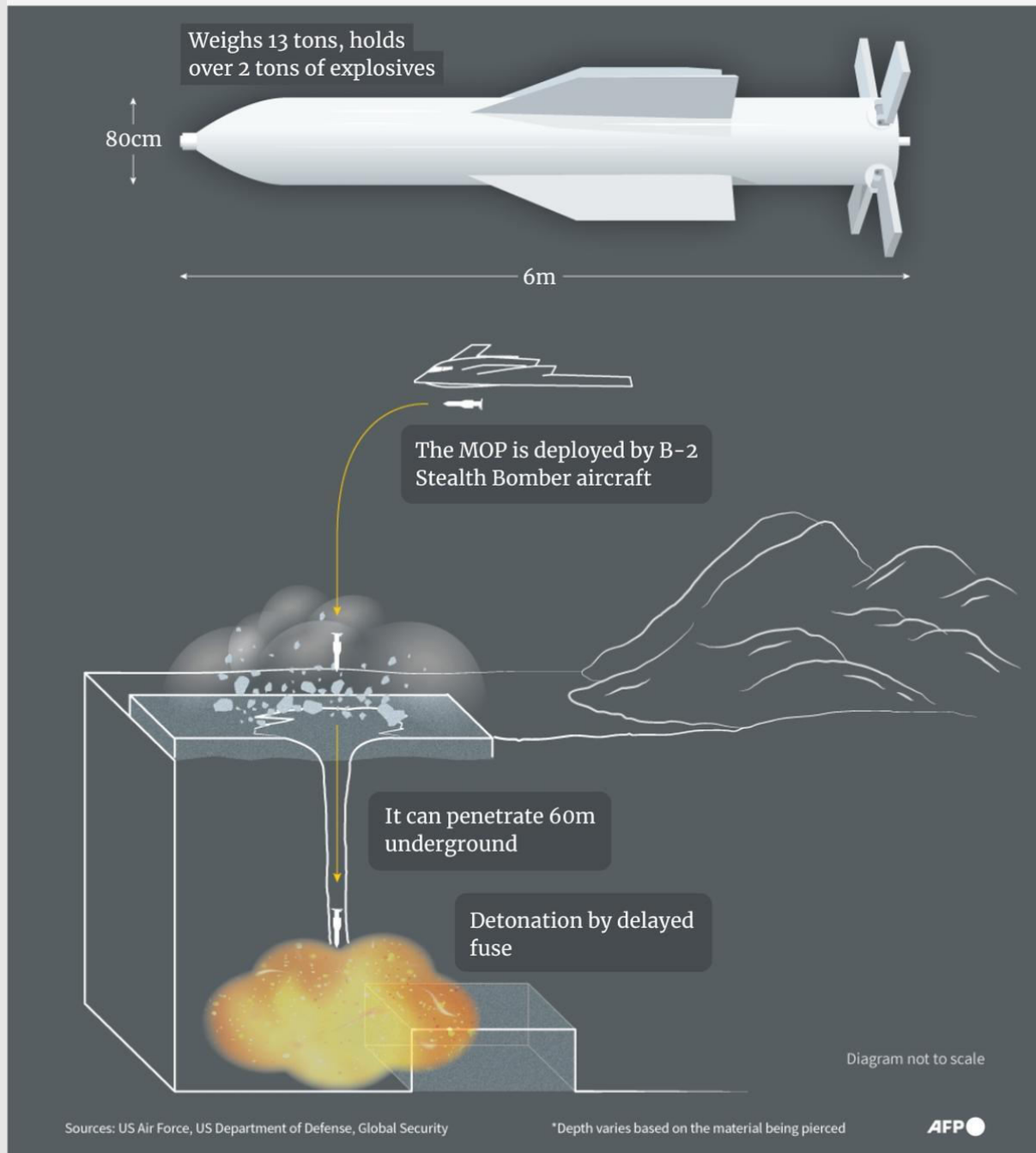
26. US Joins Israel-Iran Conflict with Strikes on Key Nuclear Site

Introduction

In a major development, the United States has carried out airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, marking its direct involvement in Israel's war with Iran. Among the targets was Fordo, a deeply buried uranium enrichment site that had remained untouched in Israeli strikes.

GBU-57 'Bunker Buster' bombs

The U.S.-built bomb, also known as the Massive Ordnance Penetration (MOP), can penetrate deep underground, smashing through rock or concrete, before exploding.



Why Fordo Is Critical

- Fordo is located beneath a mountain, about 90 metres (300 feet) underground.
- It is believed to be central to Iran's efforts to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.
- Israel could not destroy the site with its own capabilities due to its depth and fortification.

US Drops Massive Bunker-Buster Bomb on Fordo

- The US used the GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bomb.
- The bomb weighs around 13,000 kg, is 20.5 feet long, and can penetrate up to 60 metres of soil before detonating.
- It was dropped by a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, the only aircraft capable of carrying it.

More on the GBU-57 Bomb

- Developed by Boeing for the US Air Force.
- Built with a special steel alloy casing to survive deep impact before explosion.
- Specifically designed to destroy hardened bunkers and underground facilities.
- As of 2015, only 20 units had been contracted for production.

Extent of Damage Unknown

While the bomb was successfully dropped on Fordo, the actual level of destruction is yet to be confirmed, given the site's extreme depth and fortified structure.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

27. India Breaks into Top 100 in Global SDG Rankings for the First Time

India Ranks 99th in 2025 SDG Index

India's Journey in Sustainable Development Goals



- India has entered the top 100 countries in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index for the first time.
- Ranked 99th out of 167 nations, India has improved from 109th in 2024 with a score of 67.

- The SDG Index is published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and measures progress toward achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

How India Compares with Other Nations

- China is ranked 49th with a score of 74.4.
- United States is ranked 44th with 75.2 points.
- Among India's neighbours:
 - Bhutan: 74th (70.5)
 - Nepal: 85th (68.6)
 - Bangladesh: 114th (63.9)
 - Pakistan: 140th (57)
 - Sri Lanka: 93rd
 - Maldives: 53rd

India's Steady Progress Since 2021

- India's past rankings:
 - 2021: 120th
 - 2022: 121st
 - 2023: 112th
 - 2024: 109th
 - 2025: 99th

This consistent improvement reflects India's growing focus on sustainable development.

Global Outlook: Progress Stalled Worldwide

- The report warns that only 17% of SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030.
- Reasons include:
 - Conflicts
 - Structural vulnerabilities
 - Limited fiscal space, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Europe Leads the Index, But Faces Its Own Challenges

- Top three countries:
 1. Finland
 2. Sweden
 3. Denmark
- 19 of the top 20 are European countries.
- However, they too face issues with climate change and biodiversity loss due to unsustainable consumption.

Conclusion: A Milestone for India Amid Global Challenges

India's entry into the top 100 marks a significant achievement in its SDG journey. While the world struggles to stay on course for the 2030 goals, India's upward trajectory offers a positive signal — but continued effort will be crucial to sustain progress.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

28. Trump Announces Iran-Israel Ceasefire Amid Calibrated Retaliation and Geopolitical Signals

Iran Retaliates, But With Restraint

- After US strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, Tehran responded by attacking the Al-Udeid US air base in Qatar.
- Iran gave advance notice to the US and Qatar to avoid casualties — all missiles were intercepted.
- US President Donald Trump called the attack "weak and expected" and thanked Iran for the warning.
- A few hours later, Trump announced a full ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

Why Iran Chose Qatar

- Iran's missile strike on Al-Udeid was symbolic and aimed at maintaining credibility without triggering escalation.
- Qatar's ties with Iran and its neutral diplomatic role made it a safe choice for Tehran to send a message without major fallout.
- Qatar closed its airspace an hour before the strike, and the US had already moved out most aircraft from the base.

Strategic Messaging: Iran Avoids Full Escalation

- Iran signaled readiness for nuclear talks, provided Israeli strikes stop.
- Iran withdrew enriched uranium stockpiles from bombed sites ahead of US strikes, preserving assets for future negotiation.
- Despite tensions, Iran did not block the Strait of Hormuz or involve proxy groups like Hezbollah or Hashd-al-Shaabi.

Israel's Heavy Strikes Escalated the Conflict

- **Israel's attacks over 12 days targeted:**
 - IRGC leadership
 - Air defenses
 - Nuclear and energy infrastructure
- Despite suffering damage, Iran managed limited missile responses, including new Kheybar Shekan solid-fuel missiles.

Iran's Proxies Stay Silent



- Hezbollah showed verbal support but kept its military response ambiguous.
- Houthis did not resume attacks despite declaring the end of a ceasefire.
- Hashd-al-Shaabi in Iraq was not activated, mirroring Iran's 2020 playbook of limited direct action and no proxy involvement.

Why Iran Avoided Wider War

- Economic pressure and weakened internal conditions made Iran cautious.
- Tehran seeks to negotiate with the US, hoping for sanction relief and avoiding deeper conflict.
- Not using proxies gives Iran more control and reduces unintended escalation.

What's Next: Ceasefire Holds, But Fragile

- Trump's posts indicate US unwillingness to pursue full-scale war.
- The future hinges on:
 - Whether Israel halts further strikes
 - Whether Iran sees value in de-escalation
- The crisis has likely renewed Arab interest in nuclear deterrence, especially in Saudi Arabia and UAE, despite recent thaw with Israel.

Conclusion: A Calculated Pause in a Volatile Conflict

Iran's early warning, minimal retaliation, and proxy restraint show its desire to avoid total war. Trump's quick announcement of a ceasefire reflects US reluctance for deeper engagement. However, lasting peace depends on whether Israel tones down its offensive and Iran continues to prioritize diplomacy over confrontation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Hindu

29. Rajnath Singh Refuses to Sign SCO Statement: What Happened and Why It Matters

Introduction

At the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting in China, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh refused to sign a joint statement. This decision highlights India's firm stance against selective treatment of terrorism within the China-led group.

What is the SCO?

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a 10-nation regional group formed in 2001 to promote security, political, and economic cooperation.
- Members include India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Belarus, and four Central Asian countries.
- Originally born out of the 1996 "Shanghai Five", the SCO addresses terrorism, extremism, and regional cooperation through mechanisms like RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure).

What Happened at the SCO This Year?

- Rajnath refused to sign the final statement because it excluded any mention of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu & Kashmir.

- However, the draft did mention the hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Pakistan's Balochistan.
- India found this one-sided and unfair. MEA spokesperson said one country (likely Pakistan) blocked India's concerns.



• In his speech, Rajnath:

- Condemned the Pahalgam attack, carried out by a LeT proxy
- Stressed zero tolerance for terrorism
- Urged SCO to call out countries that shelter and support terrorists

Why Rajnath's Refusal is Significant

- The SCO is dominated by China, especially now with Russia focused on the Ukraine war.
- Pakistan, a close ally of China, often gets diplomatic cover at global forums.

Rajnath's refusal:

- Signaled India's strong stand against terrorism
 - Showed India won't support biased narratives
 - Underscored India's view that terrorism and diplomacy can't go hand-in-hand
- As a result, no joint statement was issued from the SCO meeting.

What's Next?

The SCO Heads of State Summit will take place later this year in Tianjin, China. India's strong stance now sets the stage for a more intense diplomatic face-off in upcoming discussions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

30. India Climbs SDG Rankings for the First Time

Introduction

India has entered the top 100 in the Sustainable Development Report (SDR) 2025, ranking 99th out of 167 countries. This is a significant jump from 110th in 2016, when the report first began. The SDR is published by the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and is widely tracked by governments and policymakers.

Progress in Poverty Reduction (SDG 1)

- India has shown strong progress in reducing poverty.
- Although official poverty data is outdated (last full dataset: 2011–12), proxy estimates suggest poverty has nearly halved from 22% in 2012 to 12% in 2023 (World Bank).
- However, poverty estimation remains controversial due to:
 - Lack of updated consumption data since 2018.
 - Outdated poverty lines (₹33/day rural, ₹47/day urban).

Hunger and Malnutrition Still a Major Concern (SDG 2)

- Zero Hunger remains a weak spot:
 - 35.5% of children under 5 are stunted (2019–21), only a slight improvement from 38.4% in 2015–16.
 - Wasting reduced from 21.0% to 19.3%.
 - Obesity among adults (15–49 years) has almost doubled between 2006 and 2021, especially in urban areas.

Electricity Access and Renewable Energy Gains (SDG 7)

- Near-universal household electrification has been achieved.
- However, power quality and supply still vary by region and rural–urban divide.
- India is now the 4th largest in renewable energy capacity (mainly solar and wind).

Digital Infrastructure and Financial Inclusion Improving (SDG 9)

- Rapid growth in:
 - Mobile penetration
 - Digital payments via UPI
- But COVID-19 highlighted the rural–urban gap in Internet access, affecting educational outcomes (SDG 4).

Governance and Institutional Weaknesses Persist (SDG 16)

Despite progress in other areas, India continues to underperform in governance-related indicators, such as:

- Rule of law
- Press freedom
- Independent institutions

These gaps have persisted throughout the Modi administration, and remain a critical area for improvement.

Conclusion: A Mixed Performance

India's rise in SDG rankings is commendable, but the country needs to:

- Update poverty metrics
- Address hunger and malnutrition
- Narrow digital and infrastructure gaps
- Strengthen governance and institutions

The focus must shift from ranking gains to substantive and inclusive progress across all sectors.

India enters top 100 in UN's global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) rankings for first time

THE ECONOMIC TIMES JUNE 25, 2025



India has for the first time secured a place among the top 100 out of 167 countries ranked for their progress in achieving the SDGs, according to a report. According to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's 10th and latest Sustainable Development Report (SDR), India ranks 99th on the 2025 SDG Index with a score of 67.

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

PrepMate

1. Why is the RBI changing gold loan rules? What are the draft proposals?

Introduction

On April 9, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released draft directions on loans against gold collateral with the objective to harmonise the regulatory framework across regulated entities (banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC)) and address differences in lending practices.



Why did the RBI want to step in?

The draft directions come in the backdrop of the RBI highlighting irregular practices amid a significant increase in the loan-against-gold jewellery portfolio of some lenders in September 2024. In the last fiscal, the combined loans against gold jewellery portfolio of banks and NBFCs was estimated to have grown by over 50%; for banks alone, the business more than doubled, growing at 104%, which set alarm bells ringing.

The draft directions on loans against gold collateral aim to harmonise the regulatory framework across regulated entities and address the differences in lending practices. The directions aim at protecting the interest of borrowers; to provide clarity on certain credit and operational processes followed by lenders; and to enhance transparency and disclosure.

What are the key changes?

The maximum Loan-To-Value (LTV) ratio remains capped at 75%. For consumption-based bullet loans, accrued interest must also be included in the LTV calculation, which effectively reduces the disbursed loan amount.

The draft proposes that borrowers furnish proof of ownership for the gold that will be used as collateral. Lenders are required to implement uniform procedures for assessing the purity and weight of gold. As per the RBI draft, gold accepted as collateral shall be valued based on the price of 22 carat gold. Concurrent loans for both consumption and income-generating purposes are to be prohibited. Loan renewals or top-ups are to be permitted only if the existing facility is classified as standard and complies with the prescribed LTV ratio. Borrowers must pay the entire outstanding amount, including both principal and interest, on the loan's maturity date to avail a fresh loan. If the lending institution delays returning the collateral to the borrower beyond seven working days after loan repayment, then the lender is liable to pay the borrower a compensation of ₹5,000 per day for each additional day of delay.

How will changes impact regulated entities?

The changes are expected to reduce the flexibility of borrowers and curtail the ability of NBFCs to renew/top-up loans seamlessly. It will lead to increased compliance burden due to documentation, DSCR (debt service coverage ratio) norms, and monitoring. Smaller NBFCs that rely on re-pledging for liquidity will face funding constraints, leading to potential market consolidation. The higher operational costs could be passed on to borrowers through increased interest rates or charges.

Will a one-size-fits-all policy work?

Gold loans serve as a lifeline for many rural and semi-urban households, often being the only accessible source of formal credit. The RBI may consider creating differentiated regulatory norms for micro gold loans versus structured high-value gold loans.

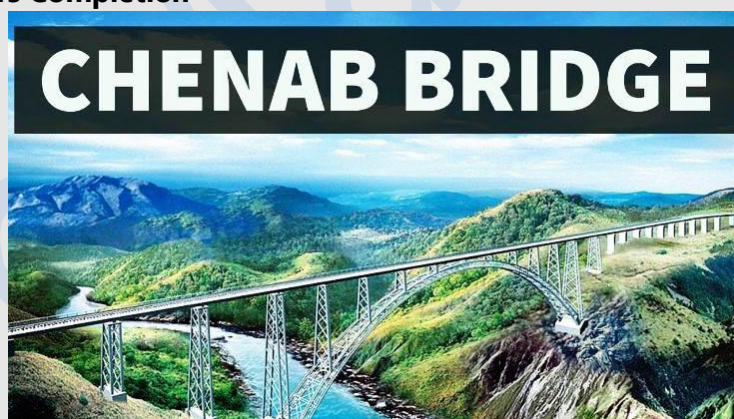
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

2. Chenab Railway Bridge: World's Tallest Rail Bridge

Historic Rail Link to Kashmir Nears Completion

- On June 6, PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the Katra-Sangaldan rail section, completing the long-delayed Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Line (USBRL).
- This includes the world's highest railway bridge over the Chenab River, part of a 42-year project to connect Kashmir by train.



Chenab Bridge: A Record-Breaking Structure

- Cost: ₹1,400 crore
- Height: 359 meters above the riverbed (35 meters taller than the Eiffel Tower)
- Length: 1,315 meters total — including a 530m approach and a 785m deck arch bridge
- Type: Steel arch and concrete bridge
- Status: Tallest rail and arch bridge in the world
- Location: Between Bakkal and Kauri in Jammu's Reasi district

Major Engineering Challenges

- Located in seismic zone-V, an earthquake-prone and geologically unstable area.
- No road connectivity made transport of materials and machinery difficult.
- Construction had to be done without disrupting the Chenab River's flow.

Key Players in Construction

- Executed by: Konkan Railway Corporation
- o Safety Analysis: IISc Bangalore, IIT Delhi, IIT Roorkee

Safety and Longevity

- Lifespan: 120 years
- Speed Limit: Can support trains at up to 100 km/h
- Earthquake Resistance: Up to magnitude 8
- Explosion Resistance: Can withstand blasts equivalent to 40 tonnes of TNT
- Weather Proofing: Endures temperatures down to -20°C and winds up to 266 km/h
- Redundancy: Can still operate at reduced speed even if one pier is removed

Conclusion

The Chenab Bridge is not just an engineering feat but a symbol of national connectivity and resilience, linking Kashmir with the rest of India through one of the most challenging terrains in the world.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

3. India's New EV Policy: A Step Forward

Introduction

On June 2, India introduced a 15% concessional import duty on fully built electric vehicles (EVs), under the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SPMEPCI). This incentive applies only if EV manufacturers:

- Invest at least ₹4,150 crore over three years
- Ensure 25% local value addition within three years, increasing to 50% in five years
- Limit imports to 8,000 EV units per year for five years

Policy Gaps: The Missing Link of Technology Transfer

While India has introduced several EV policies since 2015, including the FAME scheme (₹895 crore, later expanded to ₹10,000 crore), these initiatives lack focus on technology transfer — a critical component for building long-term capability in EV manufacturing.

What India Can Learn from China

China's EV strategy, launched in 2009, included:



Re-energising India's e-Vehicles sector

Components of the new EV policy

- Rs 4150 crore** required as minimum investment
- 3 years** timeline for setting up manufacturing facilities
- 50% domestic value** addition to be reached within 5 years

Source: Govt of India

- Large subsidies (~\$230 billion over 15 years)
 - Mandated joint ventures with foreign firms (till 2022) to enable tech transfer
 - Gradual reduction in import duty (from 25% to 15%)
 - Full control over battery manufacturing, from mining to assembly
- This helped China become the global EV leader, accounting for 11.3 million of the 17 million global EV sales in 2024.

The U.S. Experience: High Investment, Lower Adoption

The U.S. started supporting EVs in 2010, with a \$25 billion loan program, further boosted by the Inflation Reduction Act. However, adoption remains lower than in China, with 1.5 million EVs sold in 2024.

India's Next Step: Secure Battery Tech via Joint Ventures

Currently, India's target of 25% local value addition may rely on adapting existing ICE auto components and adding software features. But the real breakthrough lies in acquiring battery technology.

India must:

- Mandate joint ventures with global EV/battery manufacturers
- Encourage local battery production through incentives and partnerships
- Replicate its successful strategy used in ICE manufacturing

Conclusion: From Assembly to Innovation

For India to move from assembling EVs to innovating and owning the core tech, especially in batteries, technology transfer must be a policy priority. Without it, India risks staying dependent on imports and missing the EV revolution's economic potential.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

4. The Train to Kashmir: A Historic Journey Begins

Gamechanger for Kashmir's Future

On June 7, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off two Vande Bharat trains connecting Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Srinagar, marking a historic moment for Jammu and Kashmir. This direct rail link is expected to transform trade, tourism, and development in the Valley and bring it closer to the rest of India.

The Long Road to Connectivity

- The first railway in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was built in 1897 between Jammu and Sialkot.
- In the early 1900s, a line between Rawalpindi and Srinagar was proposed but never built.
- After Partition in 1947, Jammu lost its rail link when Sialkot became part of Pakistan.
- For decades, the nearest railway station was in Pathankot, Punjab, until the Pathankot–Jammu line opened in 1975.

Birth of the USBRL Project

- In 1983, work began on the Jammu–Udhampur railway line, which took 21 years to complete.
- In 1994, the government announced its extension to Srinagar and Baramulla.
- This became the Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), approved in 1995 with a cost estimate of ₹2,500 crore.
- The project was declared a national project in 2002, and various sections were completed over the years.

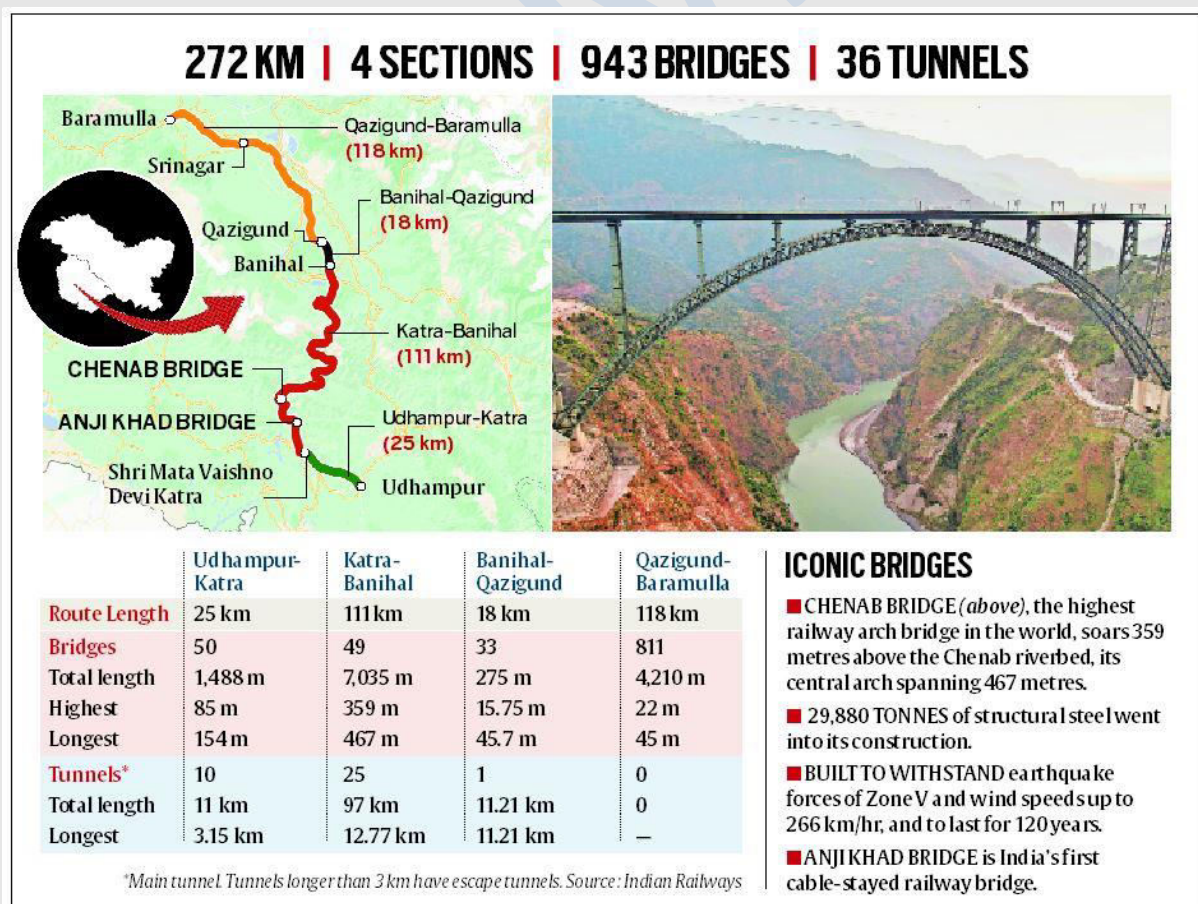
A Mega Engineering Achievement

The USBRL is now complete:

- 272 km of track built
- 36 tunnels and 943 bridges
- Total cost: ₹43,780 crore
- Travel time between Katra and Srinagar: just 3 hours

Key Highlights:

- Chenab Bridge: World's highest railway arch bridge at 359 meters above riverbed
- Anji Khad Bridge: Indian Railways' first cable-stayed bridge
- Ramban Tunnel: India's longest transport tunnel at 12.77 km.



Train Service Details

- Two Vande Bharat trains will run daily in both directions.
- Travel time is cut in half compared to road travel.
- The trains will operate year-round, even in winter, ensuring all-weather connectivity.
- Soon, trains will be extended to Jammu Tawi, enabling people from across India to reach Srinagar directly.

Economic and Social Impact

Boost to Tourism

- Easy access to the Valley is expected to significantly increase tourist footfall, benefiting the local economy.

Trade and Transport

- Faster and cheaper transport of apples, pashmina shawls, handicrafts, dry fruits, and other local goods.
- Lower costs for bringing essential items to the Valley from other parts of India.

A New Chapter for Kashmir

The completion of the USBRL is not just an infrastructure milestone — it's a step toward economic upliftment, social integration, and national connectivity for Jammu and Kashmir. It stands as a symbol of unity, progress, and the power of engineering in bridging distances, both geographical and emotional.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

5. RBI Cuts Repo Rate to 5.5% to Boost Growth

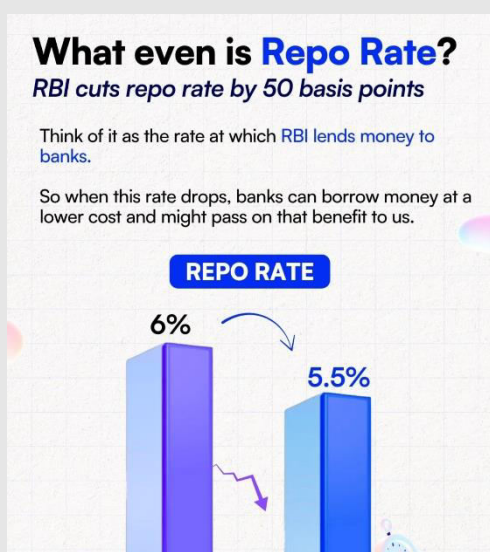
Introduction

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the repo rate by 50 basis points (0.50%) to 5.5%. This is the third cut in 2025, aimed at encouraging borrowing and investment as inflation is now under control.

Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) to Be Reduced in Phases

The RBI also announced a 100 basis point cut in CRR — the share of deposits banks must keep with the RBI. This will be done in four phases starting in September, reducing CRR to 3% by December 2025.

CRR Cut Timeline:



- September 6: -25 bps
- October 4: -25 bps
- November 1: -25 bps
- November 29: -25 bps

This move is expected to release ₹2.5 lakh crore into the banking system, making more funds available for loans and reducing banks' funding costs.

Growth Outlook: GDP at 6.5% for 2025-26

The RBI maintained its GDP growth forecast at 6.5% for FY 2025-26, supported by:

- Rural and urban demand
- Services sector expansion
- Government capital spending
- Private investment and consumption

Inflation Outlook Improved

With inflation under control, CPI inflation is now projected at 3.7% for 2025-26 (revised from 4%). A normal monsoon forecast is expected to support agriculture and help control food inflation.

Policy Stance Shifted to 'Neutral'

The RBI has changed its monetary policy stance from "accommodative" to "neutral", indicating it may raise rates again if inflation pressures return. The MPC said further rate cuts may not be possible now.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

6. New scheme to study crops using AI: What is CROPIC

Introduction

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare plans to launch CROPIC, a study to gather crop information using field photographs and AI-based models.

What is CROPIC?

CROPIC stands for Collection of Real Time Observations & Photo of Crops. According to the plan, crops will be photographed four-five times during their cycle, and the pictures will be analysed to assess their health and potential mid-season losses.



The study will be carried out for two seasons initially, kharif 2025 and rabi 2025-26.

How will CROPIC work on the ground?

The study envisages collection of field photographs during the crop season using a mobile application. The CROPIC mobile app has been developed by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

The photographs from the field will be crowd-sourced directly from farmers. Then, they will be analysed for information including crop type, crop stage, crop damage and its extent.

The CROPIC model will use an AI-based cloud platform for photo analysis and information extraction, and a web-based dashboard for visualisation.

Also, when compensation or insurance is to be paid to farmers, officials will collect the photographs using the CROPIC Mobile App.

What is the purpose of the study?

The agriculture ministry plans to conduct this study for the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). It will assist in creating a rich directory of crop signatures, and will also lead to automation of loss assessment and compensation to eligible farmers under PMFBY.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express

7. SEBI's New Verified UPI IDs: A Step to Protect Investors from Fraud

What Is SEBI Changing?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is introducing a verified UPI payment system and a tool called 'SEBI Check' to protect investors from fraud by unregistered and fake intermediaries.

These systems will be live from October 1, 2025.

Why the Change Was Needed


Many unregistered entities have been tricking investors into transferring funds, posing as SEBI-approved intermediaries. To stop such impersonation, SEBI aims to make it easier for investors to identify genuine, registered market players.

What Is the New Verified UPI Mechanism?

- SEBI-registered intermediaries will get unique UPI IDs.
- These IDs will end with "@valid" and the name of the intermediary's bank.
- Example: A stockbroker named ABC Ltd using XYZ bank will have the UPI ID: abc.brk@validXYZ.
- These UPI handles will include:
 - A custom name (e.g., abc)

SAFER D-STREET

- UPI payment mechanism for Sebi-registered intermediaries that collect funds from investors will have a **verified sign**
- This mechanism, which will go live from **Oct 1**, will use a **new UPI address** structure
- The new mechanism will be able to weed out fraudulent entities that often **pose as genuine Sebi-registered entities**



- A category suffix like .brk for brokers or .mf for mutual funds
- A "thumbs-up inside a green triangle" icon will appear for users during genuine transactions to help verify authenticity.

What Are the Benefits for Investors?

- Secure Payments: Easier to confirm if you're paying a genuine SEBI-registered intermediary.
- Fraud Prevention: Reduces chances of sending money to fake or unregistered firms.
- Transparency: Verified UPI IDs make fund collection by intermediaries more trustworthy.

What Is the 'SEBI Check' Tool?

A new feature called 'SEBI Check' will help investors:

- Verify UPI IDs by scanning a QR code or entering the ID manually.
- Confirm bank details, such as account number and IFSC, of intermediaries before making payments.

When Will This Be Available?

Both the verified UPI IDs and 'SEBI Check' tool will be available to the public from October 1, 2025.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

8. Fixing IRCTC's Ticketing Woes

Introduction

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) runs one of India's most heavily used e-commerce platforms — its online ticket booking system. With crores of users, smooth operation is essential.

- On May 22, 2025, IRCTC set a record by processing 31,814 tickets in just 60 seconds.
- However, Tatkal bookings, which are last-minute bookings, face major issues — especially during peak hours.

The Problem: Bots and Unfair Bookings

A big concern is that ticketing agents use bots (automated programs) to book tickets faster than regular users can.

- This makes it difficult for genuine passengers to get tickets.
- During the Tatkal booking window, the system slows down or crashes due to high demand and bot usage.



New Measures to Curb Abuse

To solve these issues, IRCTC has introduced two key reforms:

1. Anti-Bot Upgrades:

- Major digital overhaul of the system.
- Use of anti-bot technology.
- 2.5 crore fake or suspicious user IDs deactivated.
- Content delivery network (CDN) introduced to speed up the website.

2. Stricter Aadhaar-Based Verification:

- Aadhaar verification is now mandatory after booking any ticket.
- From July 1, all Tatkal bookings require:
 - ✓ Aadhaar authentication
 - ✓ OTP verification
- Agents are banned from booking Tatkal tickets during the first 30 minutes of the booking window.

Why This Matters

The purpose of Tatkal booking is to give all passengers an equal opportunity to travel, especially when regular tickets are unavailable. When agents misuse the system with bots, it defeats this purpose.

These new steps by IRCTC aim to:

- Restore fairness
- Reduce misuse
- Improve performance

Need for Broader Reforms

While these tech upgrades are welcome, deeper issues remain:

- Train demand still exceeds supply, despite more services being introduced.
- Ticketing fixes alone won't be enough.

The real solution lies in:

- Expanding train and track capacity
- Improving passenger safety and facilities
- Making travel more accessible and comfortable

Conclusion: A Step Forward, But Not the Destination

IRCTC's new rules will help passengers, but the bigger challenge is for Indian Railways to fundamentally expand its services.

That would reduce pressure on the booking system and eliminate the need for constant tech fixes in the future.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

9. Why Were SEZ Rules Relaxed?

Introduction

To promote domestic manufacturing of semiconductors and electronic components, the Government of India has relaxed rules related to Special Economic Zones (SEZs). This is part of a larger strategy to reduce India's dependence on imports and strengthen its electronics ecosystem.

Why Are Semiconductors So Important?

Semiconductors are tiny chips that power all electronic devices like:

- Phones, computers, smart TVs, and cars
- AI and machine learning systems
- Industrial automation tools

They are essential for the digital economy.

Currently, China dominates global semiconductor production (35% in 2021). After COVID-19, many countries, including India, realised the risks of relying on a single country and began working on domestic alternatives.

What Changes Has the Government Made to SEZ Rules?

On June 9, 2025, the government amended SEZ rules to make it easier and faster to set up semiconductor and electronics manufacturing units.

1. Reduced Land Requirement (Rule 5)

- Earlier: Minimum 50 hectares required
- Now: Only 10 hectares needed for semiconductor/electronics SEZs
- Benefit: Makes it easier for smaller players to invest and get SEZ benefits like tax breaks and duty-free imports

2. Relaxation of Encumbrance-Free Land (Rule 7)

- Earlier: Land had to be free of all legal issues
- Now: The Board of Approval can relax this condition
- Benefit: Speeds up SEZ setup despite India's complex land laws

3. Permission for Domestic Sales (Rule 18)

- Earlier: SEZs could only sell exports
- Now: Units can also sell within India after paying duties
- Benefit: Helps manage global trade uncertainties and supports local supply chains

What Has Been the Immediate Impact?

Although long-term effects will take time to measure, two new SEZs have already been approved under the relaxed rules:

1. Micron Semiconductor Plant – Gujarat



- Investment: ₹13,000 crore
- Location: Sanand, Gujarat
- Area: 37.64 hectares
- Focus: Semiconductor manufacturing

2. Aequs Electronics Unit – Karnataka

- Investment: ₹100 crore
- Location: Dharwad, Karnataka
- Area: 11.55 hectares
- Focus: Electronic components

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

10. Concerns of Sugar and Soybean Industries Over India-US Trade Deal

Introduction

As India and the US move closer to finalising a bilateral trade agreement—before the July 9 deadline to avoid reinstatement of US tariffs—two Indian agricultural industries are raising red flags: the sugar industry and the soybean processing industry.

US Pressure to Open Indian Markets

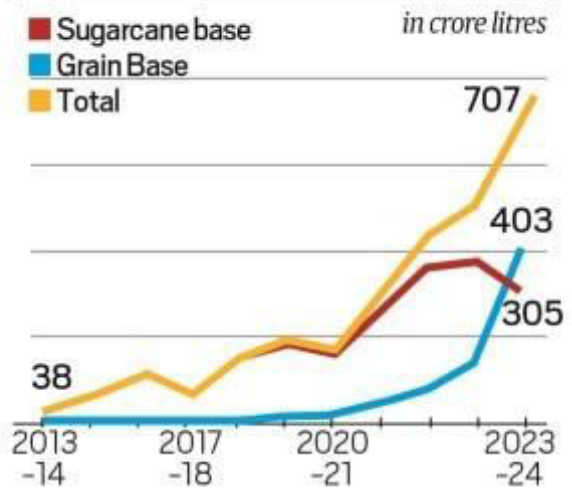
- The US, a major exporter of ethanol, corn, and soybeans, is seeking access to Indian markets.
- The geopolitical goal is to diversify away from China by tapping into India's large consumer base.
- India currently restricts GM crop imports and allows ethanol imports only for industrial, not fuel, use.

Sugar Industry's Concerns: Ethanol Feedstock Threatened

- Ethanol blending success: India has increased ethanol blending in petrol from 1.5% in 2013-14 to 18.8% in 2024-25, aiming for 20% by 2025-26.
- Shift in raw materials: While ethanol was originally made from sugarcane molasses, maize (corn) now accounts for a majority of ethanol production.
- Threat from imports:
 - Cheaper US ethanol could undercut local producers.
 - GM maize imports could further marginalise sugarcane-based ethanol.
 - Millers argue sugarcane ethanol doesn't compete with essential food/feed crops like maize.
- India already imported 70.8 crore litres of ethanol from the US in 2024, but only for industrial use.

CHART 1**ETHENOL BENDING %
IN PETROL ***

*All-India average blending percentage for petrol sold across states.

CHART 2**ETHENOL SUPPLIED TO OIL
MARKETING COMPANIES**

Note: Data is for ethanol supply years: Dec-Nov till 2021-22, Dec-Oct in 2022-23 and Nov-Oct from 2023-24.

Soybean Industry's Opposition: Risk to Farmers and Processors

- NITI Aayog proposal: Import GM soybeans, use oil domestically, export GM-rich meal.
- SOPA's counterpoints:
 - Most Indian soybean processing units are inland—far from ports—making imported soybean unviable due to high freight costs.
 - Imports could undermine 7 million Indian soybean farmers.
- Current stats:
 - India crushes 11–12 million tonnes of soybean yearly.
 - 7–7.5 million tonnes of the meal is consumed domestically.
- India lacks the massive feed market like China, which crushes over 100 million tonnes annually for livestock.

Falling Prices and Tariff Cuts Add Pressure

- On May 30, India cut import duties on crude soybean, palm, and sunflower oils from 27.5% to 16.5%.
- Domestic soy oil processors now face increased competition from cheaper imports.
- Soybean prices in local markets are Rs 1,000 below the MSP, prompting concerns of farmers shifting to other crops.

Conclusion: Trade Deal May Disrupt Domestic Agro Industries

As India negotiates trade terms with the US, sugar and soybean processors warn of:

- Market disruption from cheap imports,
- Reduced profitability, and
- Long-term risks to domestic production and farmer livelihoods.

The trade-off between global strategic interests and protecting local industries remains a critical issue as talks progress.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

11. Patna Water Metro: Turning River Constraints into a Transit Asset

What is the Patna Water Metro Project?



- A modern passenger ferry system along the Ganga.
- Will use electric or hybrid boats, functioning like a metro on water.
- Inspired by the Kochi Water Metro, which launched in 2023.

Why Does Patna Need It?

- Chronic road congestion on major routes like Gandhi Setu, Bypass Road.
- The city's linear layout and surrounding rivers limit road expansion.
- Thousands of heavy vehicles, especially sand trucks, exceed Patna's road capacity daily.
- Existing rivers are under-utilised for transport despite being central to Patna's geography.

The Role of Patna's Geography

- Bounded by rivers: Ganga (north), Sone (west), and Punpun (south).
- These rivers offer a natural corridor for water-based public transport.

Challenges Ahead

- Seasonal river changes (depth and sedimentation) can impact navigation.
- Need for modern infrastructure and regulatory frameworks.
- Existing ferry operations are unregulated and informal.

Key Benefits

- Reduces traffic on crowded roads.
- Eco-friendly: Electric boats emit less pollution.
- Affordable daily commute option.
- Boosts local economy: Jobs in construction, tourism, and transport.
- Enhances connectivity for riverside communities.

National Significance

- Part of India's push to improve urban water transport.
- Aligned with the Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) on National Waterway-1.
- Supports India's inland shipping and green transport goals.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

12. Understanding Poverty in India: It Depends on the Lens

Recent Poverty Claims

- In April 2025, the Indian government cited World Bank data, stating that 171 million people were lifted from extreme poverty over the past 10 years.
- The World Bank's June 2025 update claims only 5.75% of Indians now live in extreme poverty, down from 27% in 2011-12.

Key Findings from World Bank Data

1. Past poverty levels were lower than previously estimated (e.g., 47% in 1977-78 instead of 64%).
2. New Poverty Line: Now set at \$3/day (PPP) – in India, this equals Rs 62/day.

- Under this, extreme poverty fell from 34.4 crore (2011-12) to 7.5 crore (2022-23).

270M LIFTED FROM BOTTOM RUNG

Year	Poverty Line (PPP/day)	Poverty rate (%)	People below poverty line (in million)
2011-12	\$2.15 (2017)	16.22	205.9
2011-12	\$3 (2021)	27.12	344.5
2022-23	\$2.15 (2017)	2.35	33.6
2022-23	\$3 (2021)	5.25	75.2

Source: Govt factsheet

Misconceptions About the \$3-a-Day Line

- It's not based on market exchange rates (₹85/\$), but on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) – ₹20.6/\$ for India.

- So, \$3/day means Rs 62/day, not Rs 255/day.

What is a Poverty Line?

- It's a cut-off income to decide who is poor.
- Varies by time and place.
 - ₹1,000/month was enough in 1975 but is insufficient today.
 - ₹1 lakh/month is decent in Patna, but less so in New York.

Why Use Poverty Lines?

1. To target welfare policies to those in need.
2. To assess whether poverty has declined over time.

India's Shift to World Bank's Poverty Line

- India's last official poverty line: 2011-12 (Tendulkar method).
- The Rangarajan committee (2014) proposed updates, but they weren't adopted.
- Since then, India has relied on:
 - World Bank's poverty line (PPP-based).
 - NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index (non-income-based).

How the World Bank Sets Its Poverty Line

- Based on PPP rates to reflect real purchasing power.
- Originally set at \$1/day (1985 prices); now updated to \$3/day.
- PPP rate for India in 2025: ₹20.6/\$ → Rs 62/day poverty line.

Historical Domestic Poverty Lines in India

Year	Urban Poverty Line	Rural Poverty Line
2009	₹29/day	₹22/day
2011-12	₹36/day	₹30/day
2014 (Rangarajan)	₹47/day	₹33/day

Why Are India's Poverty Estimates Controversial?

- Lack of updated domestic poverty line and gaps in data.
- Depending on the method, India's poverty rate can vary from 2% to 82%.
 - Example: 5.75% (WB's extreme poverty) vs 66% (those getting free food).

Big Picture: So, How Poor Is India Really?

- Perspective 1: Celebrate reduction in extreme poverty (Rs 62/day).
- Perspective 2: Recognize that 83% of Indians live on Rs 171/day — far from economic comfort.

A Final Contrast

- The government waives income tax for those earning up to ₹12 lakh/year (₹3,288/day), acknowledging that this income is just adequate.
- Meanwhile, official poverty lines are set at Rs 62/day — creating a sharp disconnect between policy and economic reality.

Conclusion

India's poverty data depends on how you define "poverty", the benchmarks you choose, and the purpose of the measurement. With multiple methodologies and outdated domestic standards, poverty in India is both a statistical and political question — open to interpretation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

13. Prada leather sandals imitate Kolhapur Chappal design. What Happened?

Introduction

Italian luxury brand Prada listed leather sandals on its website for over ₹1 lakh. The sandals closely resemble India's traditional Kolhapuri chappals, yet no credit was given to Indian artisans or the craft's origins.

What Are Kolhapuri Chappals?

- Handmade leather sandals from Kolhapur (Maharashtra) and parts of Karnataka.
- Known for braided straps, intricate cutwork, and durability.
- Entirely handcrafted using vegetable-tanned leather and generational skills.
- Granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2019 to protect their regional identity.

Challenges Faced by Artisans

- Despite the GI tag, artisans face:
 - Shrinking markets
 - Cheap imitations
 - Low wages
 - Exclusion from global markets
- Around 15,000–20,000 artisans remain active, a sharp decline from earlier decades.

What Is Cultural Appropriation in Fashion?



- When dominant groups use elements of a culture (especially from marginalised communities) without permission, credit, or compensation.
- In fashion, this often means luxury brands profit from traditional designs while ignoring their cultural origins.

Why the Backlash Against Prada?

- Design is unmistakably Kolhapuri, yet no mention of India, Kolhapur, or artisan communities.
- Massive price gap: Prada's version costs ₹1 lakh; Indian artisans sell theirs for under ₹1,000.
- Seen as profiting from cultural heritage without giving back.

Not an Isolated Case

- Similar controversies:
 - Isabel Marant (2015): Copied Mixe embroidery from Mexico.
 - Christian Dior (2019): Used Mexican attire without credit.
 - Louis Vuitton: Used Indian motifs like Banarasi without artisan collaboration.

The Problem with Global IP Laws

- India's GI Act protects Kolhapuri chappals within India only.
- No global law prevents aesthetic imitation unless it's trademarked or copyrighted.
- This legal loophole allows luxury brands to replicate designs without legal consequences.

Calls for Reform

- Push for:
 - Stronger international IP protection for GI-tagged products.
 - Fair trade collaborations between luxury brands and artisan groups.
 - Recognition and compensation for cultural contributions.

Why It Matters

- The controversy highlights:
 - The power imbalance in global fashion.
 - The need to decolonise fashion.
 - The urgency to protect artisan dignity and livelihoods.
- It's not just a cultural issue—it's about economic justice and ethical consumption.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

1. Rajasthan's Khichan in Phalodi and Menar in Udaipur have been designated as Ramsar sites

Two New Ramsar Sites in Rajasthan

- On the eve of World Environment Day, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced two new Ramsar sites in Rajasthan:
 - o Menar Wetland Complex (Udaipur)
 - o Khichan Wetland (Phalodi)
- India now has a total of 91 Ramsar sites — wetlands of international importance.

Why Menar Wetland Was Selected

- Located in Udaipur, it consists of:
 - o Three ponds: Braham talab, Dhand talab, Kheroda talab
 - o Flooded farmland during monsoons
- Supports 110 waterbird species, including 67 migratory birds.

Why Khichan Wetland Was Selected

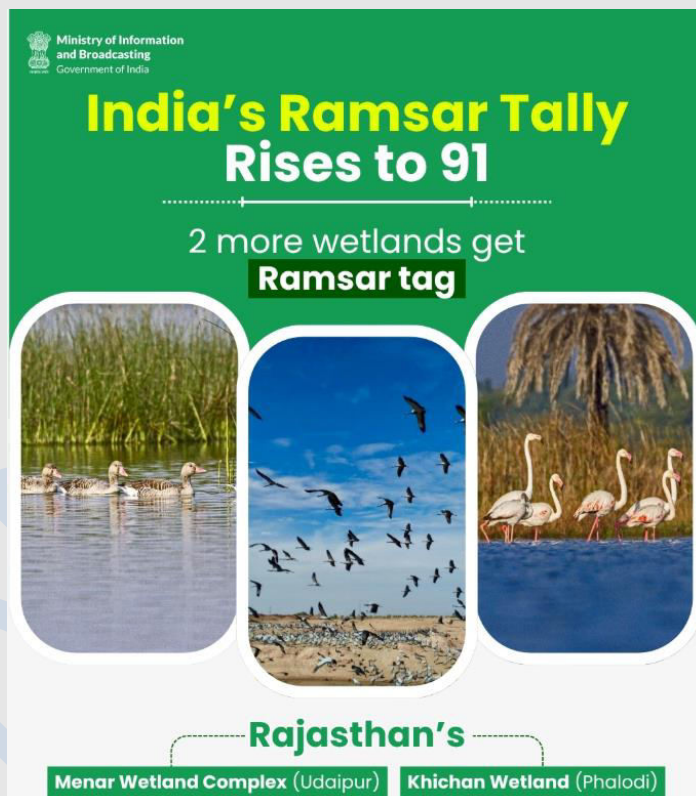
- Located in the northern Thar Desert in Phalodi, it includes:
 - o Ratri river and Vijaysagar pond
- Supports over 150 bird species.

Significance

These new designations showcase how community involvement and ecological awareness are helping protect India's rich natural heritage.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu



2. India's Tiger Prey Base: Why Their Decline Is a Concern

Introduction

A recent assessment has, for the first time, measured the abundance of ungulates—hoofed mammals like deer, pigs, antelopes, and bison—across India. These animals are crucial not

only for the survival of tigers, India's top predator, but also for maintaining healthy forest ecosystems.

Key Role of Ungulates in Forests and Tiger Conservation

Ungulates form the main diet of tigers and other large carnivores. Their feeding habits also help maintain soil and forest health. India is home to over 3,600 tigers, nearly 70% of the global population. A decline in the prey population directly threatens tiger conservation and forest balance.

Findings from the 2022 Tiger Estimation

The report, based on the 2022 All-India Tiger Estimation, was prepared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India. It used field surveys, camera traps, and dung analysis to assess the density and distribution of tiger prey.

Uneven Distribution Across India

While spotted deer, sambar, and gaur thrive in many parts of India, their numbers are declining in east-central states like Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh due to:

- Habitat destruction
- Mining and infrastructure development
- Subsistence hunting
- Forest fragmentation
- Left-wing extremism

In contrast, forests in Uttarakhand, the Western Ghats, and parts of northeast and central India have healthy populations.

Isolated and Endangered Species

Some ungulate species like barasingha, wild buffalo, hog deer, and pygmy hog are now found only in fragmented pockets. This isolation has caused genetic bottlenecks and reduced interbreeding.

Sanctuaries and forest divisions near tiger reserves have fewer prey animals than protected national parks and tiger reserves.

Status of Major Prey Species

- Chital (Spotted Deer): Most abundant and widely spread across India.
- Sambar: Stable populations, especially in the Western Ghats and central India.
- Wild Pig: Thriving across many landscapes due to high adaptability.
- Nilgai and Gaur: Doing well in several areas. Nilgai often move into farmland; gaur prefer dense forests.

Declining Species with Narrow Habitats

- Hog Deer: Habitat loss in grasslands and wetlands has reduced them to small areas in the Ganga and Brahmaputra plains.

- Barasingha (Swamp Deer): Survives only in places like Kanha, Dudhwa, and Kaziranga. Reintroduction efforts exist but are limited by its dependency on wetland-grassland ecosystems.

Why Prey Decline Threatens Tigers

The decline of ungulates leads to:

1. Reduced Tiger Habitat: Without enough prey, tigers cannot expand to new areas.
2. Human-Wildlife Conflict: Tigers hunt livestock in buffer zones, leading to retaliation by humans.
3. Ecosystem Imbalance: Forests suffer when prey species are absent.
4. Overcrowded Reserves: States like Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are reaching their wildlife "carrying capacity," pushing tigers into prey-poor states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Other Challenges to Wildlife

- Crop Damage: Nilgai and wild pigs destroy crops, adding tension between humans and wildlife.
- Habitat Conversion: Grasslands and wetlands are turning into farms and towns.
- Infrastructure Fragmentation: Roads, railways, and power lines cut through forests, affecting prey movement and survival.

What Needs to Be Done

The report recommends increasing prey populations through protected on-site breeding and improving habitat connectivity. This will not only support tiger conservation but also help reduce human-animal conflict and maintain forest health.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

3. What Are Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) Units?

Meaning

Flue gas is the smoke released when coal is burned in thermal power plants. It contains pollutants like carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), and nitrogen oxides. FGD units are special systems that remove SO₂ from this smoke before it is released into the air.

Why is SO₂ Harmful?

- SO₂ is a toxic gas that causes breathing problems and contributes to global warming.
- It leads to the creation of PM2.5 (fine particulate matter), which pollutes the air and affects human health.
- Studies show that 15% of India's PM2.5 pollution is linked to coal burning, and 80% of that comes from SO₂.

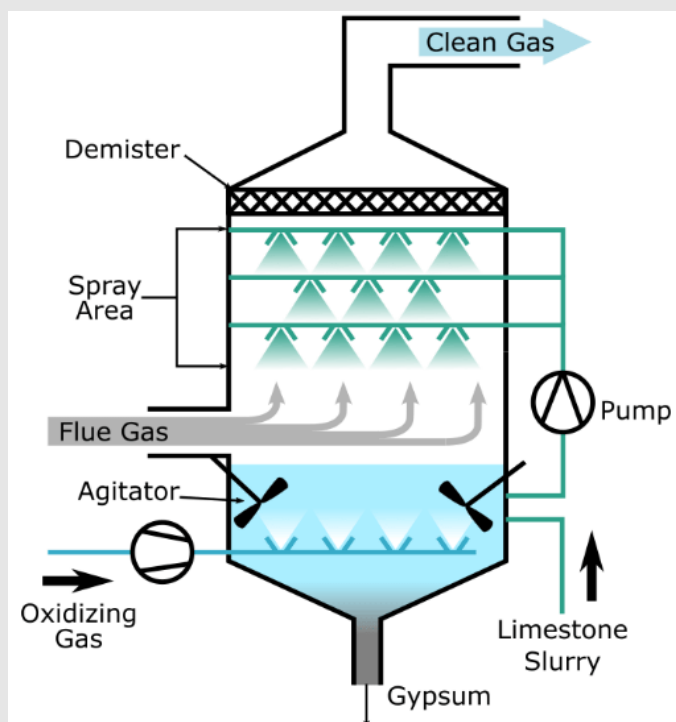
How Do FGD Units Work?

There are three main types of FGD systems:

1. Dry Sorbent Injection: Powdered limestone is added to flue gas to neutralize SO_2 . The byproduct is filtered out.
2. Wet Limestone Treatment: Flue gas passes through a limestone slurry, forming gypsum, which can be reused.
3. Sea Water Scrubbing: Used in coastal areas, where sea water absorbs SO_2 . The treated water is then discharged safely.

What Is the Situation in India?

- In 2015, the government ordered all 537 coal-fired power plants to install FGD units.
- The original deadline (2018) has been delayed multiple times. As of April 2025, only 39 plants have complied.
- Deadlines now extend to 2027–2029, depending on plant category.
- A recent expert panel has suggested scrapping the FGD policy entirely.



Why Are FGDs Being Opposed?

1. High Costs

- Installing an FGD unit costs ₹1.2 crore per megawatt.
- India's coal power capacity is over 2.19 lakh MW, meaning costs could exceed ₹97,000 crore.
- Power tariffs may rise by up to ₹0.72 per unit.

2. Affordability Concerns

- The government is concerned about increased electricity prices for consumers.
- Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has said a balance must be found between clean air and cost control.

What Do Experts Say?

- Skipping FGDs may save money now but harms public health and India's air quality goals.
- Most of the cost impact is fixed and predictable, making it easier to manage.
- Experts argue that no alternative currently exists that can replace FGDs in removing SO_2 .

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

4. Bonn Climate Change Conference 2025 Begins

Introduction

Over 5,000 government delegates and stakeholders have gathered in Bonn, Germany, for the annual Bonn Climate Change Conference. The meeting began on June 17 and will continue until June 26.



What Is the Bonn Climate Change Conference?

The conference is an annual mid-year meeting held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

It is formally called the Sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SBs) and serves as a key follow-up to the main Conference of the Parties (COP) held later in the year.

Who Attends?

- Government representatives from UNFCCC member countries
- Indigenous leaders
- Scientists and researchers
- International organisations
- Civil society and environmental groups

Why Is the Bonn Conference Important?

- It helps prepare the technical and scientific groundwork for COP (usually held in November).
- Decisions and recommendations made here directly influence the outcomes of the upcoming COP.
- It also reviews progress on agreements made at previous COPs.

Key Bodies Leading the Conference

Two main bodies under the UNFCCC lead the discussions:

1. Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)

- Tracks how countries are implementing climate agreements
- Discusses financial and technical support for developing nations

2. Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)

- Provides scientific input to guide climate policies
- Acts as a bridge between the IPCC scientists and climate negotiators

Main Focus in 2025: Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)

This year, a key issue is finalizing a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).

- GGA was first mentioned in the Paris Agreement (2015)
- After limited progress for years, a framework was adopted at COP28 (Dubai)
- The Bonn meeting aims to define clear targets for global adaptation, similar to how keeping global warming below 1.5°C is the main goal for mitigation

Conclusion

The Bonn Conference plays a crucial behind-the-scenes role in global climate governance. It shapes future negotiations, supports climate science and policy links, and sets the direction for major decisions at COP conferences.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

5. What Is the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)?

Launched by India in 2024



- Established by: Indian government through the National Tiger Conservation Authority
- Mandate: Conserve seven big cat species globally:
 - Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma
- Support: ₹150 crore allocated for 2023–2028
- Aim: Share and replicate

successful conservation practices among big cat range countries

First Assembly Held in New Delhi

- Date: June 16, 2025
- Venue: New Delhi
- Presided by: Bhupender Yadav, Union Environment Minister

Global Participation

- 95 Range Countries include: Canada, Brazil, China, USA, Iran, Nepal, Russia, etc.
- 25 Member Countries (as of Sep 2024): Include Bangladesh, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Peru, Rwanda
- Membership Open to: All UN member states after signing a formal agreement (Note Verbale)

Why Was the IBCA Launched?

Commemorating Project Tiger

- Announced by PM Modi in 2023 on the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger
- Background:
 - 40,000 tigers in 1947 → Only 1,800 by 1970 due to hunting & poaching
 - Now, India has 3,600+ tigers, or 70% of the world's tiger population

Why Big Cats Matter

- Ecological Role: Control prey population, prevent overgrazing
- Ecosystem Benefits:

- Prevent wildfires, spread of disease
- Protect biodiversity
- Conserve soil and water
- Support climate adaptation
- Store & sequester carbon — helping fight climate change

• **Call for Global Action:**

- Collective international conservation efforts emphasized by Bhupender Yadav
- Headquarters of IBCA to be located in India

Summary

The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) is a global Indian-led initiative to conserve the world's big cat species. Through shared knowledge, funding, and cooperation, it seeks to ensure that these apex predators — and the ecosystems they protect — continue to thrive.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

6. 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

7. What Is the Revised Green India Mission (GIM)?

Introduction

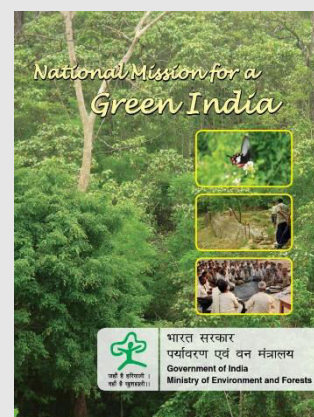
The Green India Mission (GIM) is part of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

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

1. Axiom-4 Mission: A New Milestone for India in Space

Indian Astronaut on Axiom-4

- Shubhanshu Shukla, an Indian astronaut, has traveled to the International Space Station (ISS) aboard Axiom-4.
- Marks the beginning of a new phase in India's space program.
- Unlike earlier symbolic achievements, this mission has practical benefits for India's future space plans.

From Rakesh Sharma to Shubhanshu Shukla

- In 1984, Rakesh Sharma became the first Indian in space via a Soviet mission.
- However, India then lacked the capability to fully utilize that achievement.
- Today, ISRO is much more advanced, and Shukla's mission will directly help future missions like Gaganyaan.



Why This Mission Matters for Gaganyaan

- Gaganyaan is India's upcoming human spaceflight mission.
- Human spaceflight is highly complex, with a much higher risk than uncrewed missions.
- Shukla's real-life space experience as pilot of Axiom-4 will help improve safety and preparedness for Gaganyaan.

Shukla's Role and Learnings

- As pilot, Shukla will:
 - Make decisions mid-flight
 - Navigate a complex orbit to the ISS
 - Handle in-flight processes
- This hands-on experience is invaluable and cannot be matched by simulations.
- He will also be the first Indian to visit the ISS, gaining insights useful for India's own space station plans.

Scientific Experiments: From Muscles to Moong Dal

- ISRO is conducting customised space experiments aboard Axiom-4:
 - Muscle degradation studies in zero gravity
 - Plant growth experiments with moong dal and micro-algae
- These help understand human health, food production in space, and will guide future experiments in Gaganyaan.

1. SLAWOSZ UZNANSKI-WISNIEWSKI Mission Specialist, Polish

Scientist and engineer, was member of European Space Agency's Astronaut Reserve Class of 2022. Has made significant contributions at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, where he served as a reliability expert and project lead. From 2018 to 2020, was Engineer in Charge for the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), overseeing its round-the-clock operations.

3. SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA Pilot, Indian

Group Captain Shukla was commissioned into IAF's fighter wing in June 2006; has 2,000 hours of flight experience across a range of aircraft. Will pilot Axiom 4 mission to the ISS. Named on February 27, 2024, as one of four elite astronauts for Gaganyaan, India's maiden human spaceflight mission.

2. PEGGY WHITSON Commander, American

Most experienced American astronaut with more than 38 years of experience. Three previous missions to ISS; holds record among US astronauts & among women for spending the most time in space, 675 days. Trailblazer: first female commander of ISS; only woman to serve as ISS commander twice; first female commander of a private space mission (Axiom 2); most spacewalks by a woman (10 walks, 60 hours).

4. TIBOR KAPU Mission Specialist, Hungarian

Mechanical engineer, specialist in polymer technology, has contributed to pharma and logistical industries. In 2022-23, he focused on space radiation protection at an aerospace technology company. In 2023, was selected as one of four Hungarians for the Hungarian to Orbit (HUNOR) Astronaut Program.

WHAT ASTRONAUTS WILL DO

- More than 60 scientific studies and activities scheduled to take place aboard the ISS
- This will be the most research and science-related activities conducted on an Axiom Space mission aboard the ISS to date
- Thirty-one countries involved in these studies, including the US, India, Poland, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Nigeria
- ISRO has designed 10 experiments. These include: growing crops in space; examining tardigrades in space; investigating muscle loss in astronauts in space; and analysing impact of gazing at computer screens in microgravity
- Astronauts will also engage in scientific outreach activities such as addressing students and people from the space industry

Source: Axiom Space

Paving the Way for India's Space Station & Moon Landing

- Axiom-4 is part of India's broader roadmap:
 - Gaganyaan (2026–2027)
 - Own space station (after 2030)
 - Human mission to the Moon by 2040

Boosting India's Space Economy

- The global space market is worth \$500 billion, expected to double by 2030.
- India currently has just a 2% share.
- Missions like Axiom-4 can:
 - Attract private sector participation
 - Drive innovation and investment
 - Inspire young talent and students
- India aims to grow its share to at least 10% in the coming years.

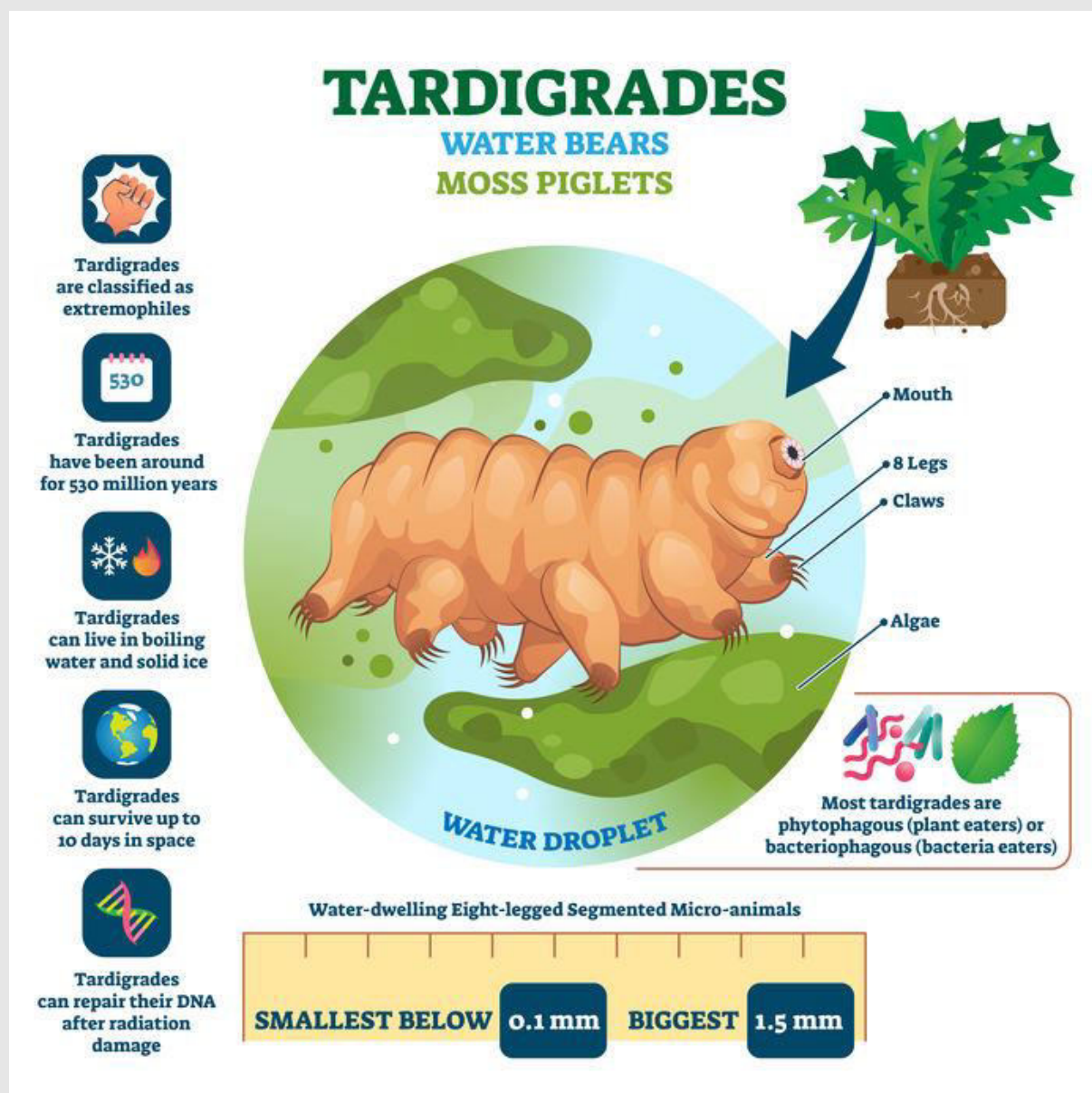
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. Why Scientists Study Tardigrades in Space

Tardigrades in Space Missions

Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla will study tardigrades aboard the International Space Station (ISS) during his two-week mission. The focus will be on how these tiny creatures revive, survive, and reproduce in space conditions.



What Are Tardigrades?

Tardigrades, also called water bears or moss piglets, are tiny aquatic animals about 0.5 mm long. They've existed for around 600 million years, surviving all major mass extinctions.

- They have four pairs of legs with claws and a specialized mouth to suck nutrients from plant cells and small organisms.
- Found in diverse habitats — from mountain tops to ocean floors — they mostly live in thin water films on mosses and lichens.

Why Are Tardigrades Studied?

Although discovered in 1773, tardigrades gained scientific interest recently due to their extraordinary survival abilities.

They can survive:

- Temperatures from -273°C to 150°C
- Space radiation and high pressure (up to 40,000 kPa)
- Decades of freezing

Their survival mechanisms could help in:

- Improving crop resilience
- Creating better sunscreens
- Preserving human tissues and organs

What Makes Tardigrades So Resilient?

Tardigrades survive harsh environments by entering a state called cryptobiosis, drastically slowing metabolism to less than 0.01% and reducing water content by over 95%.

In this state, called a tun, they become nearly indestructible. They also produce special CAHS proteins, which form a protective gel inside cells, shielding them from damage due to heat, radiation, and vacuum.

What is the Voyager Tardigrades Experiment?

This experiment will send tardigrades in their tun state to the ISS, then revive them to study the effects of microgravity and space radiation.

Goals:

- Identify genes that make tardigrades resilient
- Understand DNA repair in space
- Develop strategies to protect astronauts and biological materials during deep space missions

History of Tardigrades in Space

Tardigrades first went to space in 2007 aboard the European Space Agency's Foton-M3 mission.

- Around 3,000 were sent in tun state
- Many survived and even reproduced after exposure to open space

This made tardigrades the first animals to survive direct exposure to space.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. Ahmedabad police to use AI-based system during Rath Yatra to avoid stampede. How does it work?

AI System to Prevent Stampede at Ahmedabad's Rath Yatra



To manage large crowds during the upcoming Jagannath Rath Yatra on June 27, the Ahmedabad police will use an AI-powered anti-stampede system for the first time. Around 15 lakh devotees are expected to attend the event in the congested Old City area.

Why Is This Important Now?

This move comes after recent stampedes in:

- Bengaluru during IPL victory celebrations (11 deaths)
- Prayagraj during the Mahakumbh earlier this year

Authorities are being extra cautious to avoid similar tragedies.

Main functions and uses

1. Real-time monitoring: AI-powered CCTV cameras will continuously analyse video streams in real time.

2. Crowd density estimation: Algorithms will calculate the number of people in a given area. This can involve pixel-based analysis (converting images to black and white and counting “black pixels” representing people), and object detection, using machine learning models to identify and count individuals by detecting heads or torsos.

3. Thresholding: Pre-defined “threshold values” for crowd density will be established. When the detected density crosses these thresholds, it will trigger an alert.

4. Anomaly detection: Beyond just density, these algorithms can identify unusual crowd behaviour, such as sudden surges in movement, unusual clustering patterns, fallen individuals, and aggressive movement.

5. Alerting authorities: Upon detecting a potential stampede risk, the system sends immediate alerts to security personnel or control rooms via LCD displays, GSM messages or other communication channels.

6. Predictive analytics: Advanced systems will use time-series prediction models to forecast crowd behavior and dynamics based on historical and real-time data, helping anticipate potential bottlenecks or overcrowding.

7. Reinforcement learning: Algorithms can learn from past incidents to suggest optimal crowd flow routes and alternative evacuation paths during emergencies.

Benefits

1. Proactive prevention: The primary benefit is the ability to detect and warn of potential stampedes before they occur, allowing authorities to take preventative measures.

2. Real-time insights: Provides immediate and accurate data on crowd density and movement, far surpassing manual observation.

3. Enhanced safety: Significantly improves safety in public spaces by reducing human error and enabling swift responses to risks.

4. Optimised resource allocation: Helps in better deployment of security personnel and resources to areas with high crowd density.

5. Improved efficiency: Automates a labor-intensive task, freeing up human operators for more complex decision-making.

6. Data for future planning: The collected data can be analyzed to improve crowd management strategies for future events.

Challenges

1. Limited accuracy: AI algorithms can face challenges with occlusion (people blocking each other), varying conditions (changes in lighting, weather, and camera angles), and bias in training data (leading to false positives).

2. Computational complexity and cost: Developing and deploying such systems can be expensive due to the need for high-resolution cameras, powerful processing units, and sophisticated algorithms.

3. Data privacy and ethical concerns: The extensive use of CCTV and AI raises concerns about individual privacy and potential misuse of data.

4. Integration with existing infrastructure: Integrating new AI-powered systems with older CCTV networks can be complex.

5. Human intervention remains crucial: While AI can alert, human responders are still essential for effective intervention and crowd dispersal. As seen during Maha Kumbh, even with AI alerts, a lack of ground personnel can limit effectiveness.

6. Defining thresholds: Determining appropriate crowd density thresholds for different environments and cultural contexts can be challenging.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

4. Pickle Juice: Carlos Alcaraz's Cramps Fix in French Open Final

What Happened?



During the longest-ever French Open men's final (5 hours 29 minutes), Carlos Alcaraz sipped pickle juice to prevent cramps against Jannik Sinner.

What Is Pickle Juice?

- A briny liquid made of water, salt, and vinegar, typically used for pickling vegetables like gherkins.
- Contains acetic acid, sodium, and potassium — all useful for muscle

function.

- Now available commercially in bottles or sachets, sometimes with added dill oil or starch extracts.

Why Do Athletes Drink It?

- Used to quickly relieve cramps, especially during intense physical activity.
- The acetic acid triggers a neurological reflex via nerve receptors in the mouth, signaling muscles to relax.

How It Works: Expert Insight

- Anita Bean, sports nutritionist: Acetic acid activates a nerve response to stop cramps.
- Tejaswin Shankar: Pickle juice is a quick fix, like a "band-aid" for cramps — faster than traditional hydration or electrolytes.

Conclusion

Pickle juice is becoming a go-to solution for athletes worldwide. Its fast-acting relief from cramps, thanks to acetic acid, makes it especially useful during high-stakes, high-intensity competitions like the French Open or the Olympics.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

5. Government Plans to Regulate AC Temperatures

Introduction

The Union Ministry of Power is considering fixing the temperature range of new air conditioners (ACs) in India between 20°C and 28°C for households, hotels, and cars. This proposal aims to improve energy efficiency and promote public health.

Previous Efforts and Energy-Saving Potential

The idea isn't new. In 2018 and 2021, the Ministry had encouraged setting ACs at a default temperature of 24°C. According to a study by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):

- Each 1°C increase in AC temperature saves 6% electricity
- Setting all ACs to 24°C could save 20 billion units of power annually
- ACs could account for 200 GW of electricity demand by 2030

Why Low Temperatures Can Be Harmful

Health studies show that temperatures below 18°C may be:

- Uncomfortable
- Unhealthy, leading to:
 - Higher blood pressure
 - Greater risk of hypertension
 - Increased respiratory problems like asthma
 - Lack of Vitamin D

Children in trials in Japan, New Zealand, and the UK showed improved breathing when sleeping in rooms above 18°C.

How an Air Conditioner (AC) Works

An air conditioner doesn't actually produce cold air — it removes heat from a room and throws it outside.

Why It Needs Power

Heat naturally moves from a hot place to a cooler one. But an AC does the opposite — for example, it pushes heat from a 30°C room into the hotter 35°C air outside. Doing this takes effort, and that's where electricity is used.

Step-by-Step: The Cooling Process



ACs use a special liquid called a refrigerant to carry heat. Here's how it works:

1. Evaporator (Inside Your Room):

- The refrigerant is kept just below its boiling point.
- A fan blows room air over it.
- The refrigerant absorbs heat and boils, turning into a gas.
- This also removes moisture from the air (so the room feels less humid).

2. Compressor (Outside Unit):

- The warm gas is sent to the compressor.
- It squeezes the gas, making it 3–4 times more pressurized and heating it to $\sim 90^{\circ}\text{C}$.
- This is the step that uses the most electricity.

3. Condenser (Outside Unit):

- The hot gas moves to the condenser, where it releases heat into the outside air.
- As it cools, the refrigerant turns back into a liquid.

4. Expansion Valve:

- The high-pressure liquid is passed through this device.
- It becomes a low-pressure mix, ready to absorb heat again in the evaporator.
- The cycle repeats.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

6. 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

7. Quantum Breakthrough by IIT-Delhi and DRDO

Introduction

Scientists from IIT-Delhi and the DRDO have successfully demonstrated a major advancement in quantum cybersecurity. They used a quantum key distribution (QKD) system to securely transmit information over 1 km of free space on campus — a crucial step toward future-proof communications.

Why Quantum Security Matters

Today, most secure communications rely on complex mathematical problems that are hard to solve with current computing power. But with the rise of quantum computers, these problems may soon become solvable — putting global communications at risk.

Quantum key distribution offers a solution:

- It ensures secure message exchange between two parties.
- Any attempt to intercept the message instantly reveals the breach.
- If scaled via satellites, it could enable nationwide secure quantum networks.

Part of India's National Quantum Mission

This breakthrough ties into the National Quantum Mission launched in 2023, which focuses on:

1. Quantum communication
2. Quantum sensing
3. Quantum computing
4. Quantum materials

The mission has a budget of ₹6,003 crore till 2031.

Administrative Hurdles Slow Progress

Despite the promise, India's quantum efforts face significant bureaucratic and funding issues:

- Only a small portion of the funds has been released.
- Venture capital investment is minimal.
- Red tape, such as complex documentation and lack of single-window approvals, delays research.
- Short-term contracts, rented equipment, and low government salaries drive talent away.
- There is high dependence on foreign hardware (e.g., cryostats, sensors) and software (mostly controlled by multinational companies).

India Falling Behind Global Giants

India's current spending is much lower than other nations:

- U.S. invests 5x more
- China invests 20x more

The original 2020 budget promise of ₹8,000 crore was already reduced.

The Way Forward: Administrative Reform

To scale successes like the IIT-DRDO demonstration:

- India needs efficient funding mechanisms
- Reduce red tape and empower researchers
- Develop indigenous hardware and software
- Ensure long-term support and better pay for scientists

Without these structural reforms, India risks falling behind in the global quantum race.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu



8. Shubhanshu Shukla: First Indian Aboard the International Space Station

Historic Moment for India

- Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla of the Indian Air Force became the first Indian to enter the International Space Station (ISS) recently.
- He is part of Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4), launched by Axiom Space in partnership with NASA.



Mission Highlights

- Launched from: Florida
- Capsule: Dragon spacecraft
- Position: Shukla served as the mission pilot

Significance for Gaganyaan Mission

- Shukla is one of four astronauts selected for India's Gaganyaan mission — ISRO's first human spaceflight, expected no earlier than 2026.
- ISRO spent over ₹500 crore to include Shukla and backup astronaut Prasanth Nair in the Ax-4 mission for training and space experience.

Training and Preparation

- NASA's Johnson Space Center: Advanced training for Ax-4.
- Russia: Prior Gaganyaan astronaut training for Shukla, Nair, Ajit Krishnan, and Angad Pratap.
- These experiences are vital due to Russia and the U.S.'s long-standing human spaceflight expertise.

Delays and Challenges

- The mission faced several delays:
 - Weather issues
 - Technical problems with the Falcon 9 rocket

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

9. How GLP-1 Drugs Like Semaglutide Are Transforming Obesity Treatment

India Joins the GLP-1 Revolution

Two powerful GLP-1 drugs — Semaglutide (Novo Nordisk) and Tirzepatide (Eli Lilly) — are now available in India. These medicines, already popular in the US, help people lose 15–20% of body weight, a result once possible only through bariatric surgery.

What Are GLP-1 Drugs?

GLP-1 drugs are part of a class called GLP-1 receptor agonists, used to treat:

- Type-2 diabetes
- Obesity

These mimic incretins, natural gut hormones that regulate blood sugar and appetite.

How Do They Work?

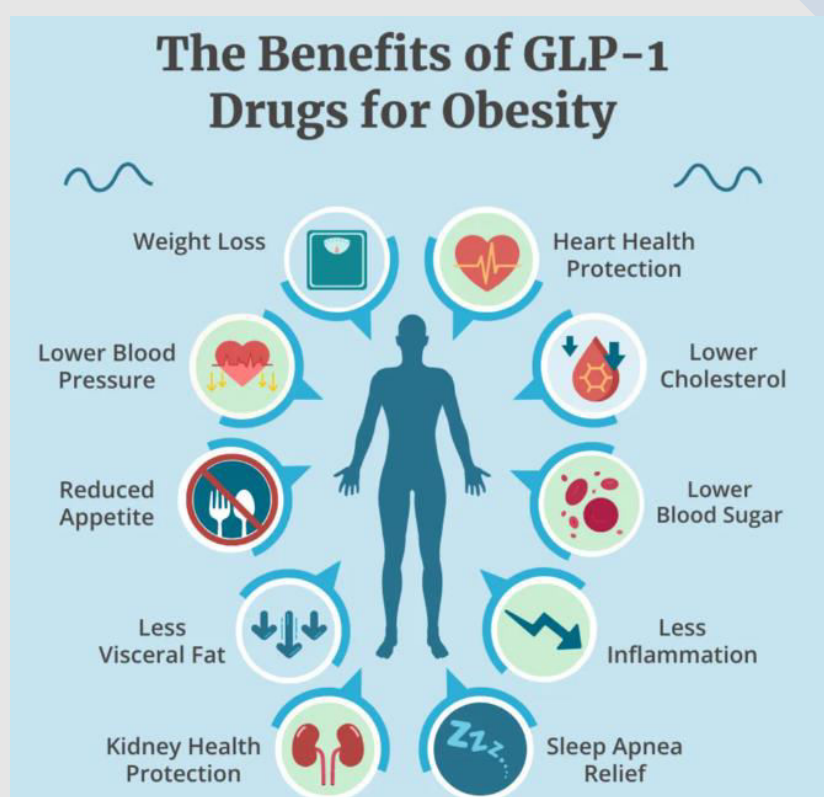
GLP-1 drugs help in four key ways:

1. Increase insulin secretion to absorb blood sugar.
2. Reduce glucagon (which raises blood sugar).
3. Slow stomach emptying to prevent sugar spikes.
4. Signal the brain to reduce appetite.

Tirzepatide also mimics GIP, another gut hormone, offering enhanced effects.

Discovery

- GLP-1 hormones were first discovered in 1986, but interest was delayed due to insulin's dominance.



Weight Loss and Beyond Clinical Benefits

- Semaglutide: Up to 15% body weight loss.
- Tirzepatide: Up to 20% weight loss.

Other Health Benefits

- Cardiovascular: Reduces heart attack/stroke risk by 20%.
- Mortality: Lowers all-cause death risk by 19%.
- Heart failure: Risk reduced by 69%.
- Liver health: Improves fatty liver and fibrosis.
- Sleep apnea: Tirzepatide approved for treatment.

Additional Effects

Cravings for sweets and alcohol drop significantly. Early studies suggest reduced Alzheimer's and dementia risk.

In Summary

GLP-1 drugs like semaglutide and tirzepatide:

- Are game-changers for obesity and diabetes treatment.
- Offer broad health benefits: heart, liver, brain, and appetite control.
- May soon become even more accessible with newer forms and dosing options.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

10. India Sets Global Example in Child Immunization

Introduction

India's percentage of Zero-dose children (those who've received no vaccines) declined from 0.11% in 2023 to 0.06% in 2024, as per the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) report. This positions India as a global leader in child health.



Significant Decline in Child and Maternal Mortality

Under-Five Mortality:

- Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) fell by 78% in India (vs. 61% globally).

Maternal Mortality:

- India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is now 80 per lakh live births, an 86% decline since 1990 (compared to 48% globally).

Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) — A Pillar of Public Health

Programme Reach:

- Covers 12 vaccine-preventable diseases
- Vaccinates 2.9 crore pregnant

women and 2.6 crore infants annually

Key Initiatives and Campaigns

1. Zero Dose Implementation Plan (2024):

- Targeted at 143 districts in 11 states
- Focuses on urban slums, migrants, remote areas, and hesitant communities

2. Mission Indradhanush (since 2014):

- 5.46 crore children and 1.32 crore pregnant women vaccinated
- Intensified since 2017

3. Polio-Free Status (since 2014):

- Maintained through National & Sub-National Immunization Days

4. Village Health & Nutrition Days (VHNDs):

- Regular outreach for community-level immunization

5. Multi-Tier Task Forces:

- Coordinated implementation at state, district, and block levels

6. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) Campaigns:

- Combat vaccine hesitancy via mass media, street plays, community radio, etc.

Technology and Tracking

- U-WIN Platform tracks immunization digitally to ensure no child is missed
- Community outreach includes door-to-door visits, awareness building, and real-time monitoring

Global Recognition and Awards

- India received the Measles and Rubella Champion Award (2024) in Washington D.C.
- Recognized by UN IGME for its consistent immunization efforts

India vs. Other High-Burden Countries

Zero-Dose Children as % of Population (2023):

- India: 0.11%
- Nigeria: 0.98%
- Pakistan: 0.16%
- Indonesia: 0.23%
- Others (Yemen, Sudan, DR Congo, etc.): 0.72–1.68%

Despite having a much larger population, India's zero-dose burden is significantly lower.

Why Comparisons Must Be Contextualized

Any global comparison must consider:

- India's huge population
- Its high absolute vaccination numbers
- Robust systems to reach underserved groups

A Commitment to Last-Mile Delivery

India's success in eliminating Polio (2014) and Maternal & Neonatal Tetanus (2015), along with the 2025 Measles-Rubella campaign, reflects its long-standing commitment to immunization.

With strong healthcare infrastructure and a proactive approach, India continues to protect its children through inclusive and equitable vaccination strategies.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: PIB

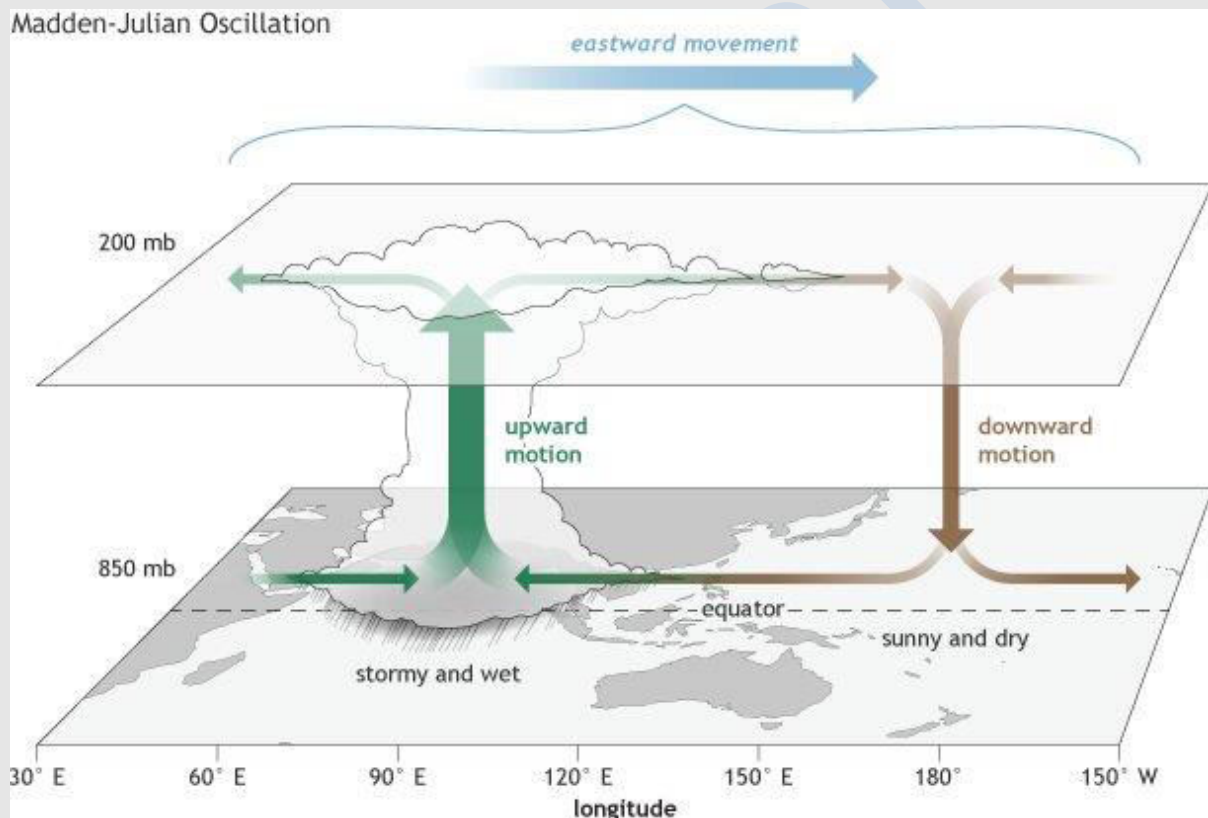
Miscellaneous

1. Early Monsoon in India: What Happened?

Introduction

This year, the southwest monsoon reached Kerala on May 24, which is 8 days earlier than usual. It also arrived in Mumbai on May 26, which is 2 weeks early—the earliest ever recorded for the city.

One of the main reasons behind this early arrival was a special weather pattern called the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO).



What is the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)?

The Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) is a natural weather pattern in the atmosphere that moves around the tropical part of the Earth, close to the equator.

Think of it as a wave of clouds, rain, and winds that travels around the planet from west to east. This wave can change the weather in the places it passes over — especially by bringing more or less rainfall.

Why is it called "Madden-Julian"?

It's named after Roland Madden and Paul Julian, two American scientists who first described this phenomenon in 1971. They noticed that a pattern of clouds and storms kept moving around the Earth every 30–60 days — and that it was connected to rainfall and storms in the tropics.

How Does the MJO Move?

The MJO is not fixed in one place. It moves eastward (from places like Africa toward the Pacific Ocean) and takes about 30 to 60 days to circle the Earth once. Sometimes, it moves more slowly and can take up to 90 days.

As it moves, it changes the weather in the tropical regions it passes over — like India, Southeast Asia, Australia, Africa, and South America.

Two Phases of MJO (with examples)

The MJO has two main phases, and each affects the weather differently:

1. Active Phase (Rainy Phase)

- Brings thick clouds, rising air, low pressure, and heavy rainfall.
- Winds carry moisture upward, forming clouds and storms.
- For example, if the MJO is active over India during June, it can help the monsoon arrive early or bring more rain.

2. Suppressed Phase (Dry Phase)

- Brings clear skies, sinking air, high pressure, and dry weather.
- Stops clouds from forming.
- If this phase is over India during the monsoon, it can weaken the rain or delay the season.

As the MJO moves, these phases shift across the globe—so one region may get rain while another stays dry.

Where is MJO Felt?

The MJO mostly affects countries and oceans in the tropical belt — the area between 30° North and 30° South latitude.

India is right in this belt, which is why monsoon rains are closely linked to the MJO.

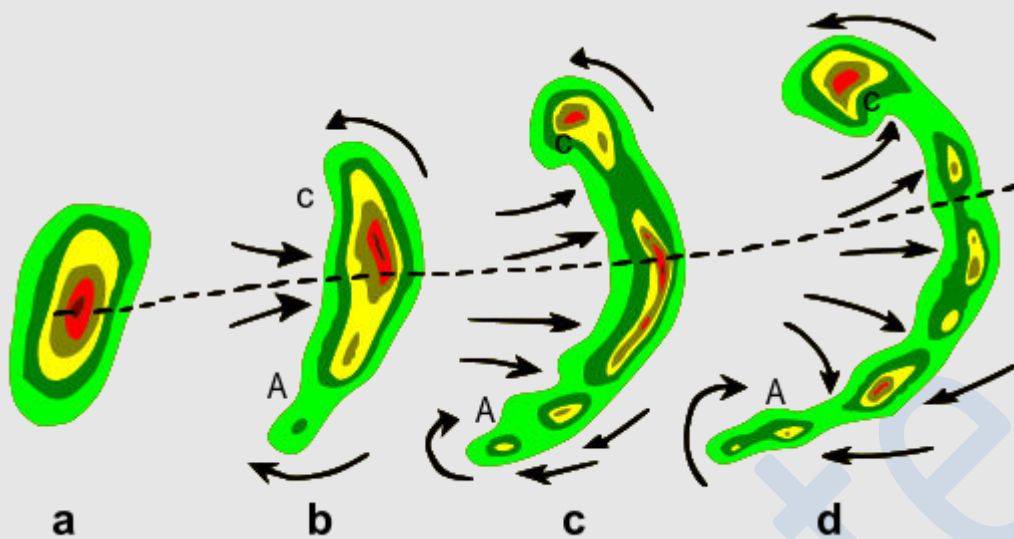
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Geography

Source: Indian Express

2. What Is a Bow Echo and How Did It Signal Delhi's Fierce Storm?

Introduction

During the recent heavy storm in Delhi, weather experts spotted a special radar pattern known as a "bow echo". This helped explain why the winds were so strong — reaching up to 100 km/h.



What Is a Bow Echo?

A bow echo is a line of thunderstorms that curves forward on weather radar, looking like an archer's bow or crescent shape.

- It usually means strong straight-line winds are hitting the region.
- These storms are often dangerous and can lead to severe weather events like powerful windstorms or flash floods.

How Big Is a Bow Echo?

- It can stretch over 20 to 100 km in length.
- It usually lasts between 3 to 6 hours.
- Sometimes, a bow echo can be part of a larger storm system called a squall line (a long line of intense storms).

Who Coined the Term?

The term "bow echo" was created in the 1970s by Ted Fujita, a well-known meteorologist who also developed the Fujita Scale used to measure the strength of tornadoes.

How Does a Bow Echo Form?

1. Rain-cooled air (cold air that falls with rain) hits the ground and spreads out sideways.
2. This creates a gust front — the boundary where the cool air meets the warm, moist surface air.
3. The gust front pushes the warm air upward, forming new thunderstorms.
4. These new storms produce more rain and more cold air — continuing the cycle.
5. Eventually, the storm line bends forward like a bow as more air flows into the back of the storm.

This bending shape is what we see on the radar and call a bow echo.

Why Are Bow Echoes Important?

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD):

- Bow echoes are a sign of severe weather.
- They often bring damaging straight-line winds, unlike tornadoes, which have rotating winds.
- In Delhi's case, the bow echo warned of wind speeds up to 100 km/h.

Have Bow Echoes Happened in India Before?

Yes, India has seen bow echoes before:

- On May 31, 2022, one formed over Delhi and Noida, but lasted only about an hour.
- In May 2025, another squall line (like a bow echo) was seen in Odisha during a thunderstorm.

These are not everyday events, but they are not rare either, especially during the pre-monsoon season when thunderstorms are more common.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Geography

Source: Indian Express

3. Miss Thailand Crowned Miss World 2025 in Hyderabad

Introduction

Opal Suchata Chuangsri of Thailand was crowned Miss World 2025 at the 72nd edition of the international beauty pageant, held at the HITEX Exhibition Centre in Hyderabad.



Path to the Crown

Contestants competed in several fast-track events. From these events, the group was narrowed down to 40 quarter-finalists, then top 10 from each region, followed by the Top 5, Top 2, and finally the winner.

India's Journey

India's representative, Nandini Gupta, made it to the Top 10 in the Asia & Oceania group but did not progress to the final stages.

Cultural Celebrations

The month-long event in Telangana included historical tours, cultural performances, and platforms for global advocacy and empowerment.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

4. Sheikh Hasina Charged with Crimes Against Humanity: What You Need to Know

Background

On June 1, 2025, Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) announced that former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina could face charges of crimes against humanity. She has been in exile in India since August 2024 following mass protests and her eventual ousting from power. Bangladesh formally requested her extradition in December 2024.

What Is Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)?

- Established under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 to try war crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan.
- Originally created to prosecute Pakistani forces and collaborators.
- The Act allowed prosecution for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed between March 25 and December 16, 1971.

Revival of the Tribunal

- After decades of dormancy, the tribunal was revived in 2009 by Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government.
- The 1973 law was amended to allow prosecution of civilians.
- The revived tribunal targeted political opposition members, including leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, accused of supporting Pakistan during the war.
- More than 100 people were sentenced to death, though the tribunal faced international criticism for violating fair trial standards (e.g., permitting trials in absentia).

What Is Sheikh Hasina Accused Of?

According to Bangladeshi prosecutors, five main charges have been filed:

- 1. Murder and Attempted Murder:** Allegedly linked to a violent police crackdown that killed over 450 protesters.
- 2. Use of Excessive Force:** Accused of ordering attacks using helicopters, drones, and lethal weapons against student protesters.
- 3. Targeted Killings:** Specifically named in the killing of student Abu Sayed near Begum Rokeya University.
- 4. Inflammatory Statements:** Accused of inciting violence by branding protesters as descendants of razakars (1971 war collaborators).
- 5. Unlawful Shootings:** Connected to the deaths of six protesters in Chankharpul (Dhaka) and six more in Ashulia.

What Sparked the Protests?

- Protests began over a quota system in public jobs and education for descendants of 1971 war veterans.
- Though the government scrapped the quota, Hasina's inflammatory remarks escalated the unrest.



- The crackdown that followed intensified nationwide anger, culminating in her ouster.

Controversy Around the Tribunal

- Rights groups have long questioned the fairness of ICT proceedings.
- Critics say the tribunal became a political tool under Hasina to target opponents.
- The law's provisions—such as allowing trials without the accused present—clash with international human rights norms.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

5. Assam's Controversial Move to Arm Civilians

What Happened?

The Assam government, led by the BJP, announced plans to issue arms licenses to select indigenous communities in remote, Bangladesh-bordering areas for "self-defence."

Why It's Problematic

- Risks vigilantism and inter-community violence.
- Blurs the line between state law enforcement and armed civilians.
- Past examples like Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh led to serious human rights violations.

Legal Concerns

- The Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016 prohibit mass arming of communities.
- Identifying eligible groups can be divisive and hard to regulate.
- Weapons could enter illegal arms markets or fall into the wrong hands.

Call for Reversal

The Assam government should focus on strengthening official law enforcement instead of outsourcing security to civilians—an act seen as abdicating state responsibility.

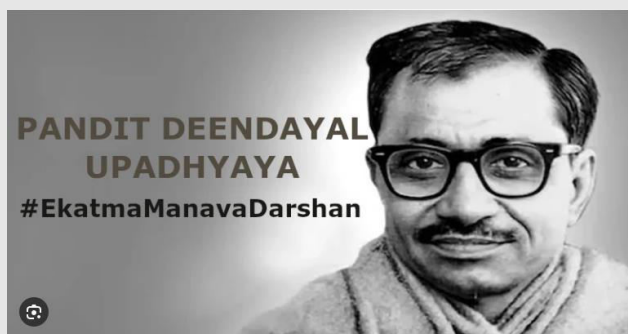
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: The Hindu



6. What Is Integral Humanism?

Introduction



Integral Humanism (Ekatm Manavvad) is the political philosophy developed by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, a co-founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) — the predecessor to today's BJP. The philosophy aims to guide India's development in a way that aligns with Indian culture, values, and social realities, instead of copying Western ideologies like communism or capitalism.

Why Is It Important to the BJP?

- The BJP considers Integral Humanism its foundational ideology.
- In 2025, the party is celebrating 60 years since Upadhyay presented the philosophy in four landmark lectures in Mumbai in 1965.
- The ideas were later elaborated by Dattopant Thengdi, an RSS pracharak and founder of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS).

The 1965 Lectures in Mumbai

- Upadhyay delivered four lectures at Ruia College, Mumbai, from April 22 to 25, 1965.
- He questioned India's lack of a clear development direction 17 years after Independence.
- He emphasized that importing foreign ideologies blindly would not help India achieve true progress or happiness.

Core Themes of Integral Humanism

Upadhyay concluded that India must harmonize:

- Nationalism
 - Democracy
 - Socialism
 - World peace
- ...with traditional Bharatiya (Indian) cultural values.

Key Concepts: 'Chiti' and 'Dharma'

Chiti

- Described as the soul or essence of a nation, guiding its cultural progress.
- A nation thrives when its Chiti is reflected in the actions of its people.

Dharma

- Dharma is seen as the guardian of the national soul.
- Abandoning Dharma is equivalent to betraying the nation.

Economic Objectives of Integral Humanism

Upadhyay outlined six key goals for the Indian economy:

1. Minimum standard of living and national defense readiness.
2. Growth beyond the minimum to help India contribute to global progress.
3. Employment for all and efficient use of resources.

4. Development of Bharatiya technology suited to Indian needs.
5. Human-centered approach respecting culture and values.
6. Ownership of industries based on practical needs, not ideology.

Influences from 'Daishik Shastra'

- Many of Upadhyay's ideas were inspired by 'Daishik Shastra', a political science text written by Badrishah Thulgharia in the 1920s.
- The book emphasized Indian political thought and values, and received praise from Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- M.S. Golwalkar, the second RSS chief, recommended the book to Upadhyay.
- Upadhyay stayed in Almora in 1958-59 to study the book and later incorporated its concepts into his own writings and lectures.

Legacy and Relevance Today

- Integral Humanism remains the ideological core of the BJP.
- It is often cited by the party to justify its people-centric, culture-rooted, and nationalistic policy decisions.
- The philosophy aims to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, placing the individual within the framework of society and culture.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper IV; Ethics

Source: Indian Express

7. Bengaluru Stampede Tragedy: What Went Wrong and How to Stay Safe

Celebration Turns into Tragedy

Just a day after Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won their first-ever IPL title, joy turned into mourning. A stampede outside Bengaluru's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium during a felicitation event left 11 people dead and over 50 injured. The chaos unfolded as fans rushed to see the team, especially star player Virat Kohli.



Many fans believed the event was open to the public, while others were told entry was by invitation only. Confusion, overcrowding, and poor crowd control turned the celebration into a deadly disaster. The primary cause of death was asphyxia — people couldn't breathe in the overcrowded space.

What Caused the Stampede?

- Conflicting messages: RCB announced an open-bus parade, while police said it wouldn't happen.
- Poor crowd control: Authorities failed to manage the massive crowd near key city areas.
- Lack of communication: People weren't clearly told where to go or how to attend.

- Inadequate security: There weren't enough police or staff to control the situation.
- Gate mismanagement: Gates were shut after the venue filled, but the crowd kept pushing.

A judicial inquiry has been announced, and senior police officials have been suspended. But the deeper issue is neglect of crowd safety in public events.

How to Stay Safe in a Stampede: 6 Life-Saving Tips

1. Be Aware in Crowds

Always be alert in large gatherings like festivals, concerts, or sports events. Look for:

- Exit routes
- Movement of the crowd
- Narrow or blocked pathways

If you feel things getting tense or the crowd is building rapidly, it's time to move out.

2. Leave Early if It Feels Unsafe

Don't wait for panic to start. If you feel uncomfortable, leave immediately. The earlier you react, the easier it is to escape.

Crowd disasters often happen when people ignore early warning signs. Trust your instincts.

3. Stay on Your Feet

Falling during a stampede can be fatal. If you fall, it's very hard to get back up because of the pressure of the crowd.

If someone near you falls, try to help them up — this can prevent a domino effect where many others fall too.

4. Move With the Crowd, Not Against It

Trying to fight the crowd can tire you and cause you to lose balance. Instead:

- Go with the flow of the crowd
- Avoid sudden or jerky movements
- Think like a surfer riding a wave

This will help you stay upright and in control.

5. Protect Your Chest and Keep Breathing

Most stampede deaths are caused by suffocation. Here's how to stay safe:

- Put your arms in front of your chest to protect your lungs
- Avoid screaming or wasting breath
- If you fall and can't get up, lie on your stomach with your hands under your chest to keep breathing space

6. Don't Panic — Help Each Other

Panic spreads quickly and makes things worse. Instead:

- Stay calm
- Cooperate with people around you

- Help others stay on their feet

During the Bengaluru incident, a few people formed a human chain to help others — an act that likely saved lives.

Final Thought: Fans Deserve Better

The Bengaluru tragedy shows that fans — who are the heart of any sport — are often neglected when it comes to planning and safety. Crowd safety must become a priority, with:

- Clear communication
- Proper planning
- Adequate policing

Without these, such preventable tragedies will keep happening.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: The Hindu & Indian Express

8. Historic Voyage by Two Indian Women Naval Officers

Introduction

Lieutenant Commanders Dilna K and Roopa A became the first Indian women duo to successfully circumnavigate the globe without external help, relying only on wind power. They sailed 25,600 nautical miles over nearly eight months, crossing four continents, three oceans, and three Great Capes.



The Man Behind Their Training: Cdr Abhilash Tomy

Retired naval pilot Commander Abhilash Tomy, who has twice circumnavigated the globe solo, mentored the crew. He emphasized:

- Avoiding collisions and grounding
- Preventing any crew from falling overboard
- Ensuring the voyage was safe and efficient without unnecessary risks

Facing Challenges at Sea

The officers faced:

- Cyclones that required rerouting
- A navigation panel blackout for three hours mid-Pacific
→ Handheld GPS devices and mobile phone charts were used for backup navigation
- Difficult conditions during the South Pacific leg, with no nearby ports for diversion

Why Cape Horn Is a Big Deal in Sailing

Cape Horn, near Antarctica, is known for:

- Stormy weather
- Towering waves

- No diversionary ports in case of trouble

Successfully reaching and rounding it is seen as a major milestone in global sailing.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: The Hindu & Indian Express

9. Ancient Hunter-Gatherers in Kutch Predate Harappan Civilization by 5,000 Years

New Discovery Near Dholavira

- Archaeologists have found evidence of human settlements near Bambhanka village on Khadir island in the Great Rann of Kutch.
- These sites are located just 1 km from Dholavira, the famous Harappan city.
- Findings indicate human activity dating back 5,000–5,500 years before the Harappans.

Who Were These People?

- These were hunter-gatherers, not farmers.
- They lived in a mangrove-rich coastal environment, eating molluscs and using stone tools.
- They possibly moved seasonally rather than settling permanently.

Shell Middens: Clues from the Past

- Researchers found large deposits of broken sea shells, some possibly cooked (as indicated by blackened shells).
- Similar sites exist in Pakistan (Las Bela) and Oman, suggesting regional links and trade.
- Shell species like *Terebralia palustris* (mangrove whelk) show adaptation to a coastal lifestyle.

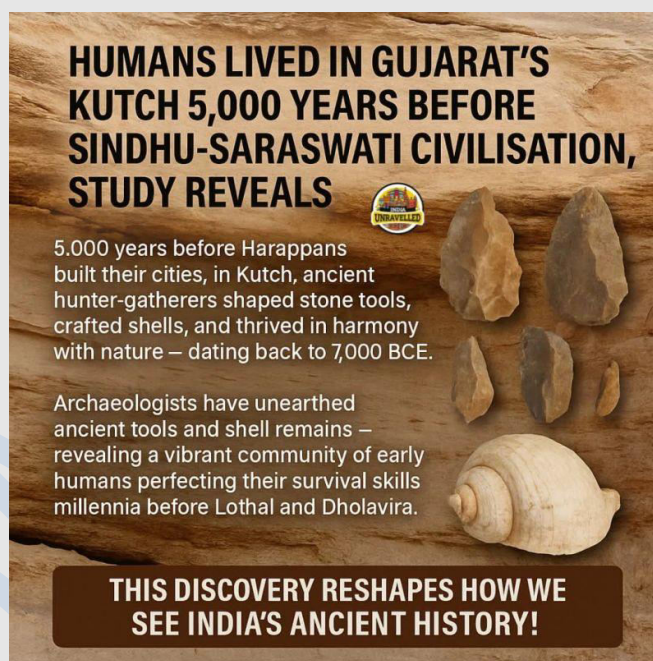
Tools and Trade

- Tools made of basalt, limestone, quartzite, chert, jasper, and chalcedony were discovered.
- Some materials like agate were locally available, others had to be traded from outside Kutch.
- Locations like Lungwali, Kunduwari, Ganeshpar, and Janan also show tool use.

Temporary Settlements, Seasonal Movement

- These communities likely occupied one site for a season, then moved on.
- No permanent structures like houses or burials have been found yet.
- Remains include stone flakes, pottery shards, and rudimentary walls.

Radiocarbon Dating Confirms Antiquity



- 15 samples from Khadir have been carbon-dated by PRL Ahmedabad and IUAC Delhi.
- Findings predate the Harappans by several millennia.
- Dholavira is dated between 3300 BCE – 1400 BCE; these new findings date to ~8500–8000 years ago (pre-2600 BCE).

Possible Regional Connections

- Similar shell middens and tools have been found along the Karachi coast and in Oman.
- Suggests early trade or cultural links among coastal communities across the Arabian Sea.
- Researchers believe this could point to a wider prehistoric network.

Future Research and Excavations

- More samples from Khadir and nearby regions are being dated.
- Deeper excavations and soil studies may reveal more about flora, food habits, and trade.
- Teams from IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Kanpur, PRL Ahmedabad, and IUAC Delhi are continuing research.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

10. Why Are There Protests in Los Angeles?

Introduction

Protests erupted in Los Angeles after federal agents conducted immigration raids targeting workplaces. The raids triggered anger and fear, especially in immigrant communities. Protesters clashed with law enforcement, prompting a heavy response from authorities.



Trump Sends National Guard to Los Angeles

President Donald Trump ordered 2,000 National Guard troops to Los Angeles, bypassing California Governor Gavin Newsom.

- This is a rare and dramatic move—the first time since 1965 that a U.S. president activated a state's National Guard without the governor's request.
- Trump called the protests a "form of rebellion", justifying federal military involvement.

California Leaders Oppose Federal Action

Governor Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass strongly opposed Trump's decision.

- Newsom called the move "inflammatory" and politically motivated.
- Bass warned it was a "dangerous escalation."

Both leaders demanded the National Guard be returned to state control.

How Did the Protests Start?

The protests began Friday, when federal agents in camouflage raided Los Angeles' garment district, targeting undocumented immigrants.

- The raids caused chaos—protesters chanted, threw eggs, and were met with pepper spray and rubber bullets.
- The unrest spread to nearby cities like Paramount, where clashes intensified.

How Have Protests Escalated?

- By Saturday, hundreds had been arrested, mostly in Paramount, a largely Latino area.
- On Sunday, troops arrived in downtown Los Angeles and faced off with protesters outside the Metropolitan Detention Center.
- Law enforcement used tear gas and crowd-control weapons to disperse demonstrators.

Who Controls the National Guard?

The National Guard can be deployed by either the state governor or the U.S. president:

- Normally, governors control the Guard for state emergencies like floods or fires.
- It's rare for a president to take control without a state's request.
- The last such case was in 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson acted during civil rights protests in Alabama.

What Are Officials Saying?

- Trump accused the protesters of being "insurrectionists" and hinted at using the Insurrection Act, which allows domestic military deployment.
- The White House said the National Guard was needed to stop "violent mobs."
- California officials rejected these claims, calling the protests mostly peaceful and saying local police had enough resources.
- Attorney General Rob Bonta and Governor Newsom both condemned the federal action as "unlawful".

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

11. Tragedy in Ahmedabad: Air India Boeing 787 Crashes Minutes After Takeoff

Overview

On the afternoon of June 12, 2025, an Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner (Flight AI171) carrying 242 people crashed shortly after taking off from Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport en route to London Gatwick. The aircraft went down within 40 seconds of takeoff, crashing into a residential block of B.J. Medical College in Meghani Nagar, causing a massive explosion and widespread destruction.

Casualties and Survivor

All 230 passengers and 12 crew members on board perished in the crash — except for one: a British national, Viswashkumar Ramesh, who was seated in A11. He is recovering in hospital. On the ground, 24 people were also killed, bringing the total death toll to at least 265. Former Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani was among the deceased.

Sequence of Events

- Takeoff Time: 1:38 p.m. from Runway 23
- Crash Site: Meghani Nagar, ~5 km from airport
- Altitude Reached: Less than 625 feet
- Emergency Alert: A 'Mayday' was issued by pilots but they went silent before impact

Rescue and Relief Operations

Union Home Minister Amit Shah confirmed that rescue operations were nearly complete, with DNA matching underway to confirm identities. The aircraft's black boxes are being searched to help investigators understand what went wrong.

Air India, under Tata Group, has announced:

- ₹1 crore compensation for families of the deceased
- Full coverage of medical expenses for the injured
- Support for rebuilding the damaged B.J. Medical College hostel
- Relief flights from Delhi and Mumbai for victims' families

Aircraft Details: Boeing 787 Dreamliner

The crashed aircraft, VT-ANB, was a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, introduced to Air India's fleet in 2014. Known for its fuel efficiency and passenger comfort, the Dreamliner is a wide-body, long-haul jet made from carbon fiber composites, offering:



UPDATES: Air India Boeing 787 Crashes on Takeoff

- 20–25% fuel savings over older aircraft
- Capacity: Up to 248 passengers
- Range: 13,530 km
- Engines: GEnx-1B / Trent 1000

This is the first fatal crash involving any 787 Dreamliner variant.

Boeing 787: Past Safety Concerns

There have been quality and safety concerns about the Dreamliner in the past — but none of the planes had ever crashed before.

Federal regulators grounded the entire 787 fleet worldwide for more than three months after lithium ion batteries caught fire on two of the aircraft in 2013, leading to smoldering fires in the cargo hold. Boeing had to craft a workaround and created a metal box to surround the batteries to prevent fires from spreading.

There have also been concerns about the plane's carbon fiber fuselage. Last year, a whistleblower said he had observed problems with how parts of the plane were fastened together. The longtime Boeing engineer warned that production "shortcuts" could significantly shorten the lifespan of the plane, eventually causing the fuselage to fall apart in mid-flight.

But Boeing pushed back on those allegations. Engineering executives at the company defended the integrity of the 787's fuselage, saying they had conducted extensive testing with no findings of fatigue in the composite fuselage.

Importance of Black Boxes

Authorities are racing to retrieve the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) and flight data recorder (FDR), crucial for:

- Reconstructing the crash timeline
- Identifying mechanical or human failures
- Verifying pilot communication and flight controls

These devices are designed to survive extreme conditions and are typically located at the tail end of aircraft to improve their chances of recovery.

Why Crashes Often Happen During Takeoff or Landing

Aviation experts note that aircraft are most vulnerable during takeoff and landing — when the aircraft is close to the ground, speed and altitude are rapidly changing, and engine performance is critical. A sudden power loss or structural failure during this window can be catastrophic.

Government Response

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu have closely monitored the situation. Investigative teams from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Aircraft Accidents Investigation Bureau (AAIB) are leading the probe.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

12. Who Is Responsible When a Ship Sinks?

Recent Accidents off Kerala Coast



Two major maritime accidents occurred off Kerala recently:

- June 9: MV Wan Hai 503, a Singapore-flagged ship, caught fire 88 nautical miles off Bepore. It was carrying over 2,000 tonnes of fuel and hundreds of containers. Ecological concerns remain due to hazardous cargo.

- May 25: MSC ELSA 3, a

Liberian ship, sank off Kochi. It had containers with harmful substances like calcium carbide.

Who Regulates Global Shipping?

Global shipping is regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a UN agency. It sets safety, pollution, and liability rules for international shipping.

- India follows IMO conventions through domestic rules via the Directorate General (DG) of Shipping.
- India has not signed some conventions like the 2010 Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) Convention, which could be relevant in accidents involving toxic cargo.

Why Are Some Ships Registered in Other Countries?

- Ships are often registered in Flags of Convenience (FOC) countries (e.g., Liberia, Marshall Islands) that offer easier regulations.
- Though governed by IMO norms, these countries may offer less strict oversight.

Who Pays for Cargo Loss and Environmental Damage?

- The ship owner is responsible for cargo loss and environmental damage.
- Bill of Lading: A contract between the shipper and the receiver that establishes cargo ownership and shipment terms.
- Losses are covered by the Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Club—a group of insurers that share risks related to:
 - Cargo damage/loss
 - Environmental damage
 - Loss of life due to ship accidents

Important: There is a cap on compensation for cargo loss, but no cap on environmental damage claims (like oil spills).

Who Must Salvage a Sunken Ship?

- Under the Nairobi Convention on Wreck Removal (2007), the ship owner must salvage the wreck.
- Applies up to 200 nautical miles from India's coast.
- If salvaging isn't possible, the owner remains liable for damages.

Why Do Modern Ships Still Sink?

Despite advanced technology, ships still face:

- Unpredictable sea conditions
- Human error (e.g., overloading, poor route choices)
- Technical failures

Example:

- ELSA 3 likely sank after it began tilting (listing), which caused containers to fall, worsening the tilt until the ship capsized.
- In 2020, Wakashio, a ship near Mauritius, ran aground because the crew sailed too close to shore seeking mobile signals during COVID-19 isolation.

Lessons from History: SOLAS Convention

After the Titanic sank in 1912, the Safety of Life At Sea (SOLAS) Convention was introduced. It:

- Requires lifeboats on both sides of ships to be sufficient to carry all passengers, even if one side becomes inaccessible.
- Is regularly updated to improve safety standards worldwide.

Conclusion: A Complex but Evolving System

- Ship owners bear the main responsibility in accidents—legal, financial, and environmental.
- IMO conventions, although robust, still leave gaps (like HNS) that countries like India must consider ratifying.
- Human error remains a significant factor, highlighting the need for constant updates to global maritime safety norms.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: Indian Express

13. 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

14. India's Coastline Now Measures 11,098 km — But Why the Sudden Jump?

Introduction

India's coastline, previously measured at 7,516 km, has now been recalculated to be 11,098 km — a sharp increase of 3,582 km or nearly 48%. This rise is not due to any territorial expansion, but due to more accurate, high-resolution measurement techniques.

Length of India's coastline along states		
State/UT	Coastline length (in km)	
Gujarat	2,340.62	
Maharashtra	877.97	
Goa	193.95	
Karnataka	343.3	
Kerala	600.15	
Tamil Nadu	1,068.69	
Andhra Pradesh	1,053.07	
Odisha	574.71	
West Bengal	721.02	
Daman and Diu	54.38	
Pondicherry	42.65	
Lakshadweep	144.8	
Andaman and Nicobar	3,083.50	
Source: Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways		

Why the Length Has Increased

- Old data (1970s): Measured using low-resolution maps (scale of 1:4,500,000)
- New data: Measured with higher-resolution maps (scale of 1:250,000) using modern GIS software
- Higher resolution captures bends, curves, and irregularities in the coast more accurately
- Many offshore islands were also newly included, which had been missed earlier due to data limitations

Understanding the Coastline Paradox

- Coastlines are irregular and don't have a fixed length — they appear longer as you measure them in greater detail

- This is known as the "coastline paradox" — the smaller the scale or measuring unit, the longer the measured length
 - The same problem applies to rivers and mountain ranges
- Conclusion: Coastline length is not absolute. It depends on how precisely it is measured.

Island Count Also Revised

- Previous counts - 1,382 islands (Survey of India, 2016)
- After reconciling definitions, the new count is 1,389 islands:
 - 1,298 offshore islands
 - 91 inshore islands
 - (River islands not included in this count)

Why These Changes Matter

Though the actual ground situation remains the same, these updated numbers carry administrative and strategic value:

- May affect Coastal Zone Regulation (CRZ) areas
- Useful for coastal protection and erosion control projects
- Impacts infrastructure and tourism planning in coastal areas
- Strengthens understanding for climate resilience and national security

Recalculation to Happen Every 10 Years

Given the importance of precise data, India has decided to repeat this coastline and island reassessment every decade, just as many other countries already do. This helps account for:

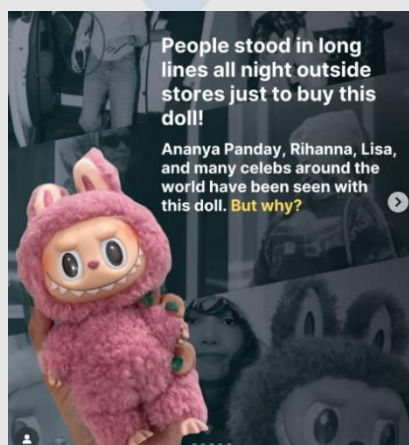
- Natural changes like erosion or deposition
- Human activity like land reclamation

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Geography

Source: Indian Express

15. Labubu Dolls Take Over Global Pop Culture

What Is Labubu?



People stood in long lines all night outside stores just to buy this doll!

Ananya Panday, Rihanna, Lisa, and many celebs around the world have been seen with this doll. But why?

Labubu is a viral toy doll made by Beijing-based brand Pop Mart in collaboration with artist Kasing Lung. It's part of a series called "The Monsters", featuring quirky, mischievous characters.

Global Craze

- Endorsed by stars like Rihanna, Lisa (BLACKPINK), and Ananya Panday
- Huge queues reported in Australia and the UAE
- Sold in blind boxes, where the toy is a surprise

Economic Impact

- Pop Mart's market value hit \$40 trillion

- Its stock surged 6x in one year due to “Labubu fever”

Media Messaging

Chinese state media covered the success heavily, linking it to:

- Cultural globalisation
- Pro-consumption policies
- But also flagged concerns about overconsumption

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

16. Global Potato Research Center to be Set Up in Agra: What It Means for India

What’s the Big News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved a new International Potato Center - South Asia Regional Centre (CSARC) in Agra, Uttar Pradesh.
- It will be a regional wing of the Peru-based International Potato Center (CIP), a global leader in potato and sweet potato research.

What is the International Potato Center (CIP)?

- Headquartered in Lima, Peru, CIP was founded in 1971.
- It focuses on improving potato, sweet potato, and other tuber crops, especially in developing countries.
- CIP started working with India in 1975, in partnership with ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research).

Cabinet Approves
International Potato Center's
South Asia Regional Centre in UP

To be established in
Uttar Pradesh's Agra

Major objectives:

- To increase **food & nutrition security, farmers' income,** and generate **job opportunities**
- To improve **potato & sweetpotato productivity, post-harvest management, and value-addition**

Why is This Important for India?

- Potato is the 3rd most consumed crop globally after rice and wheat.
- India is 2nd largest producer (after China)

A major consumer but with low yields:

Potato: 25 tonnes/ha (can go up to 50 tonnes/ha)

Sweet potato: 11.5 tonnes/ha (can go up to 30 tonnes/ha)

• The center will:

- Improve seed quality and availability

- Reduce dependence on seed imports
- Open up export opportunities
- Strengthen the food processing sector

How Does This Compare Globally?

- China set up a similar center in Beijing in 2017 — the China Center for Asia Pacific (CCCAP).
- This will be the second international CIP center in Asia.
- It will also be India's second international agri-research center, after the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Varanasi.

India's Potato Power: Key Stats

- Global production (2020): 359 million tonnes
 - China: 78.24 million tonnes
 - India: 51.30 million tonnes
- **Top producing states in India:**
 - Uttar Pradesh: 15 million tonnes
 - West Bengal: 15 million tonnes
 - Bihar: 9 million tonnes
 - Others: Gujarat, MP, Punjab

Relevance: GS Prelims; Geography

Source: Indian Express

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