SITOK IAS

EDITORIALS COMPILATION

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1st March 2026

[Where does the India-U.S. trade deal stand?- TH FAQ]

International Relations

Easy Explanation

February saw many important developments in India–U.S. trade relations. India and the U.S. were planning an interim trade agreement that would reduce tariffs on Indian exports. But suddenly, the U.S. Supreme Court cancelled some tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump. This created uncertainty about what will happen to the trade deal.

Trump had imposed tariffs on many countries, including India, using a U.S. law called the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). On February 20, the U.S. Supreme Court said the President cannot impose such tariffs without approval from the U.S. Congress. Because of this ruling, many tariffs imposed since 2025 were removed.

Earlier, Trump had already removed a 25% penalty tariff on India (imposed because India was buying Russian oil). That had reduced India's tariff from 50% to 25%. Under the proposed India–U.S. deal, tariffs were expected to fall further to 18%. But before this reduction could happen, the Supreme Court ruling changed the situation.

Trump reacted strongly against the court decision and looked for other legal ways to impose tariffs. Currently, the U.S. has imposed a 10% tariff on imports for 150 days, which may be increased to 15%. Other tariffs remain in place too, including:

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- 50% tariff on steel and aluminium imports
- Tariffs on small-value imports below $800
- 126% tariff on Indian solar modules (due to alleged subsidies)

These continue to affect Indian exports, especially MSMEs and metal industries.

Other countries like the European Union, Japan, and Australia also reacted. Some demanded clarity, while others said their trade deals would remain unchanged.

India's response has been cautious. India said it is studying the situation. The Indian negotiation team was supposed to visit Washington to finalize the agreement, but the visit has been postponed indefinitely. However, meetings between officials from both countries are still happening.

Interestingly, the article suggests that currently the trade deal is more important for the U.S. than for India. India cannot reduce tariffs on U.S. goods until a deal is signed, but the U.S. tariff pressure on India has temporarily reduced because of the court ruling.

The U.S. administration maintains that nothing has changed in its overall policy. It still expects countries to follow trade commitments and warns that higher tariffs could be imposed if partners do not cooperate.

Key Takeaways

Background: India–U.S. Trade Developments
- Interim trade agreement under negotiation.
- Expected tariff reduction on Indian exports to 18%.
- Negotiations affected by U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

U.S. Supreme Court Judgment
- Struck down tariffs imposed under IEEPA law.
- Said President needs Congressional approval to impose tariffs.
- Led to removal of some tariffs imposed since 2025.

Impact on India
- Earlier penalty tariff reduced India's tariff from 50% → 25%.
- Planned reduction to 18% now uncertain.
- Negotiation visit postponed.

Existing Tariffs Affecting India
- 50% tariff on steel and aluminium.
- Tariffs on small-value exports (below $800).
- 126% tariff on Indian solar modules.

Global Reactions
- EU demanded clarity on U.S. policy.
- Japan said its agreement unaffected.
- Australia asked the U.S. to honour free trade commitments.

India's Position
- Studying implications cautiously.
- Negotiations ongoing but delayed.
- Meetings between officials continue.

Strategic Insight
- Temporary reduction of U.S. tariff pressure on India.
- Trade deal currently more beneficial for the U.S. side.

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U.S. Policy Stand

- Trump administration says tariff policy continues.
- Warned partners against “playing games”.
- Possible future tariff escalation remains.

How will rare earth MoU with Brazil help India?- TH FAQ

International Relations

Easy Explanation

India and Brazil have signed an agreement to cooperate in rare earth elements and critical minerals. These minerals are very important because they are used in modern technologies like electric vehicles, defence equipment, electronics, renewable energy systems, and advanced computing. The agreement says both countries will work together in every stage — from finding minerals to mining, processing, recycling, and refining them — so that supply chains become stronger and both countries become more competitive.

India is trying to reduce its dependence on a few countries for these minerals, especially China. To do this, India is building its own capacity and also forming partnerships with other countries. One major step is the National Critical Mineral Mission approved in 2025, which aims to develop the entire supply chain from exploration to recycling by 2031. India has also identified 30 minerals as critical and changed mining laws to allow the central government to auction mining blocks more easily. India is also exploring mineral projects abroad through Khanij Bidesh India Ltd., including in countries like Argentina and Chile. At the same time, India wants to manufacture advanced products at home, such as rare earth magnets by 2026, which are important for electric vehicles and defence systems.

The agreement with Brazil is important because Brazil has very large mineral reserves, but only about 30% has been explored so far. By partnering with Brazil, India gets more options to obtain minerals. This increases India’s bargaining power because it is no longer dependent on just one or two suppliers. It also reassures companies that supply will be stable, which encourages investment. If both countries follow similar environmental standards, it will also help India export finished products to global markets that demand transparency about raw material sourcing.

The agreement also indirectly connects with a U.S.-led initiative called Pax Silica, which aims to secure supply chains for advanced technologies like semiconductors, data centres, and AI hardware. India joined Pax Silica recently, and cooperation with Brazil may help India obtain raw materials needed for such technologies. However, Brazil itself is not a member of Pax Silica.

For Brazil, this agreement is beneficial because it can attract Indian investment into mining and processing industries. Brazil has large reserves of rare earths, bauxite, manganese, and lithium. Working with India gives Brazil access to a large market and long-term purchase agreements, which makes projects financially viable. It also helps Brazil move beyond exporting raw minerals to developing its own processing industries, which increases economic value.

Key Takeaways

India–Brazil MoU on Critical Minerals

- Signed during Brazilian President Lula’s visit (Feb 2026).
- Covers entire value chain — exploration, mining, processing, recycling, refining.
- Aim: strengthen supply chains and competitiveness.

India’s Strategy on Critical Minerals

- National Critical Mineral Mission (2025–2031).
- List of 30 critical minerals released (2023).
- MMDR Amendment Act 2023 increased Centre’s powers.

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- Overseas sourcing via Khanij Bidesh India Ltd.
- Plan to produce rare earth magnets domestically by 2026.

Importance for India
- Reduces dependence on limited suppliers.
- Improves bargaining power in global markets.
- Encourages private investment through supply stability.
- Supports sectors like EVs, defence, and electronics.

Link with Pax Silica Initiative
- Pax Silica = U.S.-led supply chain security initiative.
- Focus on semiconductor and AI hardware ecosystem ("silicon stack").
- Brazil MoU supports raw material access but Brazil is not a member.

Benefits for Brazil
- Huge reserves: rare earths, bauxite, manganese, lithium.
- Attracts Indian capital and technology.
- Provides access to large Indian market.
- Helps Brazil move up the value chain (beyond raw exports).

Geopolitical Significance
- Supply chain diversification amid global competition.
- Strategic cooperation between emerging economies.
- Critical minerals becoming key to economic and national security.

Why is the NEP undergrad course in chaos?- TH FAQ

Sociology

Easy Explanation

India introduced a new four-year undergraduate (UG) degree system under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Earlier, most bachelor's degrees in India were three years long. The new system aims to match global education standards and provide more flexibility, research exposure, and skill-based learning.

In this new model, students have multiple exit options. After one year, they can get a certificate; after two years, a diploma; after three years, a regular bachelor's degree; and after four years, an honours degree with options like research or entrepreneurship. Many universities started implementing this system from 2022 onwards, including Delhi University, AMU, and several others. Now, the first batch of students has reached the final semester of the fourth year.

However, the implementation has faced many problems. Universities and students have struggled with changing rules, unclear expectations, and lack of resources. For example, many students choosing the research option were initially required to publish papers in high-quality international journals, which is unrealistic for undergraduate students. Although these requirements were later relaxed, confusion remains.

Another major issue is lack of infrastructure and funding. Many colleges do not have enough laboratories, research materials, or access to libraries and archives needed for research. Teachers are also overburdened because supervising student research is not counted as part of their official workload. Some universities reported that most students continued into the fourth year, which increased pressure on already limited facilities.

There is also criticism that the four-year programme increases costs for students and may reduce access for poorer sections of society. Karnataka even decided to go back to the three-year degree system from 2024-25, arguing that the extra year creates financial burden and inequality.

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Experts suggest that improvements are needed before the next batch begins. This includes better infrastructure, more funding, feedback from teachers and students, and financial support mechanisms like loans through the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA).

Key Takeaways

Four-Year UG Programme under NEP 2020

- Replaces traditional 3-year degree with 4-year structure.
- Focus: interdisciplinary learning, flexibility, research exposure, skill development.
- Multiple exit options:
  - 1 year: Certificate
  - 2 years: Diploma
  - 3 years: Bachelor's degree
  - 4 years: Honours / Honours with Research

Implementation Status

- UGC guidelines issued in 2022.
- Implemented in universities like Delhi University, AMU, Ambedkar University.
- Over 100 universities adopted model by 2023-24.
- First batch now completing fourth year.

Major Challenges

Infrastructure & Funding

- Shortage of laboratories, research facilities, and libraries.
- No additional funding support from UGC in many cases.

Faculty Shortage & Workload

- Teachers overloaded with supervision work.
- Research supervision not counted as official workload.

Policy & Administrative Confusion

- Changing guidelines and unclear expectations.
- Unrealistic research requirements initially imposed.

Equity Concerns

- Extra year increases financial burden on students.
- May reduce access for disadvantaged groups (SC/ST, rural students, women).
- Karnataka reverted to 3-year model citing these concerns.

Student Concerns

- Lack of training for research.
- Limited access to research resources like archives and libraries.

Suggested Improvements

- Better infrastructure and laboratories.
- Increased funding support.
- Feedback from faculty and students.
- Financing through HEFA loans and research grants.

Chronicles of a war foretold: TH Profiles

International Relations

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

Before 1979, Iran was ruled by the Shah (king) Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had close relations with the United States and Israel. Iran even signed secret military deals with Israel, including missile cooperation. But everything changed in 1979 when a revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah and created an Islamic Republic based on religious leadership.

The new Iranian government strongly opposed the U.S. and Israel. It called the U.S. the “Great Satan” and Israel the “Little Satan”. Since then, Iran and Israel have become major enemies, and this rivalry has shaped politics in West Asia (Middle East) for decades.

Israel became the strongest military power in the region with support from the U.S. Iran, facing sanctions, used a different strategy. Instead of direct war, it built influence through proxy groups (militias) such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. This strategy expanded Iran’s influence across Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon — sometimes called the “Shia Crescent”.

Events like the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 actually increased Iran’s regional influence because Iraq’s new leadership had ties with Iran. Iran also developed its nuclear programme, which created tensions with the West. In 2015, Iran signed the nuclear deal (JCPOA) with world powers to limit its nuclear activities in exchange for removal of sanctions. But in 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement and reimposed sanctions, worsening tensions again.

Conflict intensified after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel. Israel began targeting Iranian influence in the region, aiming to weaken Iran and its allied groups. The collapse of Syria’s Assad government in 2024 further weakened Iran’s regional position.

In 2026, tensions escalated into direct military confrontation. The U.S. and Israel launched air strikes on Iran, targeting nuclear facilities and military leadership. Iran retaliated with missile attacks on Israel and U.S. bases. After about 12 days of fighting, a ceasefire was reached, but tensions remained high.

The main disagreement continues. Israel wants Iran to completely give up its nuclear programme, missiles, and support to militias. Iran is willing to negotiate only about nuclear issues, not its regional influence or defence capabilities. For Israel and the U.S., weakening or changing Iran’s government is seen as a long-term goal. For Iran, this conflict is about survival.

Key Takeaways

Historical Background

- Pre-1979 Iran (under Shah) was allied with U.S. and Israel.
- 1979 Islamic Revolution created an anti-U.S., anti-Israel regime.
- Ayatollah Khomeini established Islamic Republic.

Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran vs Israel

- Iran supports anti-Israel groups (Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad).
- Israel views Iran as its primary regional threat.
- Rivalry shapes West Asian geopolitics for decades.

Iran’s Strategy — “Forward Defence”

- Creation and support of proxy militias across region.
- Influence across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon — “Shia Crescent”.
- Objective: keep threats away from Iranian territory.

Key Turning Points

2003 Iraq War

- Removal of Saddam Hussein increased Iran’s influence.

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2015 Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)
- Iran agreed to limit nuclear programme.
- Sanctions relief provided.

2018 U.S. Withdrawal
- Trump exited JCPOA and reimposed sanctions.
- Iran resumed nuclear enrichment activities.

Recent Escalation (Post-2023)
- Hamas attack on Israel triggered regional conflict.
- Israel targeted Iran's regional network.
- Syria developments weakened Iran's position.

2026 Direct Conflict
- U.S. and Israel bombed Iranian nuclear and military targets.
- Iran retaliated with missile attacks.
- Temporary ceasefire after 12 days.

Core Issues of Conflict

Israel & U.S. Demands
- End nuclear programme.
- Stop missile development.
- Stop support to militias.

Iran's Position
- Will negotiate nuclear issue only.
- Rejects limits on missiles and regional influence.

Strategic Objectives
- Israel seeks regional dominance and reduced Iranian power.
- U.S. aims to prevent nuclear Iran and reshape regional balance.
- Iran sees conflict as survival of its regime.

A small piece of RNA copies itself, hinting at how life began: TH Science

Science Tech

Easy Explanation

Scientists have always wondered how life first started on Earth. In 1953, two scientists — Miller and Urey — showed that basic molecules needed for life (like amino acids, which make proteins) could form naturally under early Earth conditions. But that experiment did not explain how genetic material like DNA or RNA formed, which is necessary for life to reproduce.

A major problem is that life needs genetic information to make proteins, but proteins are also needed to copy genetic information. This is called the "chicken-and-egg problem" of life's origin.

In the 1980s, scientists discovered that RNA (a molecule similar to DNA) can both store genetic information and perform chemical reactions. This led to the idea that RNA might have been the first genetic material on Earth — known as the "RNA world hypothesis."

However, scientists still could not create an RNA molecule that could copy itself. Most RNA molecules were too large and complex to act as both template and copying enzyme at the same time.

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Now, researchers in the U.K. have created a small RNA molecule called QT45 that can copy its own genetic information. This is the first known RNA that can self-replicate without help from proteins.

The replication process is extremely slow — it takes weeks to copy itself — but early Earth had millions of years, so this could still have been possible naturally. Interestingly, the copying is not perfect (about 92–94% accurate), which actually makes it more realistic because errors create variation. Variation is necessary for evolution and natural selection.

This discovery does not prove that life started from RNA, but it shows that self-replicating molecules can exist, which makes the RNA-first theory more believable. It suggests that life may have begun from simple chemistry that gradually became more complex over time.

Key Takeaways

Origin of Life — Background
- 1953 Miller-Urey experiment showed amino acids could form naturally.
- Did not explain origin of genetic material (DNA/RNA).
- Life requires both genetic information and replication ability.

Chicken-and-Egg Problem
- DNA/RNA need proteins to replicate.
- Proteins require genetic instructions to form.
- Raises question: which came first?

RNA World Hypothesis
- RNA can store information and perform chemical reactions.
- Suggests early life may have been based on RNA before DNA evolved.

New Scientific Breakthrough
- Scientists created QT45 — a self-replicating RNA molecule.
- Small size: 45 nucleotides long.
- First example of RNA copying its own genetic information.

Mechanism of Replication
- Builds a complementary strand first.
- Then uses it to reproduce original sequence.
- Uses short building blocks (three nucleotides at a time).

Importance of Imperfect Copying
- Accuracy: 92–94%.
- Errors create genetic variation.
- Variation enables evolution and natural selection.

Limitations
- Replication extremely slow (weeks per copy).
- Requires special laboratory conditions.
- Does not prove life began this way — only shows possibility.

Scientific Significance
- Strengthens evidence for RNA as earliest genetic material.
- Shows transition from chemistry to biology is possible.
- Helps understand evolution of life on Earth.

| Clear your doubts now.

The Inverse Law of AI: how capital rises as responsibility falls: TH Science

Science Tech

Easy Explanation

This article talks about how the global approach to governing Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing. Earlier, countries were more cautious and focused on safety, ethics, and responsible use of AI — especially in military and sensitive areas. But now, the focus has shifted toward speed, investment, and competition.

The author explains this change by describing international AI meetings held in different countries over the past few years. In earlier meetings, experts, scientists, and policymakers discussed whether certain AI technologies should even be developed due to risks. Now, the discussions are more about funding, infrastructure, and economic benefits — basically other than ethical concerns.

A major reason for this shift is the increasing cost of AI development. Earlier, innovation depended mostly on talented researchers. Today, success depends heavily on access to massive computing power, data centres, and money. This means large corporations and governments with huge financial resources dominate AI development.

The article also mentions comments by AI industry leaders comparing the cost of training AI systems with the cost of educating humans. This reflects a mindset where machines and humans are seen as competing economic resources. If AI becomes cheaper and faster than humans, businesses may prefer machines, which could affect jobs and society.

The author argues that because AI development is becoming an industrial race, safety and responsibility are receiving less attention. Ethical checks slow down progress, and in a competitive environment, countries and companies do not want delays.

Overall, the article warns that while AI technology is becoming more powerful, the wisdom and caution guiding its use may be decreasing. The world is entering a phase where AI is treated like heavy industry — focused on scale, profit, and infrastructure rather than ethics.

Key Takeaways

Global Shift in AI Governance
- Earlier focus: ethics, safety, responsible deployment.
- Current focus: speed, funding, infrastructure, competition.
- Indicates declining global caution regarding AI risks.

International AI Summits Timeline
- REAIM Summit (The Hague, 2023) — focus on responsible military AI.
- Subsequent summits: Bletchley Park, Seoul, Paris, India.
- Gradual transition from ethics-driven to industry-driven discussions.

“Responsibility Index” Concept
- Author’s idea to measure balance between safety vs growth.
- Trend shows safety importance declining globally.
- Capital investment becoming dominant factor.

Industrialisation of AI
- AI development now requires huge capital and computing power.
- Barrier to entry shifting from talent → financial resources.
- Corporations and states becoming primary drivers.

Economic vs Human Perspective
- Comparison between cost of AI training vs human education.

| Clear your doubts now.

- Suggests humans may be viewed as expensive resources.
- Raises concerns about job displacement and social impact.

Infrastructure-Centric Focus
- Emphasis on:
  – Data centres
  – Semiconductor manufacturing
  – Energy supply
  – Data sovereignty
- Ethical questions becoming secondary.

Risks Highlighted
- Reduced attention to safety and regulation.
- Profit incentives overriding caution.
- Potential long-term societal consequences.

Industrial Revolution Analogy
- AI compared to industrial revolution mechanisation.
- Focus shifting from craftsmanship to mass production.
- Responsible development risks being ignored.

2nd March 2026

[Navigating uncharted waters:What next for Iran-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Iran's political system has long been centred around one powerful position—the Supreme Leader, held for decades by Ali Khamenei. His reported death creates a sudden leadership vacuum in a highly centralised system. However, Iran is not entirely unprepared for this situation. Its Constitution provides a mechanism for succession, under which an 88-member clerical body called the Assembly of Experts will choose the next Supreme Leader. Until that happens, a temporary leadership council will manage the country's affairs.

Going forward, three broad possibilities can emerge. The most likely scenario is continuity, where a new Supreme Leader is appointed and the existing system continues with little change. The second possibility is a stronger role for the military, especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which could dominate decision-making to maintain stability. The third and least likely but most disruptive scenario is regime instability or collapse, where protests intensify and the system weakens, though this is difficult due to Iran's strong security apparatus.

At the regional level, tensions are already high because of ongoing conflict involving Iran, the US, and Israel. Iran has targeted US-linked assets in Gulf countries, raising fears that the conflict could spread across the Middle East. This has pushed even rival countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE to coordinate more closely, as they want to avoid large-scale instability in the region.

One of the biggest global concerns is the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow sea route through which about 20% of the world's oil supply passes. If Iran attempts to block or disrupt this route, it can lead to a sharp rise in global oil prices, affecting economies worldwide. This is why even countries not directly involved in the conflict are closely watching the situation.

For India, the stakes are particularly high. Nearly 9 million Indians live and work in the Gulf region, and their safety becomes a major concern during any escalation. These workers also send back a significant portion of India's remittances, nearly 38%, which supports millions of families. Additionally, India depends heavily on the region for energy, importing around 60% of its energy needs, including large shares of oil and LNG. Any disruption in supply or spike in prices would directly impact inflation, economic growth, and overall stability.

Key Takeaways

- **Leadership Vacuum**
  - Death of Khamenei creates sudden uncertainty.
  - Centralised power structure disrupted.
- **Planned Succession**
  - Assembly of Experts will appoint new leader.
  - Temporary system already in place.
- **Three Future Scenarios**
  - Continuity (most likely).
  - Military dominance (IRGC role increases).
  - Regime collapse (least likely but high impact).
- **IRGC's Growing Role**
  - Powerful military + political force.
  - Key in maintaining regime stability.
- **Regional Conflict Risk**
  - Iran vs US-Israel tensions rising.
  - Gulf countries may get involved.
- **Strait of Hormuz Importance**
  - 20% global oil supply passes.
  - Disruption = global economic shock.
- **India's Strategic Concerns**
  - Diaspora safety.
  - Energy security risks.
  - Economic impact via oil prices & remittances.

[Disruption at Strait of Hormuz:India covered,for now-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing conflict involving Iran, the US, and Israel has disrupted the flow of oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz, which is one of the most important energy routes in the world. Even though Iran has not officially declared the Strait closed, signals from its military and the rising tensions have made oil companies, ships, and insurers extremely cautious. As a result, many oil tankers have stopped moving and are waiting in nearby waters, which itself is enough to disrupt global supply.

This disruption is important because nearly **20% of global oil and a large share of LNG trade** passes through this narrow route. When supply becomes uncertain, global oil prices start rising immediately. So, even without a complete blockade, the fear of disruption increases energy costs worldwide.

For India, the situation is serious but manageable in the short term. India imports about **88% of its crude oil**, and nearly **half of these imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**. However, India currently has a buffer in the form of oil stocks. Indian refineries maintain crude reserves for over 10 days, along with additional fuel stocks, which can help handle temporary disruptions.

India also has alternative options. It can import oil from countries like Russia, the US, West Africa, and Latin America. There are even some Russian oil supplies already available in nearby waters, which India can quickly access if needed. This diversification strategy helps India avoid a sudden supply crisis, at least in the short run.

However, the bigger concern lies in LPG and LNG. India imports **80–85% of its LPG** and a large share of LNG, mostly from Gulf countries via the Strait of Hormuz. Unlike crude oil, India does not have large strategic reserves for these fuels. Also, global availability in the spot market for LPG and LNG is limited. So, if the disruption continues for a long time, India may face shortages or have to pay significantly higher prices for these fuels.

| Clear your doubts now.

Another major impact is on prices. Even a small increase in oil prices has a large effect on India. For example, a **$1 increase per barrel can increase India's import bill by around $1.8–2 billion annually**. If the conflict worsens and supply remains disrupted, oil prices could rise sharply, even crossing $100 per barrel, which would increase inflation and put pressure on the economy.

However, a complete and long-term closure of the Strait is unlikely. This is because even Iran depends on this route to export its own oil. Blocking it completely would hurt its own economy as well. So, while short-term disruptions and price spikes are likely, a prolonged total shutdown is less probable.

Key Takeaways

- **Strategic Importance of Hormuz**
  - Around 20% of global oil and major LNG trade passes through it.
  - Any disruption impacts global energy markets.
- **Disruption Without Full Closure**
  - Even without official closure, shipping and insurance halts affect supply.
  - Tankers waiting → supply bottlenecks.
- **India's Oil Dependence**
  - 88% crude import dependence.
  - Nearly 50% imports pass through Hormuz.
- **Short-term Safety Buffer**
  - India has ~10 days of crude reserves + fuel stocks.
  - Helps manage immediate disruptions.
- **Diversification Advantage**
  - Alternative sources: Russia, US, Africa, Latin America.
  - Flexibility reduces supply shock risk.
- **LPG & LNG Vulnerability**
  - 80–85% LPG imports via Gulf.
  - Limited reserves and low spot availability → higher risk.
- **Price Impact on Economy**
  - $1 increase → $1.8–2 billion extra import bill.
  - Prolonged conflict may push oil > $100/barrel → inflation risk.

[Iran agreed to unprecedented terms.But Trump had to save face-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The current conflict between Iran and the US–Israel alliance is unusual because it happened **even when talks were progressing**. Iran had reportedly agreed to strict nuclear limits, but the US still carried out strikes. This is due to a **"commitment trap"**—the US leadership did not want to appear weak by accepting a deal, so it chose escalation instead.

The US also shifted its goal from just controlling Iran's nuclear programme to aiming for **regime change**. Even though Ali Khamenei has been killed, the Iranian system may still continue under new leadership, meaning the main objective may not be achieved.

Iran's response is based on **survival**. Unlike earlier symbolic actions, it is now attacking US-linked targets more seriously across the region. It is also threatening disruption in the Strait of Hormuz to increase global pressure by affecting oil supply.

| Clear your doubts now.

The US is mainly relying on **airstrikes**, as sending ground troops is risky. Also, there is no strong internal opposition in Iran to replace the regime. Since Iran is fighting for survival, it has a stronger reason to continue the conflict, making it harder to stop.

Key Takeaways

- **War Despite Progress**
  - Conflict began even after Iran agreed to strict nuclear terms.
  - Not a failure of talks, but escalation after progress.
- **Commitment Trap**
  - US avoided deal to not appear weak.
  - Chose military action instead.
- **Shift in Objective**
  - From nuclear control to regime change.
  - Leadership removal ≠ system collapse.
- **Iran's Survival Strategy**
  - Stronger retaliation than before.
  - Aimed at deterrence and protection.
- **Hormuz as Leverage**
  - Key oil route used to pressure global economy.
  - Impacts US allies too.
- **Limits of US Approach**
  - Air power only, no ground invasion.
  - No clear replacement for regime.
- **Higher Stakes for Iran**
  - Fighting for survival.
  - More willing to prolong conflict.

[Missile interceptors in U.S.-Iran war-The Hindu Text and Context]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

In the U.S.–Iran conflict, both sides are using **missile defence systems** to stop incoming missiles before they hit targets. These systems use radars and sensors to detect a missile, track its path, and then launch an **interceptor missile** to destroy it in the air, either by exploding nearby or hitting it directly.

Compared to the 2025 war, the current conflict shows better **coordination between the US, Israel, and Gulf countries**. They are using multiple systems together like Patriot, THAAD, and newer technologies, creating a layered defence that can respond faster and more effectively.

However, missile defence is not foolproof. It works well against slower rockets but is less effective against fast or advanced missiles. Also, attackers use **saturation attacks**—firing many cheap missiles or drones at once—to overwhelm the system.

Cost is another big issue. Interceptors are very expensive (millions of dollars each), while attacking missiles can be much cheaper. This forces countries to use them carefully in a long conflict.

Iran also has its own defence systems, but large-scale attacks can overwhelm them, especially because systems need time to reload. Overall, modern warfare is becoming a battle between **number of attacks vs defence capacity**.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Missile Defence Concept
Detects and destroys incoming missiles mid-air.
Uses radar, sensors, and interceptors.

Working Mechanism
Tracks missile → calculates path → launches interceptor.
Uses explosion or hit-to-kill method.

Layered Defence
Multiple systems cover different stages of attack.
Improves overall protection.

Better Coordination Now
US, Israel, UAE working together.
Integrated regional defence network.

Limited Effectiveness
Works better against slow threats.
Less effective vs fast/hypersonic missiles.

Cost Challenge
Interceptors are very expensive.
Attackers use cheaper mass attacks.

System Limitations
Can be overwhelmed in large attacks.
Reload time reduces efficiency.

How do astronauts return from space and survive re-entry?-The Hindu Text and Context

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

When astronauts return from space, the biggest challenge is **slowing down safely**. Spacecraft in orbit travel at extremely high speeds. To come back, they perform a **deorbit burn**, firing engines in the opposite direction to reduce speed so Earth's gravity pulls them back into the atmosphere.

As the capsule enters the atmosphere, it faces **extreme heat** due to friction with air. To survive this, spacecraft are designed with a **blunt (rounded) shape**, which pushes most of the heat away. They are also covered with a **heat shield** that either burns away (ablation) or blocks heat from reaching inside. This ensures astronauts remain safe even when temperatures outside are extremely high.

The spacecraft must enter at a **very precise angle**, called the **re-entry corridor**. If it is too shallow, it will bounce back into space; if too steep, it can burn up or face dangerous forces. So, navigation during re-entry is very carefully controlled.

Modern capsules are not just falling objects. They behave like **semi-ballistic bodies**, meaning they can slightly steer using their shape and orientation. This helps guide them toward a specific landing area instead of falling randomly.

During re-entry, communication with Earth is temporarily lost due to a **plasma layer** forming around the capsule. This is called a **communication blackout**, and it lasts for a few minutes until the spacecraft slows down.

As the capsule gets closer to Earth, air resistance slows it down significantly, but not enough for a safe landing. So, **parachutes are deployed** in stages to reduce speed further, allowing a soft landing, usually in the ocean.

In India's Gaganyaan mission, the crew module will follow the same process. After re-entry, parachutes will deploy, and the capsule will safely splash down in the Bay of Bengal.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Deorbiting Process
- Spacecraft slows down using reverse thrust.
- Gravity pulls it back toward Earth.

Extreme Heat Challenge
- Friction with atmosphere creates very high temperatures.
- Managed using blunt shape and heat shields.

Thermal Protection System
- Uses ablation or insulation to protect astronauts.
- Prevents heat from entering capsule.

Re-entry Corridor
- Precise angle required for safe return.
- Too steep or too shallow is dangerous.

Controlled Descent
- Semi-ballistic design allows limited steering.
- Helps target landing zone.

Communication Blackout
- Plasma layer blocks radio signals temporarily.
- Normal communication resumes after slowing down.

Parachute Landing
- Final speed reduction using parachutes.
- Ensures safe splashdown (e.g., Bay of Bengal in Gaganyaan).

[Why key to coconut cultivation today is sustainability, not productivity-The Hindu Science]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India is already the **world's largest producer of coconuts**, and productivity per tree is quite high in many regions. That means simply increasing output is no longer the main problem. Today, the bigger challenges are **climate change and diseases**, which are damaging coconut farms and reducing long-term sustainability.

Rising temperatures (projected up to 3°C by 2070) are increasing **heat stress and drought conditions**, making many traditional coconut-growing areas less suitable. At the same time, diseases like **root wilt** are severely affecting plantations, especially in regions like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In some places, entire coconut landscapes have been destroyed.

Because of this, focusing only on planting high-yield varieties (as proposed in the Coconut Promotion Scheme) is not enough. What is needed is the development of **climate-resilient and disease-resistant coconut varieties** that can survive future conditions. Research institutions and state agencies must focus more on breeding such varieties.

Another issue is policy design. Government schemes often provide inputs like fertilizers or bio-products, but these are sometimes of poor quality or not useful. Instead, giving **direct cash support (DBT)** allows farmers to decide what they actually need—like irrigation, labour, or soil improvement.

There are also problems with **value addition and processing schemes**. Many projects fail because farmers lack proper market access. Simply setting up processing units without ensuring buyers leads to unused infrastructure and financial losses.

Overall, the key idea is that coconut farming today is facing **structural challenges**, not just productivity issues. So, policies must shift from "produce more" to "produce sustainably and survive climate risks."

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Productivity Not the Main Issue
- India already has high coconut productivity.
- Domestic prices remain high despite good output.

Climate Change Threat
- Rising temperatures increase drought stress.
- Many regions may become unsuitable for coconut cultivation.

Disease Impact
- Root wilt and other diseases destroying plantations.
- Severe impact in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Need for Resilient Varieties
- Focus on heat-tolerant and disease-resistant crops.
- Research institutions must play key role.

Limitations of Current Schemes
- Input-based subsidies often ineffective.
- Poor quality or mismatch with farmer needs.

Direct Support to Farmers
- DBT allows better decision-making by farmers.
- Improves efficiency of government support.

Shift to Sustainability Approach
- Focus on long-term resilience, not just higher yield.
- Sustainability is key to future coconut cultivation.

Skill India as herculean challenges, Galgotian blunders-The Hindu Editorial

Governance

Easy Explanation

India has a limited window of opportunity called the **demographic dividend**, where a large young population can drive economic growth. This window will begin to close around 2040. To benefit from it, India must build a strong skill development system. However, vocational education remains very weak—only about 1.3% of Indian students enter vocational streams, compared to nearly 50% in many developed countries. This reflects decades of neglect of school-level and vocational education.

Although policies like the National Education Policy (2020) and schemes such as Skill India and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) aim to improve skills, their outcomes have been disappointing. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) highlighted issues like financial irregularities, invalid beneficiary accounts, and low placement rates (around 41%). Many programmes focus on short-term training numbers rather than long-term employability and quality outcomes.

A major structural issue is that India's skill ecosystem is **supply-driven and government-funded**, instead of demand-driven and industry-led. Training is often provided without properly assessing market demand. As a result, many trained youth remain unemployed or underemployed.

Experts suggest reforms in financing. One proposal is to introduce **skill loans**, similar to education loans, so students can choose quality institutions and create competition among training providers. Another idea is **skill vouchers**, where funding follows the learner rather than the institution, improving accountability and encouraging lifelong learning, including digital, AI, and green skills.

A third important reform is introducing **skill levies**, where industries contribute a small percentage of payroll to fund training. Over 90 countries use such systems. This ensures industry ownership of skills and stable financing beyond political budget cycles.

| Clear your doubts now.

Finally, India lacks a proper **real-time labour market information system**. Without accurate data on job demand, policy decisions remain disconnected from reality. Using online job portal data and AI-based analysis can help align training with emerging sectors.

In summary, India's challenge is not just expanding skill programmes but redesigning them—improving financing models, ensuring industry participation, enhancing accountability, and linking skills to real labour market demand. Without such reforms, the demographic dividend could turn into a demographic burden.

Key Takeaways

- **Limited Demographic Window**
  - Opportunity lasts till 2040.
  - Requires urgent skill reforms.
- **Low Vocational Participation**
  - Only 1.3% students in vocational streams.
  - Much lower than global benchmarks.
- **Weak Implementation**
  - CAG flagged irregularities in PMKVY.
  - Low job placement outcomes.
- **Supply-driven Model Problem**
  - Training not aligned with actual demand.
  - Focus on quantity over quality.
- **Skill Financing Reform**
  - Skill loans can empower learners.
  - Reduce sole dependence on government grants.
- **Industry-led Mechanisms**
  - Skill vouchers improve competition.
  - Skill levies ensure employer ownership.
- **Need for Labour Market Data**
  - Real-time demand data missing.
  - AI and job portal data can guide planning.

3rd March 2026

Iran's power pyramid,with Supreme Leader at the top-The Indian Express Explained Page

International relations

Easy Explanation

Iran's political system works like a **power pyramid**, where the **Supreme Leader is the most powerful authority**. Even though there are elected bodies like the President and Parliament, real control over the military, judiciary, and major decisions lies with the Supreme Leader.

After the assassination of **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, Iran followed its constitutional process. A **temporary leadership council** has taken charge, and the **Assembly of Experts** will soon appoint the next Supreme Leader. This shows that the system is designed to remain stable even during crises.

Iran's governance is based on a mix of **religion and politics**, especially the idea of **Velayat-e-Faqih**, which means a religious leader should rule. This idea was introduced by **Ayatollah Khomeini** during the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

| Clear your doubts now.

Historically, Shia religious leaders in Iran have been active in **anti-monarchy movements**, and mosques became centers for political mobilization. This helped establish the strong role of religion in governance.

Khamenei's leadership combined a **hardline foreign policy** with some pragmatism (like nuclear negotiations). However, his rule faced **economic problems, sanctions, and protests**, showing a gap between the government and people.

After his death, tensions in **West Asia have escalated**, with Iran targeting US-linked bases in the region. This increases the risk of wider conflict and has implications for global oil supply and India.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader's Dominance**
  - Highest authority in Iran
  - Controls military, judiciary, and policy decisions
- **Institutional Continuity**
  - Interim council manages transition
  - Assembly of Experts selects next leader
- **Religion-Politics Fusion**
  - Based on **Velayat-e-Faqih**
  - Clerical leadership central to governance
- **Historical Roots**
  - Shia clergy led anti-monarchy movements
  - Mosques acted as political centers
- **Khamenei's Rule**
  - Hardline yet partly pragmatic
  - Faced protests and economic challenges
- **Powerful Institutions**
  - IRGC and Guardian Council strengthen regime
  - Limit democratic competition
- **Regional Instability**
  - Escalating Iran-US-Israel conflict
  - Impacts global oil and India's interests

[After strikes on Iran,expanding theatre of conflict in West Asia-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

After the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, tensions in **West Asia sharply escalated**. The **US and Israel carried out strikes on Iran**, and in response, Iran launched missile and drone attacks across the region. This has expanded the conflict beyond just Iran and Israel.

Iran's retaliation mainly targeted **US military bases and strategic locations** in countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. For example, the US Navy's 5th Fleet base in Bahrain and energy facilities in Saudi Arabia and Qatar were attacked. Many missiles were intercepted, but some damage and casualties were reported.

Importantly, Iran has stated that it is **not targeting Gulf countries directly**, but rather the **US military presence within these countries**. However, since US bases are located in these nations, they have also been affected, disturbing the stability of the region.

Energy infrastructure has also been hit, including oil refineries and LNG facilities. This is significant because the Gulf region is crucial for global oil and gas supply. Any disruption here can affect international energy prices and countries like India that depend on these imports.

| Clear your doubts now.

The wider spread of attacks shows that Iran is under pressure and is trying to **force the US and its allies toward a ceasefire**. However, the risk is that further escalation—especially involving countries like Turkey (a NATO member)—could turn this into a much larger international conflict.

Key Takeaways

- **Conflict Expansion**
  - War has spread beyond Iran-Israel
  - Multiple West Asian countries affected
- **Iran's Target Strategy**
  - Focus on US military bases in Gulf
  - Not directly targeting neighbouring states
- **Key Strategic Hits**
  - Bahrain (US 5th Fleet base)
  - Saudi & Qatar energy facilities
  - UAE infrastructure
- **Energy Security Concerns**
  - Attacks on oil & LNG facilities
  - Threat to global energy supply
- **India's Stake**
  - Heavy dependence on Gulf oil & LNG
  - Any disruption affects economy
- **Geopolitical Signalling**
  - Iran pressuring US via regional escalation
  - Aim: force ceasefire negotiations
- **Risk of Wider War**
  - Spread to more countries
  - Possible NATO involvement increases global risk

[Germany's pitch for 2036 Olympics overshadowed by the 'Nazi Games' of 1936-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Germany is planning to bid for hosting the **2036 Olympics**, but this has created a controversy because 2036 marks **100 years since the 1936 Berlin Olympics**, which were used by Adolf Hitler as a propaganda tool for Nazi ideology.

Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has called the idea of hosting in 2036 "historically sensitive". Critics argue that choosing the centenary year may create the impression of **celebrating or reviving memories of the Nazi past**, which could hurt victims and give space to far-right narratives.

The **1936 Olympics** are remembered not just as a sporting event but as a political showcase of **Aryan superiority**, even though athlete Jesse Owens challenged this by winning four gold medals. This makes the historical legacy of that event deeply controversial.

However, supporters of Germany's bid argue that hosting the Olympics in 2036 could be an opportunity to **show how modern democratic Germany has learned from its past**. Germany follows a culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*), where it openly acknowledges Nazi crimes.

Public opinion in Germany is divided, with many people uncomfortable about hosting in 2036. As a result, Germany is also considering other options like **2040 or 2044**. Meanwhile, India is also competing for the 2036 Olympics, making the issue globally relevant.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

- **Historical Sensitivity**
  - 2036 marks 100 years of 1936 Nazi Olympics
  - Raises ethical and symbolic concerns
- **Nazi Legacy Impact**
  - 1936 Olympics used for propaganda
  - Associated with racial superiority ideology
- **Opposition Arguments**
  - Risk of glorifying or trivialising Nazi past
  - May strengthen far-right narratives
- **Supporters' View**
  - Chance to showcase democratic transformation
  - Highlight lessons learned from history
- **Germany's Memory Culture**
  - *Erinnerungskultur* promotes acknowledgment of past crimes
  - Central to modern German identity
- **Public Opinion Divide**
  - Significant opposition within Germany
  - Debate over appropriate year to host
- **Global Context (India)**
  - India also bidding for 2036 Olympics
  - Adds geopolitical and competitive dimension

Marriage as partnership:HC reframes role of 'homemaker'-The Indian Express Explained Page

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Delhi High Court said that a **homemaker is not "idle"**, but performs important unpaid work that supports the entire family. Managing the house, raising children, and supporting the working spouse are all forms of **real labour**, even if they do not generate income.

The case involved a woman who left her job to take care of her child, while her husband worked abroad and earned a high salary. Lower courts denied her maintenance, saying she was educated and capable of working. However, the High Court disagreed and said that **education or ability to earn does not mean actual income**.

The court emphasized that many women are expected to **sacrifice careers after marriage**, but later, during disputes, husbands argue that they should work and not seek maintenance. The court rejected this contradiction and said such arguments cannot be accepted.

It also clarified an important principle: **"capacity to earn" is different from "actual earning."** Just because someone can work does not mean they are currently earning or can easily get a job, especially after a long career break.

Finally, the court described marriage as a **partnership**, where both spouses contribute in different ways—one may earn money while the other manages the home. Therefore, maintenance is not charity, but a **fair recognition of unpaid contributions** made during the marriage.

Key Takeaways

- **Recognition of Homemakers' Work**
  - Homemaking is unpaid but valuable labour
  - Essential for household functioning

| Clear your doubts now.

- **Marriage as Partnership**
  - Both spouses contribute differently
  - Economic stability is a joint outcome
- **Maintenance as Right, Not Charity**
  - Based on contribution, not dependency
  - Ensures fairness after separation
- **Capacity vs Actual Income**
  - Ability to earn ≠ actual earning
  - Cannot deny maintenance on this basis
- **Gendered Reality Highlighted**
  - Women often leave jobs after marriage
  - Courts must consider social realities
- **Legal Framework Strengthened**
  - Linked to PWDV Act, 2005 & Section 125 CrPC
  - Expands interpretation of maintenance
- **Progressive Judicial Approach**
  - Moves from moral recognition to legal recognition
  - Strengthens economic rights of women

[Navigating volatile Af-Pak belt requires delhi to be nimble-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The **Afghanistan–Pakistan (Af-Pak) region is becoming highly unstable**, with Pakistan's Defence Minister even calling the situation an "open war". The conflict is mainly due to Pakistan accusing Afghanistan's Taliban government of supporting the **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, which carries out attacks inside Pakistan.

The root problem is Pakistan's long-standing attempt to **control or influence Afghanistan**. However, after coming to power in 2021, the Taliban have become more independent and are no longer dependent on Pakistan. They also **reject the Durand Line (border)** and deny supporting TTP, instead accusing Pakistan of backing rival terror groups.

Tensions have escalated with **airstrikes, cross-border attacks, and military operations**. Pakistan has also taken steps like restricting Afghan trade and expelling Afghan refugees. In response, the Taliban have carried out attacks on Pakistani border posts. This cycle of retaliation has increased instability in the region.

A full-scale war is unlikely because it would be **costly for both sides**. Pakistan has military strength, but Afghanistan has historically resisted powerful forces like the Soviet Union and the US. The Taliban are likely to rely on **guerrilla warfare** if conflict intensifies.

For India, this situation is very important. India has **historical ties with Afghanistan** and has invested in its development. At the same time, it is cautious because Pakistan has earlier used Afghan territory to support terrorism against India. Therefore, India is now **pragmatically engaging with the Taliban** while supporting Afghanistan's sovereignty.

Overall, the Af-Pak region remains volatile, and India needs to stay **flexible and alert (nimble)** to protect its strategic and security interests.

Key Takeaways

- **Rising Af-Pak Tensions**
  - Pakistan vs Taliban conflict escalating
  - Triggered by terror attacks and mistrust

| Clear your doubts now.

- **Core Issue: TTP Factor**
  - Pakistan accuses Taliban of sheltering TTP
  - Taliban denies and counters allegations
- **Failure of Pakistan's Strategy**
  - Taliban no longer dependent on Pakistan
  - Afghanistan not acting as a "proxy state"
- **Escalating Military Actions**
  - Airstrikes, border clashes, trade restrictions
  - Risk of prolonged instability
- **Limits of Military Solution**
  - Afghanistan's history of resisting invasions
  - Taliban may use guerrilla tactics
- **Global & Regional Role**
  - China, US attempting limited involvement
  - No effective mediation so far
- **India's Strategic Approach**
  - Supports Afghan sovereignty
  - Engaging Taliban pragmatically
  - Must remain flexible due to security concerns

[How landscapes' 'memories' shape the way Indian cities flood-The Hindu Science]

Geography

Easy Explanation

Flooding in Indian cities is not only due to heavy rainfall or poor drainage. The article explains that **landscapes have a "memory" of past rainfall**, which affects how they respond to new rain. This concept is called **hydrological hysteresis**.

When land receives continuous rain, it becomes **saturated**. Once saturated, even a small amount of additional rainfall cannot be absorbed and quickly turns into **runoff**, leading to flooding. This is similar to a sponge—once it is full, extra water spills out.

Rivers and floodplains also behave differently over time. During heavy rains, rivers overflow into nearby low-lying areas and wetlands. Even after rainfall decreases, the water stored in these areas **drains slowly**, which is why flooding often continues even after the rain stops.

Urbanisation makes this problem worse. Earlier, cities like Bengaluru had **connected lakes and natural drainage systems** that allowed water to spread and drain gradually. Now, with construction and encroachment, these natural systems are disrupted, causing water to **accumulate quickly and drain slowly**.

Overall, flooding depends not just on current rainfall but also on **previous rainfall, soil moisture, and city planning**. With climate change increasing extreme rainfall, understanding this "land memory" is essential.

Key Takeaways

- **Hydrological Hysteresis Concept**
  - Landscape response depends on past rainfall
  - Not just current rainfall
- **Soil Saturation Effect**
  - Dry land absorbs water
  - Saturated land increases runoff → floods
- **Non-Linear Flood Response**
  - Same rainfall can cause different impacts

| Clear your doubts now.

- Depends on prior conditions
- **Role of Floodplains & Wetlands**
  - Store excess water during rains
  - Slow release delays drainage
- **Urbanisation Impact**
  - Encroachment reduces absorption
  - Increases waterlogging
- **Case Study: Bengaluru**
  - Broken lake networks worsen flooding
  - Water stays even after rain stops
- **Policy Implication**
  - Need basin-level planning
  - Protect natural drainage systems

Tiniest QR code for long-term data storage-The Hindu Science

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Researchers from TU Wien and a startup have created the **world's smallest QR code**, so tiny that it is smaller than a bacterium. But the real importance is not the size—it shows a new way to **store digital data for extremely long periods**.

Today's storage devices like hard drives and magnetic tapes last only **10–30 years** and need electricity and regular updating to avoid data loss (called **data rot**). To solve this, scientists are exploring **ceramic-based storage**, which is much more durable.

In this method, data is **etched directly onto a ceramic material (chromium nitride)** using a precise technique called **focused ion beam milling**. Instead of storing data electrically, it is physically carved into the material, making it **stable and long-lasting without power**.

This technology can store a very high amount of data in a tiny space. For example, an **A4-sized ceramic sheet could store over 2 TB of data**. Also, ceramics can survive extreme conditions and last for **thousands of years**, making them ideal for long-term data preservation.

However, there is a limitation—such tiny data cannot be read with normal devices and requires **advanced microscopes or special technology**. Still, researchers are working on making reading and writing faster and more practical.

Overall, this innovation shows a future where data can be stored **permanently, safely, and without energy consumption**, reducing dependence on energy-intensive data centres.

Key Takeaways

- **World's Smallest QR Code**
  - Size: ~2 sq. micrometres
  - Smaller than a bacterium
- **Problem of Data Rot**
  - Current storage lasts 10–30 years
  - Needs constant power and upgrades
- **Ceramic-Based Storage**
  - Uses durable materials like chromium nitride
  - Highly resistant to heat and corrosion
- **New Storage Technique**

| Clear your doubts now.

- Data etched physically using ion beams
- Not dependent on electrical states

High Data Density

- ~130 bits per μm²
- A4 sheet can store >2 TB data

Long-Term Stability

- Can last thousands of years
- No need for continuous power

Challenges & Future Scope

- Requires advanced microscopes to read
- Ongoing research for practical use

Rupture across the Durand Line-The Hindu Text and Context

Internal security

Easy Explanation

The article explains the growing conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan along the **Durand Line (their disputed border)**. Recently, both sides carried out **serious military attacks**—Pakistan launched airstrikes deep inside Afghanistan, while the Taliban attacked Pakistani border posts. This marks a major escalation compared to earlier small clashes.

The surprising part is that Pakistan had **earlier supported the Taliban** for decades. After the Taliban took power in 2021, Pakistan expected a friendly government in Afghanistan. But instead, relations worsened because the Taliban started acting **independently** and refused to follow Pakistan's expectations.

The main issue is the **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**. Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of giving shelter to TTP militants who carry out attacks in Pakistan. However, the Taliban refuses to act against TTP, partly because TTP had supported them earlier and also due to internal ideological links.

There is now a **three-level breakdown (rupture)** in relations:

- Between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan
- Between Pakistan's military establishment and the Taliban
- Between the people of both countries (due to refugee expulsions and tensions)

Even though Pakistan is **militarily stronger**, a full war is unlikely to succeed. Afghanistan has historically resisted powerful forces, and the Taliban may use **guerrilla tactics instead of direct war**.

For the future, the relationship will remain **conflict-prone and unstable**. Pakistan's earlier strategy of using Afghanistan for "strategic depth" has failed, and now Afghanistan has become more of a **security challenge than an advantage**.

Key Takeaways

Escalation Across Durand Line

- Airstrikes and cross-border attacks increased
- More intense than past clashes

Breakdown of Pakistan-Taliban Ties

- Earlier allies now in conflict
- Taliban acting independently

TTP as Core Issue

- Pakistan blames Taliban for sheltering TTP

| Clear your doubts now.

Taliban refuses due to past links

Three-Level Rupture

Political (govt vs govt)
Military (Pakistan vs Taliban leadership)
Societal (people-to-people tensions)

Failure of Strategic Depth Policy

Pakistan's Afghanistan policy backfired
Afghanistan now a security concern

Asymmetry in Power

Pakistan stronger militarily & economically
Taliban likely to use guerrilla tactics

Future Outlook

Continued instability in Af-Pak region
Long-term conflict likely, not quick resolution

4th March 2026

[Canada uranium deal key to nuclear expansion plans-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

India recently signed a **long-term uranium supply agreement** with **Cameco**, a Canadian nuclear fuel company, during the visit of **Mark Carney**, the Prime Minister of **Canada**. Under this deal, Cameco will supply **22 million pounds (about 10,000 tonnes) of uranium from 2027–2035**, worth about **2.6 billion Canadian dollars**.

This is the **second major uranium deal within a month**, after India finalised another supply agreement with **Kazatomprom**, the state uranium company of **Kazakhstan**.

India needs these agreements because it plans to **increase nuclear power capacity from about 9 GW today to 100 GW by 2047**. Nuclear reactors require uranium as fuel, but **India cannot produce enough domestically**, mainly because Indian uranium ore is **low-grade**.

Currently, **over 70% of India's uranium is imported**. India produces some uranium domestically from mines in **Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh**, but this is costly and limited.

India is also pursuing its **three-stage nuclear programme**, designed to ultimately use **thorium** (which India has in large quantities). However, the programme has progressed **very slowly**, and the current reactors still depend mainly on uranium.

Therefore, India is **diversifying uranium supply from multiple countries** like **Canada, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia** to ensure reliable fuel for its expanding nuclear energy sector.

Key Takeaways

India–Canada Uranium Deal
India signed a long-term uranium supply contract with Cameco.
Supply: **22 million pounds (10,000 tonnes) from 2027–2035**.
Deal value: **2.6 billion Canadian dollars**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Second Major Uranium Agreement

India recently also finalised a uranium supply deal with Kazakhstan's Kazatomprom.
These deals secure fuel for the **next decade of nuclear expansion**.

Goal of Nuclear Energy Expansion

India plans to increase nuclear power capacity from **9 GW to 100 GW by 2047**.
Uranium imports are essential to support this rapid expansion.

Dependence on Imported Uranium

India imports **over 70% of its uranium requirements**.
Domestic uranium ore is **low-grade (0.02–0.45%)**, making mining expensive.

Domestic Uranium Production

Uranium mining mainly occurs in **Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh**.
Total uranium requirement may rise to **about 5,400 tonnes annually**, with only ~**30% met domestically**.

Diversification of Supply Sources

India currently imports uranium from **Canada, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia**.
Future agreements may include **Australia and the US**.

Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

India aims to eventually use **thorium-based reactors**.
Stage-2 involves fast breeder reactors like the one at **Kalpakkam Nuclear Complex**.
Stage-3 (thorium reactors) is still far from commercial deployment.

[‘Strait of Hormuz is too vital to remain closed for very long’-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Geography

Easy Explanation

The **Strait of Hormuz** is a narrow sea passage connecting the **Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman** and the **Indian Ocean**. It is one of the most important energy routes in the world because **around one-fourth of global oil and gas trade passes through it**.

Due to tensions and military activities in West Asia, shipping through the strait has slowed after **Iran** warned ships to avoid the area. This has raised concerns about possible disruption to global energy supply.

For **India**, the Persian Gulf region is the main source of energy imports. In 2025, India received **about 90% of LPG, 40% of LNG, and 35% of crude oil from Gulf countries**.

However, experts believe the strait **cannot remain closed for long** because it is extremely important for the global economy. Countries maintain **strategic energy reserves**, which can meet demand for a few weeks. The immediate impact is therefore likely to be **higher global energy prices rather than physical shortages**.

Key Takeaways

Strategic Global Chokepoint

The **Strait of Hormuz** is one of the most critical maritime routes for energy trade.
Around **25% of global oil and gas supply passes through it**.

India's Dependence on the Persian Gulf

India imports most of its energy from Gulf countries.
In 2025: **90% LPG, 40% LNG, and 35% crude oil** came from the region.

Short-Term Energy Security

India and other countries maintain **strategic oil and gas reserves**.
These reserves can meet domestic demand for **several weeks during disruptions**.

Price Impact of Geopolitical Tensions

Even without supply shortages, conflict in the region can cause **global oil and gas prices to rise**.

Historical Context

| Clear your doubts now.

During the **Tanker War** (1984–1988) in the **Iran–Iraq War**, hundreds of ships were attacked.
Despite this, the flow of oil through the strait continued.

Limited Alternative Routes

Some oil can be diverted through pipelines (e.g., from **Ras Tanura** to **Yanbu** in **Saudi Arabia**).
However, **LNG and LPG have very limited alternative transport routes**.

Why Long-Term Closure is Unlikely

The strait is crucial for global trade and energy security.
Major global powers would likely ensure **maritime navigation resumes quickly**.

[New GDP series:Bigger farm sector,improved measure of informal economy-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India has introduced a **new GDP series with 2022–23 as the base year**, replacing the earlier base year of **2011–12**. The revision was carried out by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** to provide a **more accurate measurement of the economy**.

Under the new series, India's **real GDP growth between 2023–24 and 2025–26 appears more stable**, ranging between **7.1% and 7.6%**, compared with the earlier estimate of **6.5% to 9.2%**. The size of the economy in nominal terms has also been revised slightly **downward by about 3–4%**.

The revision shows **agriculture as larger than previously estimated**, mainly because the new data better captures the shift toward **high-value crops like fruits and vegetables**. At the same time, the **manufacturing sector appears to be growing faster** due to improved measurement methods and better data on the informal sector.

The new series also improves measurement of the **informal economy** using surveys such as the **Periodic Labour Force Survey** and the **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises**, reducing dependence on indirect estimates.

Key Takeaways

New GDP Base Year

India's GDP calculation has been updated with **2022–23 as the base year**.
The revision aims to reflect the **current structure of the economy more accurately**.

More Stable Growth Estimates

Real GDP growth for **2023–24 to 2025–26** is now estimated at **7.1–7.6%**.
Earlier estimates showed larger fluctuations (6.5–9.2%).

Slight Reduction in Nominal GDP Size

The overall size of the economy in current prices is **3–4% lower** than in the old series.
Such adjustments are common during GDP rebasing.

Agriculture Sector Appears Larger

The share of agriculture increased to **18.2% of GDP in 2022–23**, compared with **16.5% earlier**.
By 2025–26 it is estimated at **16.2%**.

Reasons for Larger Agriculture Estimates

Better capture of **high-value crops such as fruits and vegetables**.
Reduced input costs due to **shift from diesel to electricity and solar power in farming**.

Faster Manufacturing Growth

Manufacturing growth averages **11.2% under the new series**, compared with **about 8% earlier**.
This reflects improved methodology and better data.

Improved Measurement of Informal Economy

Use of **PLFS and ASUSE surveys** improves estimation of the unorganised sector.
Economists consider the new GDP series **more realistic and reliable** than earlier estimates.

| Clear your doubts now.

Iran strikes AWS infra:Why data centres became strategic target-The Indian Express Explained Page

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Recent drone strikes linked to tensions involving **Iran**, the **United States**, and **Israel** damaged data centres run by **Amazon Web Services** in the **United Arab Emirates** and **Bahrain**. The strikes caused fires, power failures, and structural damage, forcing AWS to shut down parts of its infrastructure.

Because AWS provides cloud services such as computing power, data storage, and databases, the disruption caused **connectivity issues and service outages for businesses across the region**.

The incident shows how **data centres are becoming strategic assets in modern warfare**. Earlier, wars mainly targeted physical infrastructure such as oil fields, pipelines, ports, and power plants. Today, **digital infrastructure like cloud data centres and communication networks are equally critical** because they support financial systems, government services, military communications, and online businesses.

As more organisations depend on cloud platforms operated by companies like **Amazon**, **Microsoft**, and **Google**, attacks on data centres can disrupt entire digital economies.

Key Takeaways

Drone Strikes on AWS Infrastructure
Drone attacks damaged **AWS data centres in the UAE and Bahrain**.
Fires, power cuts and infrastructure damage caused cloud service disruptions.

Impact on Cloud Services
Key AWS services like **computing, storage and databases** were affected.
Businesses relying on these services experienced **connectivity and operational disruptions**.

Central Role of Data Centres
Data centres host **thousands of servers that run applications, store data and support digital services**.
They power sectors such as banking, e-commerce, AI and government systems.

Cloud Infrastructure as Strategic Assets
Modern economies depend heavily on **cloud computing infrastructure**.
A single data centre outage can affect **thousands of organisations simultaneously**.

Shift in Warfare Targets
Traditionally, wars targeted **oil facilities, pipelines, ports and power plants**.
Today, **digital infrastructure such as data centres and communication networks** has become a strategic target.

Military and Government Dependence on Cloud
Governments and militaries increasingly use cloud systems for **intelligence, logistics and communication**.
Disrupting these systems can weaken operational capabilities.

Economic and Financial Risks
Cloud outages can affect **financial markets, digital payments and online commerce**.
Therefore, attacks on data centres can create **large-scale economic instability**.

On India's fighter jet acquisitions-The Hindu Text and Context

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

India has approved the purchase of **114 Rafale fighter jets** from **Dassault Aviation** of **France**, costing about **₹3.25 lakh crore**. The deal includes **18 jets delivered directly** and **96 manufactured in India** under the *Make in India* initiative with participation from **Tata Advanced Systems**.

| Clear your doubts now.

However, a key issue is **limited technology transfer**. France has reportedly refused to share **critical source codes** for radar, electronic warfare, and mission systems. Without these codes, India cannot fully modify the aircraft or integrate indigenous weapons easily.

Modern fighter aircraft depend heavily on **software-controlled systems**. If India lacks access to core software, it remains dependent on foreign companies for upgrades and modifications.

India is also exploring alternatives such as cooperation with **United Aircraft Corporation** of **Russia** for the **Sukhoi Su-57** fighter jet, which may offer deeper technology access. At the same time, India is developing indigenous fighters like **HAL Tejas**, **Tejas Mk2**, and the **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)** to achieve long-term defence autonomy.

The broader debate is whether India should remain mainly a **buyer of advanced weapons** or develop the **technology and intellectual property needed to build them independently**.

Key Takeaways

Rafale Fighter Jet Procurement
India approved procurement of **114 Rafale jets** from Dassault Aviation.
Deal value: **₹3.25 lakh crore**.
18 jets fly-away; 96 to be manufactured in India.

IAF Squadron Strength Gap
The **Indian Air Force** currently operates **29 squadrons vs authorised strength of 42**.
Retirement of **MiG-21** aircraft increased this gap.

Limited Technology Transfer
France will share production technology but **not critical mission-system source codes**.
This restricts India's ability to customise software or integrate indigenous weapons.

Importance of Software in Modern Warfare
Modern fighter jets rely on **software-defined systems for radar, sensors and electronic warfare**.
Control over source code determines operational autonomy.

Diversification of Defence Partners
India maintains defence cooperation with **France, Russia, Israel and the United States**.
Russia has reportedly offered greater source-code access for the **Su-57** programme.

Push for Indigenous Defence Capability
India is developing domestic platforms such as **HAL Tejas, Tejas Mk2 and AMCA**.
Indigenous systems help accumulate long-term technological capability.

Strategic Autonomy Depends on R&D and Industry
Defence autonomy requires **higher R&D spending, strong aerospace supply chains, and skilled human capital**.
Owning **design architecture and software codes** is more important than merely assembling aircraft.

[What are the AI Impact Casebooks released in the AI Summit 2026?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

At the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**, a set of **AI Impact Casebooks** were released to showcase how **artificial intelligence is already solving real-life problems in the Global South**. These casebooks present practical examples of AI being used in **agriculture, healthcare, education, accessibility for the disabled, and women's empowerment**.

Instead of theoretical discussions about AI, the casebooks highlight **working projects that are improving farmers' incomes, assisting the visually impaired, helping doctors detect diseases early, supporting teachers in classrooms, and empowering women through digital tools**.

The initiative demonstrates how AI can be used for **inclusive development**, especially in developing countries where there are shortages of experts, resources, and infrastructure.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

Purpose of the AI Impact Casebooks
Released at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**.
Document real-world AI solutions benefiting communities in the **Global South**.
Focus areas include **agriculture, healthcare, education, accessibility and gender empowerment**.

AI for the Physically Challenged
Tools like **PathPal** help visually impaired people read text or currency through smartphone-based AI.
Shruti AI converts speech into **Indian Sign Language** for the deaf.
Vaani AI assists people with autism or speech impairments in communication.

AI Supporting Healthcare
Nayanamritham 2.0 uses AI to detect **diabetic retinopathy** in Kerala.
Cough Against TB (CATB) analyses cough sounds to identify tuberculosis risk.
AI tools also assist **cervical cancer screening and heart surgery planning**.

AI Improving Agriculture
Platforms like **MapMyCrop** use satellite data and AI to predict crop harvest timing.
AI-based soil analysis systems help optimise fertiliser use and increase yields.
Voice-based advisory systems provide **real-time farming advice in local languages**.

AI in Education
Tools like **BharatGen Yojaka** automate assessment while keeping teachers in control.
Platforms such as **Chimple** create AI-generated educational games in local languages.
AI tutors help students learn **coding and technical skills**.

AI for Women's Empowerment
NyayaSakhi-SWATI provides legal guidance to survivors of domestic violence.
AtenIA mentors girls in STEM fields using AI-based learning tools.
Digital training programmes help women detect **deepfakes and financial scams**.

Significance for Inclusive Development
AI solutions address shortages of **teachers, doctors, and agricultural advisors**.
They enable **low-cost, scalable solutions** for developing countries.
Demonstrates AI's potential as a tool for **social welfare and economic development**.

[Why India needs to radically rethink its doctoral education programmes-The Hindu science]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The article argues that **India needs to reform its Ph.D. education system** so that doctoral research becomes **more innovative, relevant, and socially useful**. The debate has intensified after **China** introduced **"practical Ph.Ds"**, where doctoral students are evaluated based on **real-world products, prototypes, or solutions** instead of only research papers and lengthy theses.

In India, Ph.D. programmes often take **many years to complete** because of rigid requirements such as publishing multiple papers, writing very long theses, and waiting for lengthy administrative processes. This sometimes leads to **superficial research, pressure to publish in predatory journals, and exploitation of students**.

The article suggests that Ph.D. research should focus more on **innovation, societal impact, and industry collaboration**, rather than merely increasing publication counts or producing lengthy dissertations.

Key Takeaways

China's "Practical Ph.D." Model
China has introduced Ph.D. degrees evaluated through **working prototypes and real-world applications**.
This approach values **applied innovation alongside academic research**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Problems in India's Ph.D. System

Ph.D. programmes often take **5–8 years or more** due to publication requirements and bureaucratic delays.
Progress is often measured by **number of papers rather than research quality**.

Publication Pressure and Predatory Journals

Students are pressured to publish in indexed journals.
This sometimes leads to **low-quality research and use of predatory journals**.

Exploitation of Ph.D. Scholars

In some labs, scholars are treated as **labour for supervisors' research output**.
Supervisors may prolong Ph.D. duration to maintain productivity in their labs.

Problems with Lengthy Theses

Many universities expect **200+ page theses**, assuming length equals quality.
Internationally, many universities now favour **shorter dissertations focused on core contributions**.

Limited Societal Impact of Research

Much doctoral research remains **unused in policy, industry, or public welfare**.
Many theses remain archived without practical application.

Need for Structural Reforms

India should encourage **industry collaboration, applied research, and innovation-focused evaluation**.
Ph.D. education should address **national challenges in health, agriculture, sustainability, and technology** rather than only academic publication metrics.

6th March 2026

[The legal framework that governs maritime conflict-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The incident involves the sinking of the Iranian warship **IRIS Dena** by a **US submarine** in international waters near **Sri Lanka**. The ship had earlier participated in **MILAN-2026**, a multinational naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy near Visakhapatnam. The attack resulted in the death of about 80 sailors and expanded the ongoing **US-Israel-Iran conflict** beyond West Asia into the **Indian Ocean region**, close to India.

The legal debate arises because the attack happened in **international waters** (outside any country's territorial sea). Maritime law mainly comes from the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, but UNCLOS mostly regulates **peacetime maritime activities**, not wartime conduct.

During armed conflicts, the **law of naval warfare** applies alongside UNCLOS. According to this framework:

A **warship belonging to a belligerent state** can be treated as a legitimate military target.
However, the **UN Charter** generally prohibits the use of force between states (Article 2(4)).
The main exception is **Article 51**, which allows **self-defence if a state faces an armed attack**.
Another legal basis could be **authorization by the UN Security Council**, though this is rare due to veto powers of permanent members.

Some experts argue the strike could be legally justified if it was **self-defence in an ongoing armed conflict**. Others argue it may be **unlawful** because the ship was reportedly on **peaceful passage** and outside the conflict zone.

Because the attack happened near Sri Lanka's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, Sri Lanka could participate in **search and rescue operations**, but it has **no authority to stop the attack itself**.

The incident highlights the **strategic and security challenges in the Indian Ocean**, where India maintains a strong naval presence.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

Incident in International Waters
- Iranian warship **IRIS Dena** was torpedoed by a US submarine near Sri Lanka.
- The attack occurred outside territorial waters, in international waters.

Expansion of Regional Conflict
- The incident widened the **US-Israel-Iran conflict** beyond West Asia.
- It brought the conflict close to the **Indian Ocean region**.

Role of UNCLOS
- Maritime governance is mainly regulated by **UNCLOS**.
- However, UNCLOS primarily deals with **peacetime maritime law**, not wartime conflict.

Law of Naval Warfare
- During armed conflict, **naval warfare laws operate alongside UNCLOS**.
- Warships of a belligerent state can become **legitimate military targets**.

UN Charter and Use of Force
- **Article 2(4)** prohibits the use of force between states.
- **Article 51** allows force in **self-defence against armed attack**.

Legal Debate on the Attack
- Some experts justify the strike as **self-defence during conflict**.
- Others argue it was illegal since the ship was on **peaceful passage**.

Implications for Indian Ocean Security
- The incident highlights **growing geopolitical tensions in the Indian Ocean**.
- It raises concerns for **India's maritime security and regional stability**.

[Turning to Iranian Kurds,US seeks out old ally in West Asia-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

As the **US–Israel–Iran conflict** expands, the United States is again relying on the **Kurds**, a long-standing non-state ally in West Asia. Intelligence agencies like the **CIA** and **Mossad** are reportedly supporting Kurdish groups to maintain a **ground presence against Iran**.

The **Kurds** are the **largest stateless ethnic group in the world**, with about **25–35 million people** spread across **Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Armenia**. Despite repeated attempts after **World War I**, they never succeeded in establishing an independent state called **Kurdistan**.

Historically, Kurdish groups have fought several governments. The **PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party)** began an insurgency against Turkey in 1978 for Kurdish independence. In recent decades, Kurdish militias also played a major role in fighting **ISIS** in **Syria and Iraq**, which made them important allies for the United States.

However, Kurdish ambitions often create tensions with regional states, especially **Turkey**, which views Kurdish militias as a security threat.

Recently, with changes in Syria's political situation and renewed tensions with Iran, the US appears to be **re-engaging Kurdish groups as strategic partners** once again.

Key Takeaways

Largest Stateless Ethnic Group
- Kurds number **25–35 million people**.
- They are spread across **Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Armenia** without their own country.

Failed Kurdish State After World War I
- The **Treaty of Sèvres (1920)** proposed a Kurdish state.

| Clear your doubts now.

The **Treaty of Lausanne (1923)** cancelled the plan, leaving Kurds without a homeland.

Conflict with Regional Governments

Kurdish movements faced repression in **Turkey and Iran**.

The **PKK insurgency (since 1978)** led to prolonged violence with Turkey.

Role in Fighting ISIS

Kurdish militias, especially the **YPG in Syria**, played a key role in defeating **ISIS**.

They became major **US military partners in the region**.

Strategic Value for the US

Kurds provide **local ground forces** without direct US troop deployment.

They help counter **Iranian and Russian influence in West Asia**.

Regional Geopolitical Tensions

Kurdish autonomy movements worry **Turkey and other neighbouring states**.

Kurdish forces have links with groups viewed as security threats by some countries.

Possible Renewed US Support

With rising tensions involving **Iran**, the US may again strengthen ties with Kurdish groups.

This reflects shifting **power dynamics in West Asia**.

Why India's rice production and export strategy requires a rethink-The Indian Express Explained Page

Economy

Easy Explanation

India is currently the **world's largest rice exporter and producer**. In **2024-25**, India exported about **21.69 million tonnes**, far more than **Thailand and Vietnam**, the other major exporters.

However, this success raises **environmental and financial concerns**.

Rice cultivation requires huge amounts of water. Paddy fields are flooded for long periods to control weeds. On average, producing **1 kg of rice requires around 3,000 litres of water**. Therefore, when India exports rice, it is also **indirectly exporting large quantities of water**, which strains groundwater resources.

Another issue is **economic efficiency**. India exports two main types of rice:

Basmati rice (premium, aromatic)
Non-basmati rice (bulk commodity)

Even though India exports **more non-basmati rice**, basmati earns **much higher revenue per kilogram** and uses **less water**. Therefore, experts suggest India should shift toward **high-value basmati and specialty aromatic rice varieties** rather than exporting large volumes of water-intensive rice.

Key Takeaways

India's Global Leadership in Rice

India became the **largest rice exporter since 2011-12**.

In **2024-25**, exports reached **21.69 million tonnes**.

Largest Rice Producer

India produced about **150 million tonnes of rice**, surpassing **China**.

This strengthens India's role in global food supply.

High Water Consumption

Rice cultivation requires around **5 million litres of water per acre**.

Approximately **3,000 litres of water are used per kg of rice produced**.

Virtual Water Export

| Clear your doubts now.

Exporting rice effectively means **exporting water resources**.
This raises concerns in water-stressed regions like **Punjab and Haryana**.

Basmati vs Non-Basmati

Basmati rice earns much higher export value per kg.
It also consumes **less water due to later sowing with monsoon rains**.

Promoting High-Value Varieties

Experts recommend promoting **GI-tagged aromatic rice varieties** such as
Kalanamak
Katarni
Gobindobhog
Koraput Kalajeera
Seeraga Samba

Policy Shift for Sustainability

Expand **basmati cultivation within GI areas**.
Increase procurement in eastern states where **groundwater stress is lower**.

[What are 'gravity bombs' which US is planning to shift to in Iran?-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The **United States military** has announced a shift in its bombing strategy against **Iran**. Until now, the US mainly used **long-range "stand-off" weapons** such as cruise missiles and drones that can be launched **from far away**, outside the reach of Iranian air defence systems.

Now, the US plans to start using **precision gravity bombs** weighing **500, 1,000, and 2,000 pounds**. These bombs are dropped directly from aircraft flying over or near the target.

Earlier weapons like the **Tomahawk Cruise Missile** and **LUCAS** were used to destroy **radars and surface-to-air missile systems**. Once these air defences were weakened, aircraft could safely enter the airspace.

Gravity bombs are cheaper but riskier because **pilots must fly closer to the target**. However, modern upgrades such as **Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM)** allow these bombs to hit targets with high precision using **GPS guidance**.

These bombs are part of the **Mark 80 series**, widely used in conflicts like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

The announcement suggests the US believes it has achieved **air superiority over Iranian air defences**, allowing aircraft to operate safely in Iranian airspace.

Key Takeaways

Shift in US Military Strategy

The US is moving from **long-range stand-off strikes** to **direct bombing missions**.
This indicates greater control over the battlefield.

Use of Stand-Off Weapons Earlier

Weapons like **Tomahawk cruise missiles** and **LUCAS drones** were used initially.
They strike targets from **outside enemy air defence range**.

What Are Gravity Bombs

Gravity bombs are **unpowered "free-fall" bombs** dropped from aircraft.
Their path depends on **gravity, aircraft speed, and altitude**.

Modern Precision Bombs

With **JDAM kits**, gravity bombs gain **GPS guidance and steerable fins**.
This turns traditional bombs into **precision-guided weapons**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Conventional vs Nuclear Gravity Bombs

- Current bombs are **conventional explosives** (Mark 80 series).
- Nuclear versions like **B61 and B83** exist but require **presidential authorization**.

Cost vs Risk Trade-off

- Cruise missiles cost **millions of dollars each**.
- Gravity bombs cost about **$25,000–$30,000** but require aircraft to fly closer to targets.

Indicator of Air Supremacy

- Using gravity bombs suggests the US believes **Iran's air defences have been weakened**.
- This indicates possible **air superiority in the conflict zone**.

[Our stakes are high in West Asia.Delhi must call for diplomacy, de-escalation-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing war between the **United States–Israel and Iran** has created serious instability in **West Asia (Middle East)**. The conflict began with missile strikes on Tehran and has expanded across the region.

For **India**, this conflict is not just a distant geopolitical event. India has major **economic, energy, and diaspora interests** in the Gulf region. Millions of Indians work there, and India imports a large share of its **oil and gas** from West Asian countries.

The conflict has already disrupted global markets. Oil prices have increased sharply and shipping through the **Strait of Hormuz**, one of the world's most important oil routes, is under threat. Since a large portion of global oil passes through this narrow passage, any disruption can increase energy prices globally.

The article argues that the war also raises questions under **international law**. The **United Nations Charter** generally prohibits the use of force between states unless it is **self-defence or authorised by the UN Security Council**. Critics argue that neither condition clearly applied in this case.

There were also ongoing diplomatic negotiations involving Iran's nuclear programme, reportedly mediated by **Oman**, which might have resolved the issue peacefully. Therefore, many analysts believe diplomacy should have been pursued instead of military escalation.

For India, the priority is **regional stability** because war in West Asia can lead to higher oil prices, disruptions to global trade, and risks to Indian citizens living in the region.

Key Takeaways

War Disrupting West Asian Stability

- The US-Israel-Iran conflict has destabilised the regional order.
- The war risks spreading across multiple countries.

Importance of West Asia for India

- Millions of Indians live and work in Gulf countries.
- The region is vital for **India's energy security and trade**.

International Law Concerns

- The **UN Charter** prohibits use of force between states.
- Exceptions exist only for **self-defence or UN Security Council approval**.

Diplomatic Negotiations Were Underway

- Talks mediated by **Oman** reportedly aimed to limit Iran's nuclear programme.
- Military escalation disrupted this diplomatic process.

Risk to Global Energy Markets

- Oil prices have risen sharply due to uncertainty.

| Clear your doubts now.

Disruption of the **Strait of Hormuz** could severely impact global oil supply.

Potential Regional Escalation

Iranian retaliation and proxy attacks could spread conflict across West Asia.

The region may face prolonged instability and security threats.

India's Policy Position

India is advocating **diplomacy and de-escalation**.

Peace in West Asia is crucial for **India's economic growth and development**.

[As nicotine pouches spread, calls for regulations, ban get louder-The Hindu Science]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Nicotine pouches are small packets containing **nicotine powder, flavourings, and other chemicals**. Users place them **between the gum and lip**, where nicotine gets absorbed into the bloodstream through the mouth lining.

Unlike cigarettes or chewing tobacco, these products **do not contain tobacco leaves** and do not produce smoke. However, they still contain **nicotine**, which is a **highly addictive chemical**.

Recently, the **Tamil Nadu Directorate of Drugs Control (DDC)** issued a public warning because these pouches are **not approved for sale in India**. Authorities also sent **show-cause notices to dealers selling them online**.

Health experts warn that these products are dangerous because:

They are **highly addictive**.

Flavoured varieties can **attract youth and first-time users**.

They can cause **heart problems and gum damage**.

Some products contain **very high nicotine levels (up to 50 mg)**.

Although some nicotine products like **patches and tablets** are allowed for **nicotine replacement therapy**, nicotine pouches are **not approved for quitting smoking**.

Doctors and anti-tobacco activists are therefore demanding **strict regulation or a complete ban**, similar to India's ban on **e-cigarettes**.

Key Takeaways

What Nicotine Pouches Are

Small pouches containing **nicotine powder and flavourings**.

Placed between **lip and gum for absorption through mouth tissues**.

Highly Addictive Substance

Nicotine is a **powerful addictive chemical**.

Particularly harmful for **youth, pregnant women, and young adults**.

Not Approved in India

The **Tamil Nadu Directorate of Drugs Control** warned against their sale and use.

Their **safety, efficacy, and quality are not established**.

Easy Online Availability

Nicotine pouches are being **sold through multiple online platforms**.

Over **100 online portals reportedly sell them**.

Health Risks

Possible **cardiovascular problems** and **gum diseases**.

High nicotine concentration increases **addiction risk**.

Regulatory Concerns

| Clear your doubts now.

Activists fear nicotine pouches could become **an alternative to banned e-cigarettes and chewing tobacco**.
Flavoured products make them attractive to **new users and adolescents**.

Demand for Strong Regulation

Experts recommend **state-level bans and national regulation**.
Cybercrime units may need to monitor **online sales platforms**.

9th March 2026

[Why Iran war threatens India's fertilisers supply-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

Fertilisers are essential for crop production because they provide nutrients like **Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K) and Sulphur (S)**. Although India produces enough food crops, it is **not self-sufficient in fertilisers**. The country imports large quantities every year. For example, India imports about **10 million tonnes of urea** and **6.5 million tonnes of DAP**, while **potash fertiliser is almost completely imported**.

A major share of these fertiliser imports comes from **West Asian countries**, especially the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** nations such as Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These countries supply finished fertilisers as well as key inputs like **ammonia and sulphur**, which are required to manufacture fertilisers in India.

Another important issue is **natural gas dependence**. Urea production requires natural gas as a raw material, and the fertiliser sector uses **around 29% of India's natural gas consumption**. However, more than half of India's natural gas is imported, largely from **Qatar, UAE and Oman**. Any conflict in West Asia can therefore disrupt gas supplies and affect fertiliser production.

India also lacks domestic reserves of crucial fertiliser minerals such as **rock phosphate, potash and sulphur**. These raw materials are imported from countries like **Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia**. If global conflicts disrupt supply chains or raise prices, fertiliser availability and affordability in India could be affected.

The current war involving Iran raises concerns because many fertiliser inputs and energy supplies pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**, an important global shipping route. If this route is blocked or disrupted, India may face difficulties importing LNG, ammonia and sulphur needed for fertiliser production.

At present, India has **comfortable fertiliser stocks**, which reduces immediate risk. However, if the conflict continues for a long time, it may create supply shortages, increase fertiliser prices and eventually impact **agricultural production and food security** in India.

Key Takeaways

High Import Dependence
India imports large quantities of fertilisers such as urea, DAP and potash.
West Asia as Major Supplier
GCC countries supply a significant share of fertilisers and fertiliser inputs to India.
Natural Gas Dependency
Fertiliser plants rely heavily on imported natural gas for urea production.
Lack of Domestic Mineral Resources
India has very limited reserves of rock phosphate, potash and sulphur.
Strategic Shipping Route Risk
Many fertiliser inputs pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**, making supplies vulnerable to conflict.
Current Stock Situation
India currently has comfortable fertiliser stocks due to recent large imports.

| Clear your doubts now.

Long-Term Food Security Risk

Prolonged war could disrupt fertiliser supply chains and affect agricultural productivity.

[Electing a Rajya Sabha member:The rules,process, and politics-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The **Rajya Sabha** is the Upper House of Parliament. Unlike the Lok Sabha, whose members are directly elected by citizens, **Rajya Sabha members are elected indirectly by the elected Members of State Legislative Assemblies (MLAs)**. The House can have **up to 250 members**, of which **238 are elected from states and Union Territories** and **12 are nominated by the President** for their contribution to fields such as literature, science, art, and social service.

Rajya Sabha elections use the **system of proportional representation through the single transferable vote (STV)**. MLAs rank candidates in order of preference. A candidate must secure a required **quota of votes** calculated through a formula based on the number of MLAs and seats available. If candidates receive surplus votes, those votes are transferred to second-preference candidates.

Members serve a **six-year term**, and **one-third of the members retire every two years**, which makes the Rajya Sabha a **permanent body that is never dissolved**. The elections are conducted according to the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, and voting takes place through an **open ballot system** to reduce cross-voting.

Key Takeaways

Indirect Election to Rajya Sabha

- Members of the Rajya Sabha are not elected directly by citizens.
- They are elected by **MLAs of State Legislative Assemblies and electoral colleges of some Union Territories**.
- This system reflects the **federal character of the Indian Constitution**, giving states representation in Parliament.

Composition and Maximum Strength

- The Constitution allows the Rajya Sabha to have **a maximum of 250 members**.
- **238 members represent states and Union Territories**, while **12 members are nominated by the President**.
- Nominated members are selected for their **special contributions in literature, science, art, and social service**.

Single Transferable Vote System

- Elections are conducted using **proportional representation with a single transferable vote (STV)**.
- MLAs rank candidates by **first preference, second preference, and so on**.
- Surplus votes and eliminated candidates' votes are transferred until all seats are filled.

Quota Formula for Winning

- A candidate must achieve a **minimum vote quota** to win the election.
- The quota is calculated using the formula:
  (Total MLAs voting ÷ (Seats + 1)) + 1.
- This ensures that seats are distributed **proportionally among parties according to their Assembly strength**.

Eligibility and Term

- A candidate must be **at least 30 years old** to become a Rajya Sabha member.
- Each member serves a **six-year term**.
- The Rajya Sabha is a **permanent body**, with **one-third of members retiring every two years**.

Open Ballot and Anti-Defection Control

- Rajya Sabha elections use an **open ballot system**, where MLAs must show their ballot to authorised party representatives.
- This rule was introduced to **reduce cross-voting and maintain party discipline** during elections.

Political Importance of Rajya Sabha Elections

- The outcome of elections depends on the **numerical strength of parties in State Assemblies**.
- When no party has enough numbers, **alliances, strategic voting, or cross-voting** may influence results.

| Clear your doubts now.

Therefore, Rajya Sabha elections often become **important indicators of political power at the state level** and can impact national politics.

‘Poll results sea change in Nepal politics...RSP would be keen to partner with India’-The Indian Express Explained Page

International relations

Easy Explanation

Nepal’s recent election marks a **major political change**. The **Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)**, a new party formed in 2022, won **120 out of 165 directly elected seats**. Its leader **Balendra (Balen) Shah**, a young politician and former Mayor of Kathmandu, defeated former Prime Minister **K.P. Sharma Oli**, showing that voters wanted **new leadership instead of traditional political elites**.

Public anger against the old political establishment played a major role. For nearly three decades, Nepal’s politics was dominated by leaders like **Oli, Prachanda, and Sher Bahadur Deuba**. Youth-led protests and dissatisfaction with corruption, unemployment, and political instability pushed voters to support a new party promising change.

Balendra Shah’s rise is also important because he could become **Nepal’s first Madhesi Prime Minister**, representing the Terai region. For India, the election outcome appears positive because **anti-India sentiment was largely absent**, and the new leadership may seek stronger economic cooperation with India.

Key Takeaways

Major Political Shift in Nepal
- The election represents a **“sea change” in Nepalese politics**, with voters rejecting traditional political elites.
- The **Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)** secured a decisive victory, signalling strong public demand for new leadership and governance reforms.

Rise of a New Political Force
- RSP is a **new political party formed in 2022**, representing young and reform-oriented leaders.
- Its success shows the growing influence of **youth-driven politics and anti-establishment sentiment** in Nepal.

Role of Youth and Demographic Change
- Nepal has a **very young population with a median age around 25 years**.
- Many young Nepalese work abroad and compare Nepal’s development with other countries, increasing expectations for better governance and economic opportunities.

Key Electoral Issues
- The election campaign focused on **unemployment, corruption, and political instability**.
- Nepal’s heavy dependence on **remittances from migrant workers** highlights the lack of domestic economic opportunities.

End of Dominance of Traditional Leaders
- For decades, Nepal’s politics revolved around leaders like **K.P. Sharma Oli, Prachanda, and Sher Bahadur Deuba**.
- The election results significantly weakened these traditional parties, showing public dissatisfaction with the existing political system.

Significance of Madhesi Leadership
- Balendra Shah’s emergence as a possible **first Madhesi Prime Minister** is historically significant.
- It represents greater political inclusion for the **Madhesi community of the Terai region**, which had long demanded stronger representation.

Implications for India and China
- The absence of strong **anti-India rhetoric** during the election is seen as a positive sign for India-Nepal relations.
- The new leadership may focus on **economic cooperation with India**, while China’s attempts to consolidate communist forces in Nepal may lose influence in the near future.

| Clear your doubts now.

[From 'control' to 'management': Behind AP's new population policy-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The Andhra Pradesh government has proposed a **Population Management Policy** to address the state's **declining fertility rate**. The state's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is 1.5**, which is far below the **replacement level of 2.1** needed to maintain a stable population. This means fewer children are being born, which could lead to a **shrinking workforce and a growing elderly population** in the future.

Instead of focusing on controlling population growth, the new policy focuses on **managing demographic changes**. The government wants to encourage families to have more children and also improve **maternal health, childcare, and support for elderly citizens**.

The policy proposes **financial incentives, free education for additional children, and subsidies for fertility treatments such as IVF**. It also aims to reduce **C-section births, teenage pregnancies, and improve healthcare services**. The broader goal is to balance population growth and maintain a healthy working-age population.

Key Takeaways

Shift from Population Control to Population Management
- Andhra Pradesh is moving away from the earlier focus on **reducing population growth**.
- The new approach focuses on **managing demographic changes**, especially declining fertility and ageing population.
- The policy aims to maintain a **balanced population structure with a stable workforce**.

Declining Fertility Rate in Andhra Pradesh
- The state's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is 1.5**, much lower than the **replacement level of 2.1**.
- A lower fertility rate means **fewer children are being born**, which may lead to a shrinking labour force in the future.
- Similar demographic trends are seen across **many southern states of India**.

Ageing Population and Economic Concerns
- Andhra Pradesh's **median age is about 32.5 years**, higher than India's average of **28.4 years**.
- Around **10% of the population is currently above 60 years**, and this may rise to **23% by 2047**.
- An ageing population increases **pressure on social security systems, healthcare, and government finances**.

Incentives to Encourage More Children
- The policy proposes **₹25,000 financial incentive for the birth of a second or third child**.
- Families with a third child may receive **₹1,000 per month for five years for nutrition support**.
- The government also proposes **free education up to 18 years for the second and third child in government institutions**.

Support for Fertility and Health Services
- The policy plans to **subsidise IVF treatment** through a public–private partnership model.
- This is intended to support **around 11.7 lakh infertile couples in the state**.
- The government also aims to **train 10,000 healthcare assistants every year** to improve maternal and child health services.

Improving Maternal and Child Health
- Andhra Pradesh currently has a **very high rate of C-section births (around 67.5%)**, and the government aims to reduce it to **below 40%**.
- The policy also aims to **reduce teenage pregnancies and promote better maternal healthcare practices**.
- Preventive health check-ups and awareness programmes are also part of the strategy.

Political and National Implications
- Population changes in southern states have raised concerns about **future parliamentary representation after the next delimitation exercise**.
- Since delimitation is based on population, states with slower population growth may **lose seats relative to northern states**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Therefore, population trends are becoming an important **political and governance issue in India**.

[Revisiting 'The Wealth of Nations' , and its abiding suspicion of concentrated power-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

"The Wealth of Nations" was written by **Adam Smith** and published in **1776**. It is one of the most important books in economics because it changed how people understood **wealth, markets, and economic development**. Smith argued that the wealth of a country should not be measured by how much gold or trade surplus it has, but by **how productive its economy is and how much it improves the living standards of ordinary people**.

Smith explained that economic growth largely depends on the **division of labour**, where work is divided into smaller specialised tasks. This increases productivity and allows markets to expand. However, Smith did not blindly support free markets. He believed markets should function **within a framework of justice, institutions, and regulation**, because concentrated economic power and monopolies can harm society.

Smith also criticised **mercantilism**, the system where governments tried to accumulate wealth through trade restrictions and monopolies. He argued that such policies often benefit **powerful merchants and elites rather than the general public**. His work emphasised that economic systems should promote **competition, fairness, and broader prosperity**, while avoiding excessive concentration of power.

Key Takeaways

Publication and Historical Importance
- *The Wealth of Nations* was written by **Adam Smith and published in 1776**.
- The book is considered the **foundation of modern economics and political economy**.
- It reshaped debates on **economic freedom, prosperity, and the role of markets in society**.

New Understanding of National Wealth
- Smith challenged the mercantilist idea that wealth depends on **gold reserves or trade surplus**.
- Instead, he argued that a nation's wealth depends on its **productive capacity and ability to raise living standards for ordinary citizens**.
- This shifted focus from **state accumulation of wealth to overall economic productivity**.

Importance of Division of Labour
- Smith emphasised the role of **division of labour**, where tasks are specialised to improve efficiency.
- Specialisation increases **productivity and economic growth**, especially in large markets.
- However, he also warned that excessive specialisation can **limit human creativity and intellectual development**.

Markets, Self-Interest and the Invisible Hand
- Smith famously argued that individuals pursuing **self-interest in markets can indirectly benefit society**.
- However, he did not believe markets should be completely unregulated.
- Economic activity must operate within a **framework of justice, laws, and institutions**.

Critique of Mercantilism and Monopolies
- Smith strongly criticised **mercantilism**, which relied on trade restrictions and colonial monopolies.
- He believed these policies mainly benefited **powerful merchants and elites**, not the wider population.
- He warned that governments are often **captured by vested economic interests**.

Suspicion of Concentrated Economic Power
- Smith was sceptical of **large concentrations of wealth and corporate power**.
- He noted that business owners often **collude to influence laws and exploit workers**.
- His ideas therefore emphasised the need to **limit monopolies and protect fair competition**.

Moral and Social Dimensions of Economic Growth
- Smith recognised that economic systems have **social and moral consequences**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Poverty can create **social exclusion and inequality**, while extreme division of labour may harm workers' intellectual growth.
Therefore, he supported **public education and institutional reforms** to balance economic efficiency with social wellbeing.

[Why India's 'leaky pipeline' in research is unlike rest of the world-The Hindu Science]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The **"leaky pipeline" in STEM** refers to the gradual decline in the number of women as they move from **science education to research careers**. Globally, this problem usually begins early: fewer girls study STEM subjects in school and college. As a result, women make up only **35% of STEM graduates and about 30% of the STEM workforce worldwide**.

India appears different at first. A large number of girls study science in school and college. Around **60% of science students after Class 10 are girls**, and India has one of the **highest proportions of female STEM graduates** in the world.

However, the real "leak" in India occurs **after higher education**. Even though many women complete science degrees and PhDs, only **about 18% of India's research and development workforce are women**. Social expectations, family responsibilities, strict recruitment systems, and limited research opportunities make it difficult for many women scientists to continue long-term careers in research.

Key Takeaways

Meaning of the 'Leaky Pipeline' in STEM
The term describes the **gradual loss of women at different stages of science education and careers**.
Globally, the gap begins early because **fewer girls choose STEM subjects in school and college**.
As a result, women are underrepresented in **scientific research and leadership positions**.
India's Unique Pattern
Unlike many countries, India has **high participation of girls in science education**.
Around **60% of students in the science stream after Class 10 are girls**.
Women constitute **43% of STEM graduates at the bachelor's level and nearly half at postgraduate and PhD levels**.
Major Leak Occurs After Education
Despite strong participation in education, **women form only about 18% of India's research and development workforce**.
Representation is even lower in elite institutions like **IITs and IISc**, where women scientists remain a small minority.
This shows that the biggest loss occurs during the **transition from education to research careers**.
Social and Cultural Barriers
In India, women often face **social expectations related to marriage, relocation, and family responsibilities**.
The period after completing a PhD often coincides with **pressure to settle down or prioritise household duties**.
These factors make long-term research careers difficult to pursue.
Structural Barriers in the Research System
Research organisations often have **strict age limits for entry-level scientist positions**.
Recruitment may be **irregular, limited, or concentrated in specific locations**.
These constraints reduce opportunities for women who face **mobility or time limitations**.
Nature of Research Jobs
Academic and scientific research jobs usually require **long-term commitment and physical presence in institutions**.
Unlike some other professions, **remote or flexible work options are limited**.
This makes it difficult for women balancing **family and professional responsibilities**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Position Gap in Scientific Careers

Many women scientists end up in **short-term fellowships, contractual positions, or grant-based roles**.
These positions often lack **job security, promotions, benefits, and stable career progression**.
As a result, a large number of trained women scientists **drop out of long-term research careers**, creating the "leaky pipeline" in India.

Why did U.S. SC reject Trump's tariffs?-The Hindu text and Context

International relations

Easy Explanation

The **U.S. Supreme Court rejected tariffs imposed by Donald Trump** because he used a law that **did not legally allow the President to impose tariffs**. Trump relied on the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)**, a 1977 law that allows a President to regulate economic transactions during a national emergency. However, the law was mainly meant for **sanctions, freezing foreign assets, or blocking financial transactions**, not for imposing import tariffs.

After returning to power, Trump declared national emergencies related to **drug trafficking and trade imbalances** and imposed tariffs on imports from countries like **China, Canada, Mexico, and others**. The Supreme Court ruled that **tariffs are a form of taxation**, and according to the **U.S. Constitution, only Congress has the authority to impose taxes and regulate foreign trade**.

The Court therefore held that Trump **overstepped his powers by using IEEPA for tariffs**, because Congress had not clearly authorised such action. However, the ruling does not completely stop the President from imposing tariffs. It only prevents the use of **IEEPA for this purpose**, meaning tariffs must instead be imposed through **other laws passed by Congress**.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Ruling

The **U.S. Supreme Court struck down tariffs imposed by Donald Trump in 2025**.
The Court ruled that the law he used **(IEEPA)** does not give the President the authority to impose tariffs.
The decision clarified the **limits of presidential power in trade policy**.

Law Used by Trump – IEEPA

Trump relied on the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (1977)**.
The law allows the President to regulate **economic transactions during national emergencies involving foreign threats**.
It has historically been used to **freeze foreign assets, impose sanctions, or block financial transfers**, not tariffs.

Tariffs Imposed by Trump

Trump imposed **25% tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico**.
He also imposed **10% tariffs on imports from China and other trading partners**.
Some countries, including **India**, faced higher tariffs under a reciprocal tariff programme.

Constitutional Issue

The **U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to impose taxes, duties, and tariffs**.
The Court ruled that tariffs fall clearly within **Congress's authority**, not the President's unilateral power.
Therefore, the President must have **explicit approval from Congress** to impose such tariffs.

Alternative Laws for Tariffs

The ruling does not stop tariffs completely.
Presidents can still use other laws such as:
Section 122 (Trade Act 1974) – temporary tariffs up to 15%.
Section 301 (Trade Act 1974) – tariffs against unfair trade practices.
Section 232 (Trade Expansion Act 1962) – tariffs for national security reasons.

Role of Congress

Congress now plays a **central role in defining trade powers**.

| Clear your doubts now.

It can **expand, restrict, or supervise presidential authority on tariffs through legislation**.
The Court emphasised that large-scale tariffs must have **clear statutory backing**.

Impact on Businesses and Future Presidents

Around **$180 billion in tariffs had been collected before the ruling**.
Many companies have filed lawsuits seeking **refunds for tariffs they paid**.
The decision also sets an important **legal precedent limiting the use of emergency powers for trade measures**.

Why are Finance Commission grants to cities still so limited?-The Hindu Text and Context

Polity

Easy Explanation

Cities generate a large share of India's economic activity—**around 67% of GDP and about 90% of government revenue** comes from urban areas. However, the financial support given to cities through the **Finance Commission (FC)** remains very small. Even under the **16th Finance Commission**, urban local bodies will receive about **₹3.56 lakh crore between 2026 and 2031**, which is roughly **0.13% of India's GDP**, almost the same as earlier allocations.

Another issue is that India's urban population is rapidly growing and may cross **600 million by the end of the decade**. When the limited funds are distributed across such a large population, the **per-capita financial support to cities remains low or even declines**.

In addition, many grants are **"tied grants"**, meaning cities can only spend them on specific sectors such as water supply or sanitation. The Finance Commission has also linked some grants to **performance conditions**, such as improving property tax collection and maintaining financial transparency. While these conditions aim to improve governance, they also **limit the financial flexibility of urban local bodies**.

Key Takeaways

Cities Generate Most of India's Economic Activity

Urban areas contribute **around 67% of India's GDP** and generate nearly **90% of government revenues**.
Despite this economic importance, the **financial transfers to urban local bodies remain relatively small**.
This creates a gap between the **economic role of cities and the resources available for urban development**.

Limited Share of Finance Commission Transfers

Under the **15th Finance Commission**, cities received about **₹1.2–1.3 lakh crore over five years**.
The **16th Finance Commission proposes ₹3.56 lakh crore between 2026–2031**, about **₹75,000 crore per year**.
Even with this increase, the transfer remains roughly **0.13% of GDP**, indicating **no major structural increase in funding**.

Rapid Urban Population Growth

India's urban population was about **470 million in 2020** and may reach **600 million or more by 2030**.
When funds are distributed across this expanding population, **per-capita financial support becomes very small**.
This makes it difficult for cities to invest adequately in **infrastructure, housing, transport, and public services**.

Issue of Tied Grants

Many Finance Commission grants are **earmarked for specific sectors**, such as **water supply, sanitation, and wastewater management**.
Such **tied grants limit the fiscal autonomy of urban local bodies**.
Cities cannot freely allocate funds according to **their local development priorities**.

Performance-Based Conditions

Around **20% of the funds are linked to performance criteria**.
Cities must meet conditions such as **improving financial discipline, conducting local elections, publishing audited accounts, and increasing property tax collection**.
If these conditions are not met, **cities may lose access to part of the funds**.

Concerns about Federalism

Urban development is constitutionally a **State subject under the Indian federal system**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Some Finance Commission incentives, such as encouraging **merging peri-urban villages into cities**, may interfere with state-level planning.
This raises concerns about **Centre–State balance in urban governance**.

Other Structural Issues

A large amount of money collected through **cesses and surcharges by the Centre (about 2.2% of GDP)** is not shared with states because it lies outside the **divisible pool of taxes**.
Much of this revenue originates from **urban economic activity**, yet cities do not receive a proportionate share.
Experts argue that cities should be given **greater financial autonomy and the ability to plan their own development priorities**.

10th March 2026

[India puts supply security first amid oil price surge-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

The ongoing **Iran war** has sharply increased global oil prices, creating concerns about energy supply and economic stability. For **India**, which imports **over 88% of its crude oil**, this situation is especially risky. Oil prices briefly touched **$120 per barrel** and stayed above **$100**, affecting global markets and causing stock market declines.

A major reason for the disruption is the **Strait of Hormuz**, one of the world's most important oil transit routes. The strait connects the **Persian Gulf** to the **Arabian Sea**, and about **one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes through it**. Due to the conflict, ships are avoiding this route after warnings and attacks, causing oil transport to slow down drastically.

India imports about **2.5–2.7 million barrels per day** of crude oil through this strait, mainly from **Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait**. If this route remains disrupted, oil-producing countries may reduce production due to limited storage capacity, further tightening supply.

Higher oil prices affect India's economy in several ways:

Increase the **import bill**
Widen the **current account deficit (CAD)**
Weaken the **rupee**
Raise **inflation**

To manage the situation, the government is focusing on **supply security**. India currently has **6–8 weeks of crude oil and fuel reserves**, and refiners are increasing imports from other regions such as **Russia**. The government has also invoked the **Essential Commodities Act** to ensure that LPG production is prioritised for domestic households.

Natural gas supplies may also be affected because **more than half of India's LNG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**. If shortages occur, the government may **reallocate gas supplies to priority sectors like fertilisers and city gas distribution**.

Overall, India's strategy is to **maintain fuel availability, diversify import sources, and control inflation** despite global energy disruptions.

Key Takeaways

1. Oil Price Surge

Oil prices rose close to **$120 per barrel** due to the Iran conflict.
Prices stabilised slightly above **$100 per barrel** after discussions of releasing global oil reserves.

| Clear your doubts now.

2. Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

The **Strait of Hormuz** carries **about 20% of global oil trade**.
Around **15 million barrels of oil pass daily** through this narrow waterway.

3. India's Import Dependence

India imports **over 88% of its crude oil needs**.
Nearly **half of India's oil imports pass through Hormuz**.

4. Economic Impact on India

Every **$1 rise in oil price increases India's import bill by about $2 billion annually**.
Higher prices can widen the **current account deficit and inflation**.

5. Government Strategy

India is **diversifying crude sources** and increasing purchases from non-Hormuz regions such as Russia.
Current reserves can cover **6–8 weeks of consumption**.

6. Fuel Price Management

Petrol and diesel prices have been **kept stable since April 2022**.
Public sector oil companies absorb losses when global prices rise.

7. Emergency Measures

The government invoked the **Essential Commodities Act** to prioritise LPG supply to households.
Gas allocation may be **reprioritised to critical sectors** like fertilisers and city gas distribution if shortages occur.

[Mojtaba Khamenei:Symbolism in Iran's pick for Supreme Leader-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

After the death of **Ali Khamenei** in military strikes during the Iran war, his son **Mojtaba Khamenei** has been chosen as the new **Supreme Leader of Iran**.

This makes Mojtaba the **third Supreme Leader** in Iran's Islamic Republic after **Ruhollah Khomeini** (1979–1989) and Ali Khamenei (1989–2026).

However, Mojtaba's selection is unusual because:

He **never held an elected political office**.
He is **not a senior religious authority** yet.

His rise is mainly linked to his **strong connections with the powerful military organisation called the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**. Over the years, he built influence among **security forces, clerics, and political networks** around the Supreme Leader's office.

The ongoing war and external threats from the **United States and Israel** have pushed Iran toward a **hardline leadership choice**, as the regime wants someone trusted by the security establishment.

| Clear your doubts now.

Another controversial aspect is **hereditary succession**. The **1979 Iranian Revolution** aimed to remove monarchy-style hereditary rule, yet the leadership passing from father to son creates concerns that Iran may be moving toward a **dynastic model of leadership**.

Supporters argue that the **"martyrdom" narrative**—the killing of Ali Khamenei—can strengthen political legitimacy in **Shia Islam**, helping the regime unite people around continuity and resistance.

In short, Mojtaba's appointment reflects **political continuity, security control, and wartime consolidation of power** in Iran.

Key Takeaways

1. New Supreme Leader

Mojtaba Khamenei has become Iran's third Supreme Leader.
He succeeded his father **Ali Khamenei**, who ruled since 1989.

2. Role of the Supreme Leader

The Supreme Leader is the **highest authority in Iran's political system**.
He controls the military, judiciary, and major political decisions.

3. Influence of the IRGC

Mojtaba has strong ties with the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**.
The IRGC is one of the most powerful institutions in Iran.

4. Wartime Context

The Iran war and external threats from the US and Israel influenced the leadership choice.
A **hardline figure trusted by the security establishment** was preferred.

5. Debate over Dynastic Succession

Iran officially rejects hereditary rule since the **Iranian Revolution**.
The father-to-son succession raises concerns about a **dynastic leadership trend**.

6. Religious Legitimacy

Mojtaba is currently a **mid-level cleric** but may be elevated to the rank of **Ayatollah**.
His father also became Supreme Leader without being a senior cleric initially.

7. Symbolism of Martyrdom

The death of Ali Khamenei can be used politically within **Shia Islamic ideology**.
The regime may use this narrative to **strengthen unity and legitimacy during crisis**.

[China and Afghanistan:Economy, terror attacks reshaping ancient relationship-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The relationship between **China** and **Afghanistan** is very old and shaped by **trade, security concerns, and economic interests**. Today, the relationship is influenced mainly by **terrorism, regional stability, and economic cooperation**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Recently, Afghanistan's acting foreign minister **Amir Khan Muttaqi** met **Yue Xiaoyong** to discuss tensions between Afghanistan and **Pakistan**. China wants peace between them because instability affects its regional interests.

China is especially worried about **terrorist attacks** targeting Chinese citizens in Afghanistan. Several attacks have killed Chinese nationals, and China fears that **Uighur extremist groups** could use Afghanistan as a base to operate against China's Xinjiang region.

Despite security concerns, China wants to expand **economic cooperation**, especially in **mineral resources, infrastructure, and trade**. Afghanistan also hopes to benefit from China's economic power.

Historical background

Relations between China and Afghanistan go back thousands of years:

Both regions were once connected through **Buddhist cultural exchanges**.
Trade occurred through the **Silk Road**, which passed through northern Afghanistan.

In the **19th century**, Afghanistan was caught in the **Great Game** between the British and Russian empires. China played little role during this period.

In the **Cold War era**, China's role increased:

Diplomatic relations began in **1950**.
The border between the two countries was settled in **1963**.

During the **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan**, China supported the **Mujahideen** along with the United States and Pakistan against Soviet forces.

Later, when the **Taliban** took power in 1996, China did not officially recognise them but maintained contact to ensure that **Uighur militants** were not supported.

After the Taliban returned to power in **2021**, China kept its embassy open and continued engagement. China wants a **stable Afghanistan that is economically connected with China**, but it **does not want military involvement**.

Key Takeaways

1. Strategic Interests of China

China seeks **regional stability** in Afghanistan to protect its economic and security interests.
It also wants peaceful relations between Afghanistan and **Pakistan**.

2. Terrorism Concerns

China fears **Uighur extremist groups** may operate from Afghanistan.
Terrorist attacks on Chinese nationals have increased China's caution.

3. Economic Motivation

China is interested in Afghanistan's **mineral resources and infrastructure projects**.
Afghanistan hopes to benefit from China's economic investments.

4. Ancient Historical Links

Interaction dates back to the **Silk Road**.
Cultural exchanges occurred during the **Buddhist era**.

| Clear your doubts now.

5. Cold War Dynamics

China supported the **Mujahideen** during the **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan**.
This was part of the global Cold War power struggle.

6. Engagement with the Taliban

China did not recognise the **Taliban** earlier but maintained contacts.
The goal was to prevent support for Uighur militants.

7. Present Chinese Policy

China wants **economic integration and stability in Afghanistan**.
However, it prefers **diplomatic and economic involvement rather than military intervention**.

[Behind an early summer is a lack of winter rains-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Geography

Easy Explanation

Many parts of **India**, especially northern and western regions, are experiencing **unusually high temperatures very early in the year**. In some places, temperatures were **8–13°C above normal**, which is similar to **heat-wave conditions**, even though it is only early March.

Normally, winter months bring **rain and snowfall**, especially in northern India, due to weather systems called **Western Disturbances**. These winds originate near **Iran and the Mediterranean region** and bring moisture to India during winter.

However, this winter was **very dry**. From January to February, India received **only about 16 mm rainfall**, which is **60% below normal**. February became the **third driest February since 1901**.

Because there was **very little rainfall and snowfall**, the soil remained dry. When soil lacks moisture, it **heats up faster**, leading to **early summer-like temperatures**.

This situation is already visible in places like **Himachal Pradesh**, where temperatures crossed **25°C in Shimla**, which is unusual for March.

Impact on agriculture

The sudden rise in temperature is worrying for **rabi crops** such as:

wheat
mustard
gram
groundnut
sorghum
safflower

Vegetables like **potato** and fruits like **apple** may also be affected.

Farmers are being advised to **increase irrigation** to maintain soil moisture, but this could **increase pressure on water resources**.

In simple terms, **less winter rain → dry soil → faster heating → early summer conditions**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

1. Early Heatwave Conditions

Several regions in **India** recorded temperatures **8–13°C above normal** in early March.
Such early heat conditions are **rare but becoming more frequent**.

2. IMD Forecast

The **India Meteorological Department** predicted **above-normal temperatures** in western Himalayan, central, and peninsular regions.
Heatwave days were expected in **Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh**.

3. Role of Western Disturbances

Winter rains mainly come from **Western Disturbances**.
Fewer disturbances this year led to **low rainfall and snowfall**.

4. Dry Winter

January–February rainfall was **60% below normal**.
February became the **third driest since 1901**.

5. Scientific Reason

Dry soil **heats faster than moist soil**.
Lack of rain accelerated the onset of **summer-like temperatures**.

6. Impact on Agriculture

Rabi crops like wheat, mustard, and gram are vulnerable to early heat.
Vegetables and fruit crops may also face stress.

7. Water Stress Concerns

Farmers are advised to **increase irrigation** to protect crops.
This may **increase pressure on already stressed water resources**.

[National interest is not at odds with core values.Recalibrate foreign policy-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The article argues that the **US–Israel military attack on Iran** has changed the geopolitical balance in **West Asia**, and **India must rethink its foreign policy** to protect its interests.

The war—called **Operation Epic Fury** by the **United States** and **Operation Roaring Lion** by **Israel**—targeted Iran's military infrastructure and leadership, including the killing of **Ali Khamenei**. The goal was to weaken Iran's power and reshape regional geopolitics.

However, **Iran** responded by escalating the conflict and widening the battlefield. One major consequence has been the disruption of shipping through the **Strait of Hormuz**, through which a large share of global oil trade passes.

This has serious consequences for **India** because India depends heavily on **West Asian energy imports**. Rising oil prices and disruptions in shipping can increase India's import bill, inflation, and economic instability.

| Clear your doubts now.

The article also highlights other risks:

Trade with Gulf countries may suffer.
Remittances from Indian workers in the Gulf could decline.
Fertiliser production and LPG supply may be affected due to disruptions in LNG imports.

The author argues that India should follow a **balanced foreign policy**, maintaining relations with both **Israel and Iran**, instead of appearing to support one side. Historically, Iran has helped India through discounted oil, strategic cooperation, and access to Central Asia through **Chabahar Port**.

The article concludes that India should return to a **principled and balanced diplomacy**, similar to the vision of **Jawaharlal Nehru**, which combined national interest with global peace and justice.

Key Takeaways

1. US–Israel War on Iran

Military operations by the **United States** and **Israel** targeted Iran's military and leadership.
The conflict aims to reshape the power balance in **West Asia**.

2. Iran's Response

Iran is retaliating through asymmetric warfare and regional escalation.
The conflict has widened across Gulf states and maritime routes.

3. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

The **Strait of Hormuz** handles a large share of global oil trade.
Disruption threatens global energy supplies.

4. Economic Impact on India

India imports large amounts of oil, LNG, and LPG from West Asia.
Higher oil prices increase **import bills, inflation, and economic pressure**.

5. Trade and Diaspora Risks

India's trade with Gulf countries exceeds **$170 billion**.
Over **9 million Indians in West Asia** send large remittances to India.

6. Strategic Role of Iran for India

Iran provides access to **Chabahar Port**, linking India to Central Asia.
Iran has also supported India with **discounted oil and strategic cooperation**.

7. Need for Foreign Policy Recalibration

India should maintain balanced relations with both Israel and Iran.
A principled diplomacy inspired by **Jawaharlal Nehru** can protect national interests and global stability.

[The lesson is national security cannot be outsourced-The Hindu Editorial]

International relations

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

The article argues that the ongoing war between United States–Israel and **Iran** shows an important lesson: **countries cannot depend entirely on another country for their security**.

When the war started, many expected the powerful US–Israel military alliance to defeat Iran quickly. However, Iran retaliated strongly by attacking **US military bases across the Gulf region** such as in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. It also targeted energy infrastructure and disrupted shipping through the **Strait of Hormuz**, causing panic in the region.

Gulf security system

For decades, many Gulf countries relied on **American security guarantees**. After the **Iranian Revolution**, the US promised to protect Gulf monarchies from threats. This policy became known as the **Carter Doctrine**, announced by US President **Jimmy Carter**.

Under this arrangement:

Gulf states hosted **US military bases**.
They depended heavily on **American defence systems**.
Their own military capabilities remained limited.

But during the current conflict, the US **could not fully protect them**, and missile defence systems in some Gulf countries reportedly ran out. This has made Gulf states question whether US security guarantees are reliable.

Lesson for India

The article says **India should learn from this situation. For many years, India was one of the **largest importers of defence equipment**.

After the **Kargil War**, India realised the risks of relying on foreign weapons. Since then, especially after 2014, India has focused on **self-reliance in defence production (Atmanirbhar Bharat)**.

Examples include:

BrahMos
HAL Tejas

India's defence exports have also increased significantly.

Broader message

The war shows that **security guarantees from powerful allies may fail during crises**. Countries must build **their own military capability and strategic autonomy** rather than depending on external powers.

Key Takeaways

1. Iran War and Regional Escalation

Iran has retaliated against the **United States** and **Israel** by attacking US bases across the Gulf.
The conflict has expanded beyond Iran's borders.

2. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

Disruption of the **Strait of Hormuz** threatens global energy supplies.
Many Gulf economies depend on this route.

| Clear your doubts now.

3. Gulf Dependence on US Security

Gulf monarchies relied on American protection after the **Iranian Revolution**.
The **Carter Doctrine** promised US military defence.

4. Failure of Security Guarantees

During the current conflict, US defence systems in the Gulf have faced shortages.
This raised doubts about the reliability of US security commitments.

5. Possible Shift in Gulf Security Architecture

Countries like **Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar** may reconsider hosting US military bases.
This could reshape regional geopolitics.

6. India's Defence Self-Reliance

After the **Kargil War**, India focused on indigenous defence production.
Systems like **BrahMos** and **HAL Tejas** reflect this shift.

7. Core Lesson

National security **cannot be outsourced to external powers**.
Countries must build **self-reliant defence capabilities and strategic autonomy**.

[What is the Musi riverfront development project?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Geography

Easy Explanation

The **Musi Riverfront Development Project** is a plan by the **Government of Telangana** to clean and develop the **Musi River** in **Hyderabad**. At present, the river looks like an open sewage channel for most of the year because untreated wastewater from the city flows into it. The government wants to transform the river into a clean, flowing water body with parks, cultural spaces, shopping areas, and tourism facilities along its banks.

The Musi River is about **260 km long** and is formed by the meeting of two streams, **Musa and Esi**, which originate in the Ananthagiri hills of Telangana. The river flows for about **55 km through Hyderabad**. Historically, the river caused severe flooding in the city, especially during the **1908 Hyderabad floods**. After this disaster, the ruler **Mir Osman Ali Khan** built the reservoirs **Osman Sagar** and **Himayat Sagar** to control floods and store water.

Under the project, the government plans to ensure **year-round water flow in the Musi River** by diverting water from the **Godavari River** through the **Mallanna Sagar Reservoir**. This water will be stored in existing reservoirs and released gradually into the Musi so that the river does not dry up. The project also proposes building **39 new sewage treatment plants** in addition to the existing ones to treat wastewater before it enters the river.

Another important feature is the creation of a cultural and tourist zone called **Gandhi Sarovar** at the point where the Musa and Esi rivers meet. The plan includes installing the **world's tallest statue of Mahatma Gandhi** in this area and developing a large cultural precinct around it.

However, the project has become controversial because many people have been living along the riverbanks for decades. Evictions of slum residents during the early stages of the project led to protests. Activists and residents under the banner of **Musi Jan Andolan** argue that the government is moving ahead with land acquisition and displacement without publicly sharing the detailed project report or properly consulting affected communities.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

1. Aim of the Project

The **Musi Riverfront Development Project** aims to clean and redevelop the **Musi River** as an urban waterfront.

2. River Flow Restoration

Water will be diverted from the **Godavari River** through **Mallanna Sagar Reservoir** to maintain year-round flow.

3. Pollution Control

The government plans to build **39 new sewage treatment plants** to reduce wastewater pollution in the river.

4. Urban Development

Plans include **parks, tourism facilities, commercial spaces, and cultural zones** along the 55-km stretch.

5. Historical Context

After the **1908 Hyderabad floods**, reservoirs **Osman Sagar** and **Himayat Sagar** were built for flood control.

6. Social Concerns

Eviction of slum residents along the riverbanks has triggered protests led by **Musi Jan Andolan**.

7. Funding and Status

The project's first phase has received in-principle funding support from the **Asian Development Bank**, but final approval and DPR are still pending.

[We now know why some people had severe blood clots after COVID shots-The Hindu Science]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

During the global rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, a very small number of people who received vaccines like **Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine** and **Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine** developed unusual blood clots along with low platelet levels. This rare condition was called **Vaccine-Induced Immune Thrombocytopenia and Thrombosis (VITT)**. It occurred in about **3–10 people per million vaccinated**.

Scientists discovered that patients with this condition produced antibodies against a normal human protein called **Platelet Factor 4 (PF4)**. Normally PF4 helps regulate blood clotting, but in these rare cases the antibodies attached to PF4 and activated platelets, causing dangerous blood clots while reducing platelet counts.

The puzzle was why the immune system attacked PF4, which is a natural human protein. Researchers later found that the issue was linked to how some vaccines worked. Vaccines like AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson used a **harmless adenovirus** to deliver DNA instructions for the coronavirus spike protein into cells. This allowed the body to produce the spike protein and build immunity against COVID-19.

A new study found that a protein inside the adenovirus called **protein VII** closely resembles part of the PF4 protein. The immune system initially produced antibodies against this viral protein. In extremely rare cases, due to specific genetic variations and a small mutation in antibody genes, these antibodies mistakenly started recognising PF4 as well. This **molecular similarity** caused the immune system to attack PF4, triggering the clotting disorder.

| Clear your doubts now.

The research provides a clear explanation for why these rare clotting events happened mainly with **adenovirus-based vaccines**, and not with **mRNA vaccines** like **Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine** or **Moderna COVID-19 vaccine**.

Importantly, the condition was **extremely rare**, and the study helps scientists design **safer vaccines in the future** by avoiding such molecular similarities in vaccine delivery systems.

Key Takeaways

1. Rare Clotting Disorder

Some recipients of **Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine** and **Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine** developed a rare clotting condition called **Vaccine-Induced Immune Thrombocytopenia and Thrombosis**.

2. Role of Platelet Factor 4

The condition occurred when antibodies attacked **Platelet Factor 4**, leading to abnormal blood clotting and low platelet counts.

3. Vaccine Technology Difference

AstraZeneca and J&J vaccines used **adenovirus vectors to deliver DNA**, unlike **mRNA vaccines** such as **Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine** and **Moderna COVID-19 vaccine**.

4. Genetic Predisposition

Affected individuals shared specific antibody gene variants (IGLV3-21), making them susceptible to producing PF4-reactive antibodies.

5. Key Scientific Discovery

Researchers identified **protein VII in the adenovirus** as the trigger due to its structural similarity with PF4.

6. Molecular Mimicry

Antibodies initially targeting the viral protein mistakenly reacted with PF4 due to **similar molecular structure**.

7. Future Vaccine Safety

Understanding this mechanism will help scientists design **safer adenovirus-based vaccines** in future immunisation programmes.

UV camera snaps treetops glowing amid thunderstorm-The Hindu Science

Environment

Easy Explanation

During thunderstorms, large amounts of electricity build up in the atmosphere, which we usually see as lightning. Scientists had long predicted that this electrical energy could also pass through tall trees and cause a faint ultraviolet (UV) glow on their leaves and branches. These electrical discharges are known as **Corona Discharge**. However, until recently, this phenomenon had never been directly observed in nature.

Researchers from **Pennsylvania State University** developed a special instrument called the **Corona Observing Telescope System (COTS)** to detect this glow. The device has a camera that can detect a very narrow band of

| Clear your doubts now.

ultraviolet light. Because the Earth's **Ozone Layer** blocks this wavelength of sunlight, the camera can easily detect ultraviolet light produced by electrical discharges during storms.

Using this system, scientists observed glowing treetops during a thunderstorm in North Carolina in the **United States**. They found that the glow was not fixed in one place but moved from leaf to leaf and branch to branch. The glow sometimes followed branches as they swayed in the wind and lasted for a fraction of a second to a few seconds.

The researchers also measured the electrical current flowing through the trees. They discovered that each corona discharge released around **100 billion photons of ultraviolet light** and carried a very small electric current. While the current from a single branch is tiny, when thousands of trees experience it across an entire forest during a storm, the total electrical activity becomes significant.

These discoveries are important because the corona discharges produce **hydroxyl radicals**, chemicals that help clean the atmosphere by breaking down pollutants like hydrocarbons. However, the electrical surges may also cause minor damage to trees by burning the tips of leaves.

Overall, the study provides the **first direct evidence that forests glow with ultraviolet light during thunderstorms**, helping scientists better understand how forests interact with atmospheric electricity.

Key Takeaways

1. Corona Discharge Phenomenon

Thunderstorms can cause **Corona Discharge** on treetops, producing ultraviolet light.

2. First Direct Observation

Scientists from **Pennsylvania State University** observed this glow for the first time in natural conditions.

3. Special Detection Instrument

The **Corona Observing Telescope System (COTS)** uses UV-sensitive cameras to detect these electrical discharges.

4. Role of the Ozone Layer

The **Ozone Layer** blocks this UV wavelength from sunlight, allowing the camera to detect storm-generated radiation.

5. Electrical Activity in Forests

Each discharge releases about **100 billion photons** and a small electric current through tree branches.

6. Atmospheric Chemistry Impact

Corona discharges generate **hydroxyl radicals**, which help clean the air by breaking down pollutants.

7. Effects on Trees

Strong voltage surges during storms may cause **minor damage to leaves and branches** due to electrical burning.

11th March 2026

'Religious ideals will live on in Iran,not Islamism'-The Indian Express Explained Page

International relations

| Clear your doubts now.

Easy Explanation

The interview with Faisal Devji discusses the **future of Iran and political Islam after the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the war involving the United States and Israel**.

The West believed that removing Khamenei would lead to **people celebrating and rejecting Iran's authoritarian Islamic regime**. However, the reaction inside Iran was **mixed**. Some people were happy, but many others expressed **grief and anger**, partly because external attacks often create **national unity even among critics of the government**.

Devji explains that Iranian society is **deeply divided**.

Some groups depend on the state's welfare or power structure and therefore support the regime.
Others oppose the government's strict Islamic political system.

The idea of **martyrdom in Shia Islam**, inspired by Husayn ibn Ali, also shapes public reactions. Khamenei's decision to stay in Tehran instead of hiding was seen as **an attempt to die as a martyr**, which can inspire pride and resistance among supporters.

However, Devji argues that **Islamism (political Islam as a governing ideology)** is already declining globally.

It was strongest during the **Cold War**, when ideological states like communism and fascism influenced politics.
After the Cold War ended, ideological politics weakened worldwide.

Today, **very few countries are ruled by Islamist systems**, and Iran is one of the last examples. Devji believes that **religious values will remain important in Iranian society**, but **clerical political control may weaken**, possibly giving way to **military or secular leadership in the future**.

In the broader Muslim world, many countries oppose the war against Iran. But their opposition is **not framed as a religious Islamic struggle**. Instead, it is mostly **political, humanitarian, or anti-war sentiment**, showing that **Islam is no longer the main language of political mobilization in many Muslim societies**.

Unlike groups such as Palestinians, Uyghurs, or Rohingya—often seen mainly as victims—**Iran is viewed as a strong political actor with its own strategy**, which is why reactions to the war are different.

Key Takeaways

1. Mixed Public Reaction in Iran

Killing of Ali Khamenei did not lead to universal celebration.
Society is polarized between regime supporters and critics.
External attacks tend to unite citizens around national stability.

2. Role of Shia Martyrdom Ideology

Martyrdom linked to the legacy of Husayn ibn Ali.
Sacrifice is seen as courage and resistance rather than defeat.
Khamenei's death may strengthen symbolic resistance.

3. Decline of Political Islam (Islamism)

Islamism rose during the Cold War ideological era.
After the Cold War, ideological states declined globally.
Only a few countries still follow Islamist political systems.

4. Origins of Islamism

| Clear your doubts now.

Developed by intellectuals like Abul A'la Maududi.
Clerics adopted the ideology later in places like Iran and Afghanistan.
The model now appears politically weakened.

5. Possible Future Political Change in Iran

Religious values may remain strong in society.
However, clerical rule could weaken.
Military or secular leadership may emerge.

6. Limited Muslim World Support for Iran

Many Muslim countries oppose the war but remain cautious.
Sectarian divisions and geopolitical interests limit support.
Opposition is often expressed in political or humanitarian terms.

7. Iran as an Independent Political Actor

Unlike Palestinians, Uyghurs, or Rohingya, Iran is seen as a strategic state.
It has political agency and regional influence.
This shapes stronger geopolitical reactions to the conflict.

[Impeaching the CEC:The law, and the process-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The issue relates to a proposed **impeachment motion against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar**. The Opposition, led by the All India Trinamool Congress, is trying to gather the required number of MPs' signatures to begin the removal process. The allegation is that the Election Commission of India showed biased conduct during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal.

The Constitution gives strong protection to the CEC to ensure the independence of elections. Under **Article 324(5)**, the CEC can be removed **only in the same way as a judge of the Supreme Court**, and only on the grounds of **proved misbehaviour or incapacity**.

To start the process, at least **100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs** must sign a motion. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha decides whether to admit it. If admitted, a **three-member inquiry committee** (including a Supreme Court judge, a High Court Chief Justice, and a jurist) investigates the charges.

If the committee finds the charges valid, **both Houses of Parliament must pass the motion with a special majority**. After this, the **President of India** issues the final order of removal. The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** also confirms this procedure.

Key Takeaways

1. Constitutional Position of the CEC

Heads the Election Commission of India.
Ensures free and fair elections in India.
Office protected from political interference.

2. Article 324(5) Safeguard

| Clear your doubts now.

CEC removal follows the same process as a Supreme Court judge.
Grounds: **proved misbehaviour or incapacity**.

3. Initiation of Motion

Requires **100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs**.
Speaker or Chairman decides whether to admit the motion.

4. Inquiry Committee Investigation

A **three-member committee** examines the allegations.
Includes a Supreme Court judge, a High Court Chief Justice, and a jurist.

5. Parliamentary Approval Requirement

Both Houses must pass the motion.
Requires **special majority** (majority of total membership + two-thirds present and voting).

6. Role of the President

After Parliament passes the motion, the **President issues the removal order**.

7. Role of the 2023 Act

The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023** reiterates the constitutional removal procedure.

[Taking sides in conflict:Delhi's past record tells a complicated story-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The article discusses whether India should remain neutral or take sides in international conflicts. Many people believe India's foreign policy is based on neutrality, but historically **non-alignment never meant complete neutrality**. It meant India could take positions based on **independent judgement rather than joining any global power bloc**.

In practice, India has often taken sides depending on its **strategic interests**. During the Cold War, India frequently criticised Western actions but was more cautious in criticising the Soviet Union because of their close relationship. For example, India responded mildly to Soviet interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan.

India's stance has also changed with different governments. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Janata government criticised it. But when Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980, India abstained from condemning the Soviet Union at the United Nations.

In the Middle East too, India often balanced moral principles with practical interests. During Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, India avoided strong criticism of Iraq because it was an important oil supplier and had supported India diplomatically.

Today India's approach to the Gulf conflict is largely **pragmatic**. The region is crucial for India due to **energy supplies, about $200 billion in trade, and nearly nine million Indians working there**. Therefore, India's main priority is **protecting its economic interests, energy security, and diaspora**.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

1. Non-Alignment Was Not Neutrality

India retained freedom to take positions independently.
Decisions were based on issue-by-issue judgement.

2. India Often Took Sides Historically

Strong criticism of Western actions.
More cautious approach towards Soviet actions.

3. Strategic Interests Shaped Policy

Soviet partnership helped India address security concerns.
This influenced India's diplomatic responses.

4. Leadership Changes Influenced Positions

The Janata government criticised the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
Indira Gandhi later changed the stance.

5. Changing Middle East Dynamics

Earlier focus was mainly Israel vs Arab states.
Internal rivalries in the region became more important.

6. India's Large Stakes in the Gulf

Around **$200 billion trade with Gulf countries**.
Nearly **9 million Indians live and work there**.

7. Present Policy Based on Pragmatism

Focus on **energy security, trade, and safety of diaspora**.
Managing India-Gulf interdependence is a long-term challenge.

[Catch them young-The Hindu Editorial]

Sociology(Health)

Easy Explanation

The article highlights the **rapid rise of childhood obesity in India**. According to the **World Obesity Atlas 2026 released by the World Obesity Federation**, millions of Indian children are already overweight or obese.

In 2025, about **14.9 million children aged 5–9 years and 26.4 million aged 10–19 years in India were overweight or obese**. Around **41 million children had a high Body Mass Index (BMI)**. If the trend continues, by **2040 about 20 million children could be obese and 56 million overweight** in India.

Childhood obesity increases the risk of **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, and metabolic liver disease at an early age. These problems were earlier common mainly among adults but are now appearing in children.

The main causes include **lack of physical activity, unhealthy diets, junk food consumption, poor access to healthy school meals, and inadequate breastfeeding in infancy**. Rapid urbanisation and lifestyle changes are also contributing factors.

| Clear your doubts now.

Experts suggest stronger government action such as **restricting junk food marketing to children, taxing sugary foods, promoting physical activity, improving school nutrition programmes, and strengthening primary healthcare systems**. Early prevention is crucial to protect the health of future generations.

Key Takeaways

1. Rising Childhood Obesity in India

India has millions of overweight and obese children.
The problem is growing rapidly among school-age groups.

2. Findings of World Obesity Atlas 2026

Report released by the World Obesity Federation.
Shows alarming growth in childhood obesity globally and in India.

3. Global Comparison

China has the highest number of children with high BMI.
India ranks second, followed by the United States.

4. Health Risks for Children

Higher risk of hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.
Also linked to metabolic liver disease and high cholesterol.

5. Major Causes

Low physical activity and sedentary lifestyle.
High consumption of processed and unhealthy foods.

6. Additional Contributing Factors

Poor access to nutritious school meals.
Inadequate breastfeeding during early infancy.

7. Policy and Prevention Measures Needed

Restrict junk food marketing to children.
Promote healthy diets, physical activity, and stronger school nutrition policies.

‘41%’ illusion: a quiet re-engineering of India’s fiscal federal landscape-The Hindu text and Context

Polity

Easy Explanation

The article explains how the Union government accepted the **Sixteenth Finance Commission (FC16)** recommendation that **States should receive 41% of the divisible tax pool**. At first glance, this appears to maintain the existing system of fiscal federalism. However, the article argues that this **41% figure is somewhat misleading**.

This is because the **divisible pool does not include cesses and surcharges**, which the Union government collects but does not share with States. Over time, the share of these taxes has increased, which means the **actual pool of money shared with States is shrinking**. As a result, even though States receive 41% of the divisible pool, they are effectively getting **a smaller share of the Union’s total tax revenue**.

| Clear your doubts now.

The **Sixteenth Finance Commission** also discontinued some grants such as **revenue deficit grants and sector-specific grants**, which earlier helped States facing fiscal stress. At the same time, many structural reforms—like controlling off-budget borrowing, improving fiscal responsibility laws, and reforming power distribution companies—were postponed.

Another important change is in the **formula used to distribute funds among States**. Earlier, part of the formula rewarded States for better tax collection efforts. Now, a larger weight is given to **States' contribution to national GDP**, which benefits richer and economically stronger States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka. Poorer States with lower income levels may receive relatively less benefit.

Finally, the article notes that grants to **local governments (panchayats and municipalities)** now come with several conditions, such as audited accounts and performance benchmarks. While these conditions aim to improve governance, poorer States with weaker administrative capacity may struggle to meet them and therefore receive less funding.

Overall, the article argues that these changes may **increase the financial imbalance between the Centre and States**, even though the headline figure of 41% suggests stability.

Key Takeaways

1. 41% Devolution Appears Misleading

States receive **41% of the divisible tax pool**.
But cesses and surcharges are excluded from the pool.

2. Shrinking Divisible Pool

Share of divisible pool in total Union tax revenue has declined.
This reduces the effective funds available to States.

3. Removal of Certain Grants

FC16 discontinued revenue deficit and sector-specific grants.
States facing fiscal stress may lose targeted support.

4. Structural Fiscal Reforms Deferred

Issues like off-budget borrowing and fiscal rule reforms were postponed.
Weak enforcement of fiscal discipline continues.

5. Change in Devolution Formula

Greater weight given to **States' contribution to GDP**.
Economically stronger States benefit more.

6. Conditional Local Body Grants

Grants to local governments now linked to performance and compliance.
States with weaker administrative capacity may receive less funding.

7. Concerns for Fiscal Federalism

Growing reliance on cesses and conditional grants increases **Centre–State financial asymmetry**.
Could deepen regional economic and governance disparities.

| Clear your doubts now.

Lessons from C-DOT saga for technology development in India-The Hindu Text and Context

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The article reflects on the history of the **Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT)** and the lessons it offers for technology development in India. C-DOT was established in 1986 under technologist Sam Pitroda to develop **indigenous telecom technology**, especially digital rural telephone exchanges, at a time when India had extremely poor telephone connectivity.

In the 1970s and 1980s, India relied heavily on imported telecom equipment, which often failed in Indian conditions and limited expansion. C-DOT introduced a new approach—developing **software-based digital switches within India** using young engineers, innovative work culture, and functional autonomy. Its technologies, along with STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling), significantly improved telecom connectivity and reduced dependence on foreign suppliers.

However, the programme faced strong resistance from bureaucracy and political rivalries. When K. P. Unnikrishnan became Communications Minister in the government of V. P. Singh in 1989, he ordered investigations into C-DOT and took actions against its leadership. The resulting uncertainty and conflicts caused a **mass exit of scientists and engineers**, weakening the momentum of indigenous telecom innovation.

Although C-DOT later completed some of its technological goals, the disruption slowed India's technology development efforts. The episode highlights the importance of **political support, institutional autonomy, and protection of scientific talent** for successful indigenous innovation.

Key Takeaways

1. Role of C-DOT in Telecom Revolution

Centre for Development of Telematics developed indigenous digital telephone exchange technology.
Helped expand telecom connectivity across India.

2. Poor Telecom Infrastructure Before 1980s

Long waiting lists for landline connections.
Only a small percentage of villages had telephone access.

3. Vision of Indigenous Technology

Led by Sam Pitroda.
Focus on software-based digital switching instead of imported equipment.

4. Innovative Institutional Model

C-DOT functioned as an autonomous organisation.
Encouraged teamwork, young engineers, and flexible work culture.

5. Political and Bureaucratic Resistance

Investigations and conflicts occurred after K. P. Unnikrishnan took charge in 1989.
Leadership disputes created uncertainty.

6. Brain Drain of Scientists

Many engineers left C-DOT due to instability.

| Clear your doubts now.

Some joined multinational companies after economic liberalisation.

7. Lessons for Technology Policy

Indigenous innovation requires political support, institutional autonomy, and protection of scientific talent.
Long-term technology projects must be insulated from political disruptions.

[Scientists rewire bacteria to build 'designer' proteins on demand-The Hindu Science]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Scientists have developed a new way to make **custom or "designer" proteins using bacteria**. The research was carried out by teams at ETH Zurich and Technical University of Munich and published in the journal Nature.

Normally, proteins in living organisms are built from **20 natural amino acids**. However, scientists can create many **artificial amino acids** in the laboratory that have special properties, such as allowing drugs to attach precisely to a protein. The challenge has been getting these artificial amino acids **inside cells**, because they struggle to cross the cell membrane.

To solve this, researchers used a clever strategy. They attached the artificial amino acids to small protein fragments called **peptides** and used a natural bacterial transport system (a nutrient gate) as a **"Trojan horse"**. This transporter carries peptides into the cell as food. Once inside, the cell's enzymes break the peptides apart and release the artificial amino acids, which can then be used by ribosomes to build proteins.

The researchers engineered this transporter in the bacterium Escherichia coli so that it could import peptides containing artificial amino acids much more efficiently. This method allowed scientists to produce proteins containing **one or even two artificial amino acids at specific positions**.

This discovery could make it easier to produce **advanced medicines and multifunctional proteins**, such as antibodies that carry drugs directly to disease targets. Scientists are now exploring similar methods in human cells to develop new therapeutic proteins.

Key Takeaways

1. Breakthrough in Protein Engineering

Scientists created a method to produce **designer proteins** inside bacteria.
Published in the journal Nature.

2. Role of Artificial Amino Acids

Artificial amino acids can give proteins new functions.
Example: attaching drugs precisely to proteins.

3. Key Scientific Challenge

Artificial amino acids struggle to enter cells through the membrane.
This limited their use in protein production.

4. Trojan Horse Strategy

Researchers attached artificial amino acids to peptides.
Bacterial transporters mistakenly imported them as nutrients.

| Clear your doubts now.

5. Engineering Bacterial Transport Systems

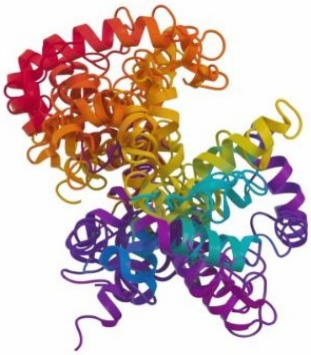
Transport proteins were modified to increase uptake efficiency.
Experiments used the bacterium Escherichia coli.

6. Ability to Build Multifunctional Proteins

Method allows insertion of **multiple artificial amino acids**.
Enables proteins with several engineered features.

7. Future Medical Applications

Could help develop targeted drugs and advanced therapeutics.
Researchers aim to apply the technique to human cells in future.
Advancement in radiography technologies and the benefits of having advancements will reduce radiation exposure and faster and accurate diagnosis leading to patient safety



Concept in One Line
Designer proteins: Proteins engineered by inserting artificial amino acids to give them new functions.

12th March 2026

The frame work behind SC's euthanasia verdict-The Indian Express Explained Page

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court allowed the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment for **Harish Rana**, a 32-year-old man who had been in a vegetative state since 2013 after a serious head injury. Doctors had confirmed that his condition was irreversible and that there was almost no chance of recovery. His family requested the court to allow doctors to stop the treatment that was artificially keeping him alive.

The Court allowed doctors at the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** to withdraw the medical support and provide palliative care so that his final days could be managed with comfort and dignity. The judges clarified that the decision was not about choosing death, but about **not artificially prolonging life when recovery is impossible**.

In India, **active euthanasia**—directly causing someone's death through methods like lethal injections—is illegal and can attract criminal liability under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita**. However, **passive euthanasia**, which means withdrawing

or withholding medical treatment and allowing the natural process of death, is legally permitted under certain safeguards.

The legal basis comes from **Article 21 of the Constitution**, which guarantees the right to life with dignity. The Supreme Court has interpreted this right to include the possibility of a **dignified death** in situations where a patient is terminally ill or in a permanent vegetative state and medical treatment no longer has any meaningful benefit.

The Court's position on euthanasia developed through important judgments. In **Aruna Ramchandra Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011)**, the Supreme Court allowed passive euthanasia in principle and created guidelines for withdrawing life support with court approval. Later, in **Common Cause v. Union of India (2018)**, the Court recognised the right to die with dignity and allowed people to make **Advance Medical Directives**, also known as "living wills", where individuals can state in advance that they do not want life-prolonging treatment in certain situations.

The Court simplified these procedures further in 2023 because the earlier process was very complicated. Hospitals now form two medical boards to evaluate the patient's condition before withdrawing treatment. These boards confirm whether the treatment has become medically futile.

In Harish Rana's case, the Supreme Court also clarified an important issue. It ruled that **clinically assisted nutrition and hydration provided through a PEG tube is a medical treatment**, not ordinary feeding. Therefore, if doctors determine that it no longer serves any therapeutic purpose, it can legally be withdrawn under the passive euthanasia framework.

Key Takeaways

First Application of Passive Euthanasia
Supreme Court allowed withdrawal of life support for Harish Rana.
First clear court-approved application of passive euthanasia in India.

Difference Between Active and Passive Euthanasia
Active euthanasia (lethal injection) is illegal.
Passive euthanasia (withdrawal of treatment) is allowed with safeguards.

Constitutional Basis
Derived from **Article 21 – Right to Life with Dignity**.
Includes the possibility of a dignified death in certain situations.

Important Supreme Court Judgments
Aruna Shanbaug case (2011) introduced passive euthanasia guidelines.
Common Cause case (2018) recognised living wills and right to die with dignity.

Advance Medical Directives
Individuals can record their wishes about refusing life-prolonging treatment.
Process simplified in 2023.

Role of Medical Boards
Hospitals must form **primary and secondary medical boards**.
They assess whether treatment has become futile.

Legal Clarification on Artificial Feeding
Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) is considered **medical treatment**.
Therefore it can be legally withdrawn when it no longer benefits the patient.

[Withdrawing life-supporting care:The procedure and the hurdles-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court allowed the withdrawal of life-supporting treatment for **Harish Rana**, who had been in a vegetative state for many years. Although India does not yet have a specific law on euthanasia, the decision follows

guidelines developed by the Supreme Court for **passive euthanasia**, which allows doctors to withdraw life-sustaining treatment when recovery is impossible.

Euthanasia can be of two types. **Active euthanasia**, where a doctor intentionally causes death through a lethal drug or injection, is illegal in India. **Passive euthanasia** means allowing a person to die naturally by stopping medical treatments such as ventilators, dialysis, CPR, or artificial nutrition when they no longer benefit the patient.

According to draft guidelines issued by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, the treating doctor must first assess whether the patient has any chance of recovery. A **primary medical board** of doctors then reviews the case and discusses the prognosis with the family. If both doctors and family agree to withdraw treatment, the decision is reviewed by a **secondary medical board**, which must give its opinion within 48 hours.

Hospitals must inform a magistrate before withdrawing treatment, though approval is not required. The process becomes easier when a patient has a **living will (advance medical directive)**, which records the person's wishes about medical treatment if they become unable to decide in the future.

Key Takeaways

Types of Euthanasia
Active euthanasia involves directly causing death through lethal drugs and is illegal in India.
Passive euthanasia involves withdrawing life-sustaining treatment and allowing natural death.

Supreme Court Framework
Passive euthanasia is permitted under strict safeguards developed through court judgments.
The framework aims to ensure dignity and prevent misuse.

2024 Draft Guidelines
Issued by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** to standardise procedures in hospitals.
Based on the Supreme Court's 2023 directives.

Role of Medical Boards
A **primary medical board** first evaluates the patient's condition.
A **secondary medical board** reviews the decision before treatment is withdrawn.

Family and Doctor Consultation
Doctors must clearly explain the prognosis to family members.
The final decision is taken through a shared and informed process.

Implementation Challenges
Many hospitals lack specialists needed for medical boards.
Several states have not yet prepared lists of nominated doctors.

Importance of Living Wills
Advance medical directives allow individuals to record their treatment preferences.
They help ensure patient autonomy and reduce emotional conflict for families.

[Iran-Arab ties:Tehran's survival could lead to a new geopolitical contract-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The war between the **United States–Israel alliance and Iran** has intensified, creating tensions across the Gulf region. Even while responding with missile and drone attacks on US bases in Gulf countries, Iran tried to reassure Arab states that it did not intend to harm them. Iranian President **Masoud Pezeshkian** apologised to Arab countries for any damage caused and said Iran's actions were directed mainly against the US military presence.

Most Arab countries want the conflict to end quickly and have avoided joining the US-Israel military action against Iran. However, the conflict has disrupted the Gulf economy. Energy companies have halted operations, insurance costs for ships passing through the **Strait of Hormuz** have risen sharply, and global oil prices could surge dramatically.

| Clear your doubts now.

The war has also weakened Arab countries' trust in the United States as a security partner. Gulf states have long depended on US military protection, but recent events have made them question whether relying heavily on Washington is safe.

At the same time, Arab states worry that a stronger Iran could dominate the region politically and militarily. Despite this fear, many Gulf countries prefer dialogue and reconciliation with Iran to maintain regional stability and protect their economies.

If Iran survives the conflict without major damage, it could reshape relations in the Middle East. Both Iran and Arab states may eventually try to negotiate a **new geopolitical understanding** that balances security concerns, reduces tensions, and stabilises the region.

Key Takeaways

War Affecting Iran–Arab Relations
Conflict between the US-Israel alliance and Iran has increased tensions in the Gulf.
Arab states are trying to avoid direct involvement.

Iran's Diplomatic Messaging
President **Masoud Pezeshkian** reassured Arab countries that Iran's actions target US bases, not Arab nations.

Economic Impact on Gulf Region
Energy operations disrupted and shipping insurance costs rising.
Oil prices could increase sharply due to instability.

Strategic Importance of Strait of Hormuz
Threats to shipping through the **Strait of Hormuz** affect global energy supply.

Declining Trust in the United States
Gulf states are questioning their long-standing dependence on US security guarantees.

Fear of Iranian Regional Dominance
Arab states worry Iran may gain greater military and political influence.

Possibility of a New Regional Order
If Iran survives the war, it may lead to a new geopolitical arrangement between Iran and Arab states.

How air strikes triggered black rain in Tehran-The Indian Express Explained Page

International relations

Easy Explanation

After Israeli airstrikes hit several oil storage facilities and refineries in **Tehran**, large fires burned for hours and released huge amounts of pollutants into the air. These explosions released toxic chemicals such as hydrocarbons, sulfur oxides, and nitrogen compounds into the atmosphere.

When rainfall occurred soon after the strikes, the raindrops passed through this polluted air and absorbed the soot and chemical particles. As a result, the rain fell as **oily, black-coloured droplets**, popularly called "black rain," coating buildings, cars, and people.

This polluted rain is dangerous for health. According to the **World Health Organization**, inhaling the toxic particles can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation of the skin and eyes. Long exposure to some chemicals found in petroleum smoke may also increase the risk of cancer.

The situation is made worse by Tehran's geography. The city is surrounded by mountains, which prevents proper air circulation and traps pollutants in the atmosphere. Because of this, toxic particles remain suspended in the air longer and mix easily with rain clouds.

| Clear your doubts now.

Scientists are also worried about **“forever chemicals”**, which are long-lasting toxic substances used in industrial materials and flame retardants. These chemicals can contaminate soil, water, and the food chain and may remain in the environment for many years.

Key Takeaways

Cause of Black Rain
- Israeli airstrikes hit oil facilities in Tehran, causing massive fires.
- Burning oil released soot and toxic chemicals into the air.

How Black Rain Forms
- Rainfall mixed with pollutants already suspended in the atmosphere.
- This created oily, soot-filled black precipitation.

Toxic Chemicals Released
- Hydrocarbons, sulfur oxides, and nitrogen compounds were released.
- These substances are highly harmful to health and the environment.

Health Risks
- Exposure can cause breathing problems, headaches, skin irritation, and eye damage.
- Long-term exposure may increase cancer risk.

WHO Warning
- The **World Health Organization** advised residents to stay indoors due to respiratory risks.

Geographical Factors
- Tehran’s mountain surroundings trap pollution and worsen air quality.

Threat of “Forever Chemicals”
- Industrial chemicals from burning facilities may contaminate soil, groundwater, and the food chain for many years.

[Era of gentle trade is over.Global village is being replaced by law of jungle-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

For many years, globalisation was based on the idea that trade between countries would create peace and cooperation. The French philosopher **Montesquieu** called this idea *“doux commerce”* (gentle trade), meaning that economic exchange would make nations more civilised and reduce conflicts.

However, the current global situation shows that this idea is weakening. Countries are increasingly using trade as a **strategic weapon** rather than a tool for cooperation. Policies like tariffs, export restrictions, and “buy national” rules—especially under leaders like **Donald Trump**—show that economic relations are now influenced heavily by geopolitics and national security concerns.

Global supply chains have also made countries realise their vulnerabilities. Events like pandemics or wars can suddenly disrupt trade networks. Because of this, many countries are shifting from **global efficiency to strategic security**, preferring to trade with trusted partners (“friend-shoring”) rather than the cheapest suppliers.

As a result, the global economy is becoming more fragmented. Instead of a single integrated world market supported by institutions like the **World Trade Organization**, countries are forming smaller trade blocs and focusing on national interests.

This shift means that trade is no longer mainly about mutual prosperity. Increasingly, it is about **strategic competition**, where nations try to weaken rivals economically. The concern is that if economic cooperation declines too much, global tensions and conflicts could increase.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Idea of "Gentle Trade"
Philosopher **Montesquieu** believed trade promotes peace and cooperation.
Economic interdependence was expected to reduce conflicts.

End of Globalisation Optimism
Rising tariffs, export controls, and economic nationalism show declining faith in free trade.

Trade as a Geopolitical Tool
Countries now use trade policies to pressure rivals and protect strategic industries.

Supply Chain Vulnerabilities
Crises like pandemics or wars exposed risks in global supply chains.

Shift to Friend-shoring
Countries increasingly prefer trading with political allies rather than the cheapest suppliers.

Fragmentation of Global Trade
Multilateral trade systems like the **World Trade Organization** are weakening.
Bilateral or regional trade agreements are increasing.

Risk of Rising Global Tensions
If economic cooperation declines, mistrust and geopolitical conflicts may grow.

Holding up half the sky on India's farms-The Hindu Editorial

Economy

Easy Explanation

Women play a major role in India's agriculture, even though their contribution is often under-recognised. According to surveys, millions of rural women work in activities such as crop cultivation, livestock rearing, and agricultural labour. However, official data often underestimates their work because many women combine farm work with household and care responsibilities, and therefore may not report themselves as "workers".

Recent labour data shows that the participation of rural women in the workforce has increased significantly. Yet much of this rise is due to **self-employment in agriculture**, which often reflects a lack of better wage employment opportunities. Today, more than 117 million women are estimated to be working in agriculture in India.

Women are heavily involved in crop production and livestock rearing. In many villages, women perform a large share of farm labour and most tasks related to animal care, such as feeding cattle and managing dairy production. Despite this large contribution, women rarely own land, which limits their economic power in agriculture.

The biggest challenge is low and unequal wages. Women agricultural workers earn significantly less than men. In many areas, women earn less than ₹300 per day for farm work, and their wages have increased very little after adjusting for inflation. Earnings from livestock work are even lower in some cases.

Overall, women form nearly **half of India's agricultural workforce**, but their labour is undervalued and poorly recorded. Experts argue that better recognition, fair wages, and stronger labour rights are necessary to improve the condition of women farmers.

Key Takeaways

Women's Major Role in Agriculture
Women perform crucial tasks in crop cultivation, livestock rearing, and farm labour.
They form nearly half of India's agricultural workforce.

Underestimation of Women's Work
Many women's activities are unpaid, seasonal, or mixed with household work.
Surveys often fail to record them as workers.

Rising Rural Female Workforce
Women's workforce participation in rural India increased from about 35% (2011–12) to 46.5% (2023–24).

| Clear your doubts now.

Growth of Self-Employment

A large share of women workers are self-employed in agriculture due to limited wage jobs.

Key Role in Livestock Sector

Women perform most daily tasks in animal husbandry and dairy activities.

Low Wages and Gender Gap

Women earn significantly less than men in agricultural labour.

In many regions wages are below ₹300 per day.

Lack of Assets and Rights

Only about 10% of rural women own land.

Better recognition, fair wages, and labour rights are needed for women farmers.

A seismic decision-The Hindu Editorial

Geography

Easy Explanation

The Government of India recently rolled back a proposal to revise the country's earthquake zoning system prepared by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**. Earthquake zoning divides the country into risk zones so that buildings and infrastructure can be designed to withstand possible earthquakes.

The proposed revision aimed to adopt a modern method called **Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Assessment (PSHA)**, which uses probability-based models to estimate earthquake risks more accurately. This approach is widely used in many advanced and earthquake-prone countries.

However, the new proposal created concern because it introduced a **new high-risk category called Zone VI**, covering areas such as Kashmir, parts of the Himalayan region, Kutch in Gujarat, and the North-East. If areas are placed in higher seismic zones, buildings and infrastructure must follow stricter safety standards.

These stricter standards could significantly increase construction costs. Estimates suggest that moving up by one seismic zone may raise construction costs by about **20%**, while two zones could increase costs by nearly **one-third**. Large projects such as dams, metro systems, highways, and power plants could become even more expensive.

Because of these financial and implementation concerns, several government agencies and the private sector opposed the revision. The government therefore withdrew the proposal for further consultation.

Experts argue that while updating earthquake zoning is necessary to improve **disaster preparedness and climate-resilient infrastructure**, it must balance safety, affordability, and development needs through wider consultation.

Key Takeaways

Rollback of Earthquake Zoning Revision

The government withdrew the proposed seismic zoning revision prepared by the **Bureau of Indian Standards**.

Purpose of Earthquake Zoning

Zoning classifies regions based on earthquake risk.

It helps design buildings and infrastructure that can withstand earthquakes.

Proposed New Method

The revision attempted to adopt **Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Assessment (PSHA)**.

This method uses probability models to estimate earthquake intensity and risk.

Introduction of Zone VI

A new high-risk category was proposed for regions like Kashmir, the Himalayan belt, Kutch, and the North-East.

Rising Construction Costs

Higher seismic zones require stronger and more expensive building designs.

Costs could increase by 20–30% for construction.

| Clear your doubts now.

Concerns from Government and Industry

Several ministries and infrastructure agencies opposed the changes due to economic implications.

Need for Balanced Policy

Earthquake zoning must improve disaster resilience while considering affordability, development, and climate concerns.

[A revision of GDP and its implications-The Hindu Text and Context]

Economy

Easy Explanation

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures the total value of goods and services produced in a country in a year. India calculates GDP using a large amount of economic data and statistical methods based on global standards such as the United Nations System of National Accounts. Periodically, the base year used for GDP calculations is revised to reflect changes in the structure of the economy.

India has recently released a new GDP series with **2022–23 as the base year**, replacing the earlier **2011–12 base year series** prepared by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**. Base-year revision is done every few years to capture new economic activities, changes in production patterns, and price structures.

The new estimates show that the **overall size of India's GDP is about 3–4% smaller** than what was earlier estimated in the previous series. However, the **annual GDP growth rates remain almost similar** to earlier estimates, with only minor differences.

The revision also changes the composition of the economy. The share of **agriculture and industry** in GDP has increased slightly, while the **share of the services sector has decreased** somewhat. Within industry, manufacturing's share has increased slightly but its overall size is marginally lower than previously estimated.

Another important change concerns the **private corporate sector**, whose share in GDP has declined in the new estimates. Meanwhile, the **household or informal sector's share has increased slightly**, partly because of agriculture's contribution.

Overall, the revision may correct earlier overestimation of GDP. However, it could also affect economic targets such as India's ambition of becoming a **$5-trillion economy**, which may take longer if the economy's size is revised downward. Experts say more methodological details are needed to fully understand the impact of the new GDP series.

Key Takeaways

What GDP Measures

GDP represents the total value of goods and services produced in a country.

It is the main indicator of the size of an economy.

Base Year Revision

India revised its GDP base year from **2011–12 to 2022–23**.

Base-year revisions capture structural changes in the economy.

Role of NSO

The **National Statistical Office** prepares National Accounts Statistics and GDP estimates.

GDP Size Revised Downward

The new series shows GDP about **3–4% smaller** than earlier estimates.

Growth Rates Mostly Unchanged

Annual GDP growth rates remain broadly similar to the earlier series.

Changes in Economic Structure

Agriculture and industry shares increased slightly.

The services sector's share declined somewhat.

| Clear your doubts now.

Policy Implications

Revised GDP size may delay India's **$5-trillion economy target** and influence economic policy analysis.

[Groups to prevent human-wildlife conflict linked to elephant deaths-The Hindu Science]

Environment

Easy Explanation

A study published in the journal **Conservation Biology** has found that anti-depredation squads (ADS) formed to reduce human-elephant conflict in Assam may actually be linked to **higher accidental elephant deaths**. These squads were introduced in 2003 in Sonitpur district with support from **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)** to help villagers collectively chase elephants away from farms and reduce crop damage.

The idea behind the programme was to avoid direct conflict between humans and elephants. Groups of volunteers used lights, firecrackers, and coordination with the Forest Department to drive elephants away from villages and farmland. Similar community-based guarding systems exist in many parts of India and the world.

However, the study analysed **20 years of elephant mortality data** and found that villages with anti-depredation squads recorded **two to three times more accidental elephant deaths** than villages without them. Most elephants did not die due to direct human attacks but from accidents such as electrocution, falling into trenches, or being hit by trains.

Researchers believe that when elephants are chased using noise and lights, they may become frightened and move quickly through unfamiliar areas. This creates what scientists call a **"landscape of fear"**, making elephants more likely to enter dangerous places or fail to notice hazards.

Experts caution that the study only shows an **association**, not a direct cause. Some deaths might have been incorrectly linked to the squads because the groups are active mainly during cropping seasons, while mortality data covers the whole year.

Assam has more than **5,000 wild elephants**, the second-largest population in India. Because anti-depredation squads are now used in several states, including West Bengal, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, the findings highlight the need to carefully evaluate such programmes and improve strategies to reduce human-elephant conflict while protecting wildlife.

Key Takeaways

Anti-Depredation Squads (ADS)
- Community groups formed to prevent crop damage by chasing elephants away from farms.
- Introduced in Assam with support from WWF.

Study Findings
- Research published in **Conservation Biology** analysed 20 years of elephant mortality data.
- Villages with ADS showed **2–3 times more accidental elephant deaths**.

Nature of Deaths
- Most elephants died from accidents such as electrocution, trenches, or train collisions.
- Direct human killings were not the main cause.

"Landscape of Fear" Effect
- Chasing elephants with lights and noise may frighten them.
- This panic may push them into dangerous environments.

Human-Elephant Conflict
- Conflicts occur when elephants enter farms and settlements after habitat loss.

Assam's Elephant Population
- Assam hosts **over 5,000 elephants**, one of the largest populations in India.

Need for Policy Evaluation

| Clear your doubts now.

Experts call for further research before expanding such interventions.
Conservation strategies should balance crop protection with wildlife safety.

[‘Delays in Starship risk NASA’s moon landing plan’-The Hindu Science]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The SpaceX Starship rocket, which is planned to take astronauts to the Moon under **NASA’s Artemis programme**, is facing significant delays. Starship was selected in 2021 as the first lunar lander for astronauts, but its development has already been delayed by about two years, pushing the expected Moon landing further into the future.

The Artemis programme aims to send astronauts back to the Moon and eventually establish a long-term human presence there. It also has geopolitical importance because the United States wants to return astronauts to the Moon before China launches its own crewed lunar missions, which are expected around 2030.

One of the biggest technical challenges for Starship is **refuelling in space**. Before travelling to the Moon, the Starship carrying astronauts must first be refuelled in Earth’s orbit. To do this, SpaceX may need to launch **more than 10 additional Starships** carrying fuel, which will transfer cryogenic propellants (liquid methane and liquid oxygen) to the main spacecraft.

This process is extremely complex because the spacecraft must dock with each other in orbit and transfer super-cooled fuel safely. Such large-scale cryogenic fuel transfer in space has **never been done before**, making it one of the most difficult technological steps in the mission.

Because of these challenges, NASA officials believe the technology may not be fully ready before the planned **Artemis III Moon landing**, currently targeted around 2028. To speed up the programme, NASA is considering testing Starship first in **low-Earth orbit** before attempting a full lunar mission.

Key Takeaways

Starship Delays
The **SpaceX Starship** lunar lander has faced about **two years of development delays**.
Artemis Programme
NASA’s **Artemis programme** aims to return astronauts to the Moon and build a long-term lunar presence.
Geopolitical Competition
The mission is partly driven by competition with **China’s planned crewed Moon missions by around 2030**.
Major Technical Challenge
Starship must **refuel in space** before travelling to the Moon.
Multiple Rocket Launches Required
More than **10 additional Starships** may be needed to supply fuel in orbit.
Cryogenic Fuel Transfer
Liquid methane and oxygen must be transferred in extremely cold conditions, which is technologically complex.
Possible Timeline Shift
Due to these challenges, the first crewed lunar landing under **Artemis III** may be delayed beyond the planned timeline.

| Clear your doubts now.

13th March 2026

[‘Oil reserves sufficient… LNG is greater concern’-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The **Strait of Hormuz** is one of the most important energy routes in the world. Nearly **20% of global oil and gas trade** normally passes through this narrow sea passage connecting the **Persian Gulf** to global markets.

Because of the ongoing war involving **Iran**, the movement of oil and gas tankers through the strait has drastically slowed. Oil tankers are being attacked and shipping companies fear sending vessels through the region. As a result, global energy markets have become extremely volatile.

Even though the **International Energy Agency** released oil from emergency reserves to stabilize markets, prices still fluctuated sharply between **$70 and $120 per barrel**. This volatility is mainly due to **fear and uncertainty about how long the conflict will last**.

Most countries currently have **strategic oil reserves**, which can sustain them for several weeks or months. However, the bigger concern may actually be **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** supplies. Europe’s gas storage is already low after winter, and disruptions from Gulf exporters like Qatar and the UAE are pushing LNG prices sharply higher.

Iran, despite being militarily weaker than the **United States**, has used **asymmetric tactics** such as drones and geography to disrupt shipping. By blocking or threatening traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, Iran is effectively **“weaponising oil prices”** to create economic pressure on Western countries.

A long-term closure of the strait is unlikely because **major economies cannot tolerate such disruption**. Possible solutions include **naval escorts for merchant ships, international cooperation to secure the sea route, and diplomatic negotiations to end the conflict**.

Key Takeaways

Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz
- About **one-fifth of global oil and gas trade** passes through this narrow chokepoint.
- Any disruption immediately impacts global energy markets and shipping routes.

Extreme Oil Price Volatility
- Oil prices fluctuated between **$70–$120 per barrel** within two weeks.
- Market behaviour is driven more by **fear of prolonged conflict** than actual shortage.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves as Buffer
- Countries hold emergency oil stocks:
  - China ~100 days
  - Japan ~250 days
  - EU ~90 days
  - India ~74 days
- These reserves help **temporarily stabilize supply shocks**.

LNG Supply Emerging as Bigger Concern
- LNG prices crossed **$15 per MMBtu** in Asia and Europe.
- Europe’s gas storage is low and Gulf LNG exports are disrupted.

Iran’s Asymmetric Warfare Strategy
- Iran uses **drones, missile threats and maritime geography** instead of direct confrontation.
- This allows it to disrupt shipping despite US military superiority.

Possible Security Measures for Shipping
- Countries may deploy **naval escorts for merchant vessels** through the strait.

| Clear your doubts now.

Anti-drone defence systems may be installed on ships.

Global Pressure for Diplomatic Resolution

A prolonged closure would damage the world economy.

Hence major powers are likely to push for **diplomacy, de-escalation and secure energy routes**.

[China's 'border defence'villages and the challenges they pose-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

China has been building **"Xiaokang" (well-off) border villages** along the **Line of Actual Control** for more than five years. These villages are mainly located along the border between India and China's **Tibet Autonomous Region**.

Out of **628 villages built by China**, about **72% are located opposite India's northeastern states**, and **around 90% of those are across Arunachal Pradesh**. Many of them are constructed in **disputed territories**, which raises security concerns for India.

These villages are not just ordinary settlements. Experts believe they are **dual-use infrastructure**, meaning they can serve both **civilian purposes (housing, development)** and **military purposes (logistics, surveillance, troop support)**.

Initially, many of these villages were empty. But since **2023**, Chinese citizens have started living in some of them, particularly opposite the **Lohit Valley** and the **Tawang** sector. This helps China strengthen its **territorial claims** and maintain a **permanent presence near disputed areas**.

China also passed a **border law in 2022** encouraging development, infrastructure, and civilian settlement in border areas to strengthen border defence.

In response, India launched the **Vibrant Villages Programme** in 2022. The aim is to develop **663 Indian border villages** with better infrastructure, connectivity, tourism, and economic opportunities so that people continue living in these frontier areas.

India is also improving **roads, bridges, and military infrastructure** near the border to strengthen its defence preparedness.

Key Takeaways

China's Xiaokang Border Villages

China has built **628 "well-off villages"** along its borders.

These are part of a broader border development strategy.

Focus on India's Northeastern Border

72% of villages are opposite India's northeastern states.

Nearly 90% of them are across **Arunachal Pradesh**.

Dual Civilian–Military Purpose

Villages may support **civilian settlement and economic activity**.

They can also provide **logistical support for the Chinese military**.

Assertion of Territorial Claims

Building settlements in disputed areas helps China **strengthen its claim over territory**.

Permanent population presence strengthens geopolitical control.

China's 2022 Land Border Law

Encourages **economic development and settlement in border regions**.

Integrates **civilian development with border defence strategy**.

India's Counter Strategy

India launched the **Vibrant Villages Programme (2022)**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Focus: infrastructure, connectivity, tourism and livelihood in border villages.

Growing Infrastructure Competition

Both countries are building **roads, bridges, and military logistics infrastructure** near the LAC.
This reflects a **long-term strategic rivalry along the border**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Why Do Border Villages Matter in Geopolitics?

Strengthen **territorial sovereignty through civilian presence**
Improve **logistics and military mobilisation**
Support **border infrastructure and surveillance**
Prevent **border depopulation**

[Caught between Afghanistan and Iran wars,Pakistan faces tough choices-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Pakistan is currently facing **serious strategic pressure from two directions** — the conflict involving **Iran** in West Asia and rising tensions with **Afghanistan** along its western border.

On one side, Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan **Taliban** has worsened significantly. The main reason is the presence of **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan** (TTP), a militant organisation that carries out attacks inside Pakistan but operates from Afghan territory. Pakistan has started airstrikes inside Afghanistan to target these militants, which has triggered retaliation.

On the other side, Pakistan is affected by the wider regional conflict involving Iran and Gulf countries such as **Saudi Arabia**. Pakistan has a **mutual defence agreement with Saudi Arabia**, meaning it may be expected to support Saudi Arabia if the conflict escalates.

This situation creates a **difficult diplomatic dilemma** for Pakistan.

It cannot alienate Saudi Arabia, which has long supported Pakistan economically.
At the same time, Pakistan also needs stable relations with Iran due to trade, border security, and internal stability.

The conflict has already increased **fuel prices in Pakistan**, worsening the country's fragile economy while it is negotiating a **$7-billion bailout package with the International Monetary Fund**.

These conflicts also risk increasing **internal instability**.

The **Baloch insurgency** could intensify if Iran becomes weaker.
Sectarian tensions could rise because Pakistan has a large **Shia population sympathetic to Iran**.

Thus, Pakistan is stuck between **economic pressure, security threats, and diplomatic balancing** in a very unstable region.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

Pakistan's Two-Front Strategic Pressure
- Pakistan faces tensions with **Afghanistan (TTP issue)** and regional conflict involving **Iran and Gulf countries**.
- This creates complex diplomatic and security challenges.

TTP and Pakistan–Afghanistan Conflict
- The **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)** conducts terrorist attacks in Pakistan.
- Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of allowing TTP to operate from Afghan territory.

Economic Strain on Pakistan
- Rising oil prices increased fuel costs by **PKR 55 per litre**.
- The country's fragile economy depends on an **IMF bailout programme**.

Strategic Ties with Saudi Arabia
- Pakistan signed a **mutual defence pact with Saudi Arabia** in 2023.
- If the Iran conflict worsens, Pakistan may face pressure to support Saudi Arabia.

Complex Relations with Iran
- Pakistan shares a **900-km border with Iran**.
- Stability in Iran is important to control **cross-border militancy and trade**.

Risk of Internal Instability
- Conflicts could strengthen **Baloch insurgents**.
- Sectarian tensions may rise between **Shia and Sunni groups** inside Pakistan.

Limited Strategic Options
- Pakistan must balance relations with **Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and the US** simultaneously.
- This leaves Islamabad in a **difficult geopolitical position**.

[Covid vaccine side effects:Why SC ordered 'no-fault' compensation-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The **Supreme Court of India** has directed the central government to create a **"no-fault compensation policy"** for people who suffered serious side effects or died after receiving COVID-19 vaccines such as **Covishield** and **Covaxin**.

During India's mass vaccination drive in 2021, a few individuals reportedly developed rare complications (like blood-clotting disorders) soon after vaccination. Families of these victims approached the court saying that they should receive compensation because the vaccination campaign was promoted by the government and was practically unavoidable for many people.

The government argued that vaccines had undergone proper scientific approval and that adverse reactions were **extremely rare**. It suggested that affected families could approach civil courts and prove negligence by vaccine manufacturers.

However, the Supreme Court said this approach would be **unfair and burdensome**. Proving medical negligence in court is complex and time-consuming. Instead, the court directed the government to adopt a **"no-fault liability" system**, where victims can receive compensation **without proving negligence**.

The court linked this decision to **Article 21 of the Constitution**, which guarantees the **right to life and health**. Since the vaccination programme was a **State-led public health initiative**, the government has a responsibility to support those who suffered serious harm, even if such cases are very rare.

At the same time, the court clarified that this order **does not mean vaccines are unsafe**, nor is it questioning the scientific approval process. It only focuses on providing **relief to affected families**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Order on Vaccine Injury Compensation
- The court directed the government to create a **no-fault compensation policy**.
- Victims of severe vaccine side effects can receive relief without proving negligence.

Background of the Case
- Families claimed their relatives died after complications following COVID vaccination.
- Most victims were aged **18–40 years** and died due to rare medical conditions.

Government's Argument
- Vaccines passed **rigorous regulatory approvals**.
- Adverse events were extremely rare (about **0.001 per lakh doses**).

Why the Court Rejected Civil Court Route
- Proving negligence in medical cases is **scientifically complex and costly**.
- It could lead to **unequal access to justice and inconsistent outcomes**.

Concept of 'No-Fault Liability'
- Compensation is provided **without establishing fault or negligence**.
- Similar mechanisms exist in **motor accident compensation and vaccine injury schemes in many countries**.

Constitutional Basis – Article 21
- The court linked compensation to the **Right to Life and Right to Health**.
- The State must act as a **guardian of public welfare**, not just a passive observer.

Court Clarification on Vaccine Safety
- The judgment does **not question vaccine safety or approval process**.
- It only ensures **support for rare adverse outcomes during a public health campaign**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)

- AEFI refers to **any medical problem that occurs after vaccination**, which may or may not be caused by the vaccine.
- India has a **national AEFI surveillance system** to monitor vaccine safety.
- Helps identify **rare side effects and maintain public confidence in immunisation programmes**.

Women's political participation in India-The Hindu Text and Context

Polity

Easy Explanation

Women's participation in Indian elections has increased significantly over the last six decades. Today, women vote almost **as much as men**, and in some State elections they even **outnumber male voters**. However, this increase in participation has **not translated into equal political power or representation**.

| Clear your doubts now.

In the early decades after independence, women voted much less than men. For example, in the **1967 Indian general election**, male turnout was about **66.7%**, while female turnout was **55.5%**. This gap existed due to factors such as **lower literacy, social restrictions, domestic responsibilities, and limited political outreach**.

Over time, the gender gap in voting reduced. By the **2019 Indian general election** and **2024 Indian general election**, women voted at nearly the **same rate as men**, and in many State elections women's turnout slightly exceeded men's.

However, when it comes to **political representation**, the situation is different. Women remain **underrepresented in Parliament and politics**. In the first Lok Sabha (1952), only **22 women MPs** were elected. Even in recent years the number is still low — **74 women MPs in 2024**, which is only about **14% of the Lok Sabha**, despite women forming nearly **half of the electorate**.

One major reason is that **political parties nominate fewer women candidates**. Although the number of women contesting elections has increased (800 women candidates in 2024), men still dominate the candidate list.

Interestingly, data shows that **women candidates often have equal or higher success rates than men**, meaning that when women are given tickets, they are capable of winning.

Women also face **social barriers** such as family control, patriarchal norms, lack of political networks, and financial constraints. Because of these structural barriers, increased voting participation has **not yet translated into equal representation**.

To address this gap, Parliament passed the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**, which reserves **33% of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies** once delimitation is completed.

Thus, India shows a **paradox: women participate actively as voters but remain underrepresented in political power**.

Key Takeaways

Rise in Women's Voter Participation
- Women's turnout has steadily increased since the 1960s.
- In recent elections, women vote **almost equal to or slightly more than men**.

Declining Gender Gap in Voting
- The turnout gap was about **11% in the 1960s–70s**.
- It reduced drastically and nearly disappeared by **2019–2024 elections**.

Limited Political Representation
- Women form **nearly 50% of voters but only about 14% of MPs**.
- Representation remains far below democratic parity.

Low Nomination by Political Parties
- Political parties still nominate **far fewer women candidates** than men.
- This "nomination bottleneck" limits representation.

Women Candidates Often Perform Well
- Data shows **similar or higher success rates** for women candidates.
- This challenges the argument that women are "less electable."

Social and Structural Barriers
- Patriarchal norms, family control, domestic responsibilities and financial constraints limit women's political engagement.

Role of Women's Reservation Law
- The **Women's Reservation Act (2023)** aims to reserve **33% seats in legislatures**.
- It is expected to improve women's political representation in the future.

| Clear your doubts now.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Important Milestones in Women's Political Participation in India

Universal adult franchise (1950) gave women equal voting rights.
73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) reserved **one-third seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities**.
Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023) provides **33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies**.

Electrifying industrial heat as a path to India's thermal independence-The Hindu Text and Context

Economy

Easy Explanation

Industries need **very high temperatures (heat)** to run processes such as making tiles, textiles, steel, and chemicals. In India, this heat is mostly produced by **burning fossil fuels like natural gas, coal, or LPG**.

Recently, geopolitical tensions affecting the **Strait of Hormuz** disrupted global energy supplies. Since India imports a large share of its natural gas, industries in places like **Morbi** and **Ludhiana** faced fuel shortages and production slowdowns.

This crisis highlights the need for **"thermal independence"** — the ability to produce industrial heat using **domestic and renewable energy sources**, instead of relying on imported fossil fuels.

Two important technologies can help achieve this:

1. Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST):
Instead of generating electricity like solar panels, CST uses mirrors to **focus sunlight and generate high temperatures** (up to about 400°C). This heat can produce steam required for industrial processes like dyeing, bleaching, or chemical treatment.

2. Electrification of Industrial Heat:
Instead of burning fuel, industries can use **electric technologies** such as induction heating or plasma torches. These systems use electromagnetic energy to generate heat directly, making them **more efficient (over 90%)** compared to gas boilers that lose energy through exhaust.

However, shifting to electric heat requires **stronger power infrastructure**. Industrial heat accounts for **about 25% of India's total energy consumption**, so moving this demand from gas pipelines to electricity grids would require **massive upgrades in power supply, storage systems, and distribution networks**.

Therefore, the article argues that India needs a **National Thermal Policy** to promote technologies such as CST, industrial electrification, and thermal storage systems. This would reduce dependence on imported fuels and improve **energy security and climate sustainability**.

Key Takeaways

Industrial Heat and Energy Dependence

| Clear your doubts now.

Industrial sectors depend heavily on **fossil fuels like natural gas and coal** for heat.
Disruptions in global energy supply directly affect manufacturing.

Impact of Global Geopolitics

Conflict affecting the **Strait of Hormuz** disrupted gas supply.
Industries in hubs like Morbi and Ludhiana faced production challenges.

Concept of Thermal Independence

Thermal independence means generating **domestic, reliable heat sources** rather than relying on imported fuels.

Role of Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST)

CST uses mirrors to **concentrate sunlight and generate high temperatures**.
Suitable for many industrial processes requiring **100°C–400°C heat**.

Electrification of Industrial Heat

Technologies like **induction heating and plasma torches** produce heat directly using electricity.
These systems are **more efficient and cleaner than fossil fuel boilers**.

Infrastructure Challenges

Industrial heat accounts for **about 25% of India's total energy use**.
Large-scale electrification would require **stronger grids, storage systems, and upgraded distribution networks**.

Need for Policy Support

India needs a **National Thermal Policy** with incentives for CST, industrial electrification, and carbon credit markets to encourage adoption.

14th March 2026

[Amid oil supply crunch, the big winner–Russia-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing conflict involving **Iran**, the **United States**, and **Israel** has disrupted oil supplies from the Middle East. This is mainly because traffic through the **Strait of Hormuz**—through which about **20% of the world's oil supply passes**—has slowed down.

When global oil supply decreases, **oil prices rise sharply**. This situation has unexpectedly benefited **Russia**, even though it is not directly involved in the conflict.

Due to sanctions imposed by Western countries after Russia's war with **Ukraine**, many countries had reduced purchases of Russian oil. However, the current energy shortage forced the US to temporarily **relax some sanctions**, allowing countries to buy Russian oil that was already loaded on ships.

As oil prices increased and sanctions eased slightly, Russian crude oil became **highly attractive for buyers**, especially in Asia. Countries such as **India** and **China** increased their imports.

Earlier, Russian oil was sold at a **discount** compared to global benchmarks. But because of the supply shortage, the discount has reduced and in some cases Russian oil is even being sold **at a premium price**.

Thus, Russia is earning **huge additional revenues from oil exports**, which may help finance its war efforts and support its economy.

For India, the situation is complicated. India depends on imports for **over 88% of its oil needs**, and about **half of its crude imports normally pass through the Strait of Hormuz**. Due to disruptions in that route, India has increased purchases of Russian oil as an alternative supply source.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Russia as the Unexpected Beneficiary
Rising global oil prices due to supply disruptions benefit oil-exporting countries.
Russia is earning **millions of dollars daily in extra revenue**.

Role of the Strait of Hormuz
About **one-fifth of global oil supply** normally passes through this chokepoint.
Disruption in this route caused a global supply crunch.

Temporary US Sanctions Relaxation
The US allowed countries to buy **Russian oil already in transit**.
This was aimed at stabilising global oil supply and prices.

Rising Oil Prices
Global crude prices increased significantly, reaching around **$100 per barrel**.
Higher prices increase revenues for oil exporters like Russia.

Russian Oil Becomes Attractive
Earlier sold at discounts due to sanctions.
Supply shortages reduced discounts and increased global demand.

Impact on India
India imports **over 88% of its crude oil**.
With Hormuz disruptions, India increased purchases of Russian crude.

Geopolitical and Economic Implications
Higher oil revenues strengthen Russia economically.
The situation highlights how **energy markets are deeply linked to geopolitics and conflicts**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

India's Major Crude Oil Suppliers (Recent Trends)

Russia – largest supplier in recent years
Iraq
Saudi Arabia
United Arab Emirates

This diversification helps India **reduce risks from supply disruptions in any single region**

.

[To compute the true costs of Iran conflict,look at the past-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing war involving **United States**, **Israel**, and **Iran** is extremely expensive. Initial estimates show that Israel is spending about **$3 billion every week**, while the US spent around **$11.3 billion in just six days** of the conflict.

These are only the **direct military costs**, such as missiles, aircraft operations, defence systems, and logistics. But the **true cost of war is much larger** because it also includes economic disruption, human casualties, environmental damage, and lost development opportunities.

For perspective, the amount spent by the US and Israel in just **six days of war equals more than ₹1.3 lakh crore**, which is a significant share of India's annual defence budget.

| Clear your doubts now.

History shows that the total cost of wars often becomes clear **many years later**. For example, a study by **Brown University** estimated that the US spent about **$8 trillion** on the wars after the **September 11 attacks**, including long-term costs such as veterans' care.

Apart from military spending, wars also cause **indirect global economic effects**. For example, the current conflict has pushed **oil prices up by nearly 50%**, which increases fuel costs and contributes to inflation worldwide.

Another way to understand the cost of war is through **opportunity cost** — the idea that money spent on war could have been used for **education, healthcare, infrastructure, or environmental protection**.

Finally, wars have major **human and environmental costs**. Past conflicts since 2001 have caused **hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths** and damaged civil liberties in many countries. Military activities also produce large amounts of greenhouse gases because military vehicles and aircraft consume huge amounts of fossil fuels.

Thus, the true cost of war goes far beyond military expenditure — it affects **economies, societies, human lives, and the environment**.

Key Takeaways

High Direct Military Costs
- Israel is spending about **$3 billion per week** in the conflict.
- The US spent **$11.3 billion in the first six days** of the war.

Comparison with National Budgets
- War expenditure in a few weeks can equal the **annual defence budgets of many countries**.
- For example, India's defence budget is about **₹7.8 lakh crore**.

Historical Lessons on War Costs
- The US post-9/11 wars cost around **$8 trillion** according to research by **Brown University**.
- Long-term costs include veterans' healthcare and reconstruction.

Global Economic Impact
- The conflict has increased **global oil prices by nearly 50%**.
- Higher energy prices contribute to **inflation and cost-of-living crises worldwide**.

Opportunity Cost of War
- Money spent on warfare could otherwise fund **infrastructure, education, healthcare, and climate action**.

Human Costs
- Post-9/11 wars caused about **940,000 deaths**, including over **432,000 civilians**.
- Wars often lead to displacement and humanitarian crises.

Environmental Costs of Warfare
- Military operations consume huge quantities of fossil fuels.
- Armed forces are major contributors to **greenhouse gas emissions and pollution**.

| Clear your doubts now.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Why Wars Have Long-Term Economic Impacts

- Increased **defence spending and public debt**
- Disruption of **energy and commodity markets**
- Inflation due to **higher fuel and food prices**
- Damage to **infrastructure and economic productivity**

[Strait of Hormuz crisis spotlights a growing risk for Indian seafarers: Abandonment-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing conflict in West Asia near the **Strait of Hormuz** has increased risks for commercial ships and sailors. Tankers and cargo vessels in the **Persian Gulf** have faced attacks, and some Indian seafarers have even lost their lives.

The crisis has also highlighted a growing problem in the shipping industry called **"seafarer abandonment."** This happens when shipowners stop paying wages, cut off supplies, and leave crew members stranded on ships or in foreign ports without support.

Indians are particularly affected because they form **about 15% of the global seafarer workforce**, making them the second-largest nationality in the maritime labour force. A report by the **International Transport Workers' Federation** found that **1,125 Indian seafarers were abandoned in 2025**, the highest number globally.

One major reason is the **"Flag of Convenience (FOC)" system**. Ships can register in countries with weaker regulations, lower taxes, and weaker labour protections. Many shipowners use these flags to avoid strict labour laws. When financial problems arise or conflicts occur, they simply abandon the ship and its crew.

Indian seafarers are especially vulnerable because many come from poorer backgrounds and often pay large sums to recruitment agents for jobs. If they are abandoned, they may lack money, visas, or legal support to return home.

The **Directorate General of Shipping** and international organisations are trying to help by repatriating stranded sailors, blacklisting abusive vessels, and tightening recruitment rules. However, experts say stronger global regulation and oversight are still needed.

Key Takeaways

Rising Risks for Seafarers in Conflict Zones
- War near the **Strait of Hormuz** has exposed merchant ships to attacks.
- Several Indian sailors have been affected.

What is Seafarer Abandonment
- Shipowners abandon vessels and crews without **wages, food, or repatriation support**.
- Crew members may remain stranded at sea or in foreign ports.

Indians Most Affected Globally
- Indians make up about **15% of the global seafarer workforce**.
- Over **1,125 Indian seafarers were abandoned in 2025**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Role of Flag of Convenience System

Ships register under countries with **weaker regulations and labour protections**.

This allows shipowners to evade responsibility for crew welfare.

Economic and Social Vulnerability

Many Indian sailors pay large recruitment fees to agents.

Losing a job at sea leaves them **financially trapped and unable to return home**.

Recent Abandonment Incidents

Cases reported near **Iran, UAE, Nigeria, Yemen, and Ukraine**.

Over **100 Indian sailors were repatriated from multiple vessels in 2025–26**.

Government and International Response

The **Directorate General of Shipping** has strengthened regulations.

Some vessels have been **blacklisted for exploiting Indian seafarers**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Why Indian Seafarers Are Globally Important

India provides **one of the largest maritime workforces in the world.**
Around **7.4 lakh seafarers are registered with the Directorate General of Shipping.**
Indian sailors are widely employed in **global merchant shipping, oil tankers, and cargo fleets.**

[OBC creamy layer:Why SC ruled against 'hostile-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The **Supreme Court of India** ruled that **income alone cannot be the only factor** to determine whether a person from the **Other Backward Classes (OBC)** falls under the **"creamy layer."**

The **creamy layer** refers to the relatively **wealthier and more advanced members of OBC communities** who are **excluded from reservation benefits** because they are considered socially and economically better off.

The case arose due to a clarification issued in 2004 by the **Department of Personnel and Training**. This rule treated the children of employees working in **public sector undertakings (PSUs)** and the **private sector** differently from those working in government jobs when determining creamy layer status.

The Supreme Court said this approach created **"hostile discrimination"**, meaning it treated **similar people differently without a valid reason**, which violates the equality principles under **Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution**.

The court emphasised that the purpose of excluding the creamy layer is **to ensure that reservation benefits reach the genuinely disadvantaged members of OBC communities**, not to create unfair distinctions between similar social groups.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Ruling on Creamy Layer

The court held that **income alone cannot be the sole criterion** for determining creamy layer status among OBCs.

Meaning of Creamy Layer

| Clear your doubts now.

The creamy layer refers to **socially advanced and economically well-off members of OBCs** who are excluded from reservation benefits.

Origin of the Concept

The concept was introduced in the landmark **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India** case.

Issue with 2004 Government Clarification

A rule treated **PSU and private sector employees differently from government employees** while determining creamy layer status.

Court's Observation

Such unequal treatment amounted to **"hostile discrimination"** and violated constitutional equality principles.

Current Income Limit

The creamy layer income ceiling is **₹8 lakh per year** (revised in 2017).

Objective of Creamy Layer Exclusion

Reservation benefits should reach the **most socially and educationally backward sections within OBCs**, not the relatively privileged groups.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Constitutional Provisions Related to Reservation

Article 14: Equality before law
Article 15(4): Special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes
Article 16(4): Reservation in public employment for backward classes

On climate change,mind the science-policy gap-The Indian Express The Ideas Page

Environment

Easy Explanation

Scientists are increasingly warning that **global warming is accelerating faster than previously expected**. A recent study by **Stefan Rahmstorf** and statistician **Grant Foster** found that the **rate of global warming has doubled since 2014** compared to the previous decade.

Earlier, it was difficult to determine whether rising temperatures were due to **natural climate variability**, such as **El Niño**, volcanic eruptions, or solar radiation. The new study separated these natural influences and confirmed that **human-driven climate change is the main reason for the rapid warming**.

The research suggests that the goal of the **Paris Agreement**—to limit global temperature rise to **1.5°C above pre-industrial levels**—may become unreachable by **2030** if current trends continue.

Another study has warned that **sea-level rise could be much higher than earlier estimates by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change**. Rising temperatures are already affecting large parts of the world, including India, where **extreme heat is making daily life and work difficult for millions of people**.

However, there is a growing **"science–policy gap."** While scientific evidence about climate risks is becoming stronger, **government policies and international negotiations are not keeping pace with the science**.

For example, countries use different methods to calculate **net-zero emissions**, sometimes allowing the same emission reductions to be counted multiple times. Scientists warn that this can **overestimate progress on climate action**.

| Clear your doubts now.

The article concludes that while scientists and experts have already proposed solutions for **climate adaptation, public health protection, energy transition, and resilient agriculture**, policymakers must act faster to implement them.

Key Takeaways

Global Warming Accelerating
Scientific studies show the **rate of global warming has doubled since 2014**.
Role of Natural Climate Variability
Factors like **El Niño, volcanic eruptions, and solar radiation** affect temperatures but do not explain the long-term warming trend.
Paris Agreement Target at Risk
The goal of limiting warming to **1.5°C above pre-industrial levels** may be crossed by **2030**.
Rising Climate Impacts
Studies suggest **higher sea-level rise and increasing extreme heat** worldwide.
India Highly Vulnerable
Large parts of India already face **heat conditions that restrict human activity and productivity**.
Science–Policy Gap
Scientific understanding of climate change is advancing faster than **government policy and international climate negotiations**.
Need for Urgent Policy Action
Experts have solutions for **adaptation, climate resilience, and energy transition**, but implementation requires stronger political commitment.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Major Climate Drivers

Key factors influencing global temperature:

- **Greenhouse gas emissions** from fossil fuels
- **El Niño and La Niña cycles**
- **Volcanic eruptions**
- **Solar radiation variations**

However, long-term warming trends are **primarily driven by human activities**.

LPG cylinder crunch hits home,singes stories of welfare and aspiration-The Indian Express The Ideas Page

Economy

Easy Explanation

Two objects have become powerful symbols of modern life in Indian households: the **pressure cooker** and the **LPG cylinder**. These items represent **modern cooking, better living standards, and social mobility**. Access to LPG cooking fuel especially marks the shift from traditional **smoke-producing chulhas (wood stoves)** to cleaner and healthier kitchens.

| Clear your doubts now.

Recognising the importance of clean cooking fuel, the government launched the **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** in 2016. The scheme aims to provide LPG connections to poor households, especially rural women, to improve health, reduce indoor pollution, and ease domestic work.

However, India imports a large share of its LPG supply, and about **90% of these imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**. Due to the ongoing conflict involving **Iran**, the US and Israel, this route has been disrupted, raising concerns about LPG supply shortages.

This situation affects poor households the most. When LPG becomes expensive or unavailable, families return to **biomass fuels such as wood or crop waste**, which produce heavy indoor air pollution.

The use of biomass fuels disproportionately affects **women and girls**, who spend more time cooking and collecting firewood. Prolonged exposure to smoke leads to serious health problems such as respiratory diseases.

Access to LPG also has **social and economic benefits**. Clean cooking saves time because women no longer need to gather firewood and cooking becomes faster. This saved time allows women to pursue **education, income-generating work, or leisure**, improving their independence and quality of life.

However, access to LPG is still unequal. Studies show that **upper-caste households use LPG at much higher rates than SC/ST households**, especially in rural areas. Poor infrastructure and remote settlements make LPG delivery more difficult for marginalised communities.

Thus, the LPG cylinder is not just a cooking tool — it represents **health, gender equality, social mobility, and energy security**.

Key Takeaways

Symbol of Modern Domestic Life
Pressure cookers and LPG cylinders represent **modern living and improved household welfare** in India.

Role of PM Ujjwala Yojana
The **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (2016)** provides LPG connections to poor households, especially rural women.

Dependence on Global Supply Routes
India imports most of its LPG, and about **90% passes through the Strait of Hormuz**, making supplies vulnerable to geopolitical conflicts.

Health Impact of Biomass Fuels
Burning wood or biomass creates **indoor air pollution**, which disproportionately affects poor households.

Gender Dimension
Women and girls face the greatest health risks because they spend more time in kitchens exposed to smoke.

Socio-economic Inequality in LPG Access
LPG use is higher among **upper-caste households**, while SC/ST households often rely on biomass fuels.

Empowerment and Time Savings
LPG reduces cooking time and firewood collection, enabling women to engage in **education, paid work, and leisure activities**, increasing autonomy.

| Clear your doubts now.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Household Energy Ladder

The "Energy Ladder" explains how households shift fuels as income rises:

Biomass fuels – wood, dung, crop residue

Transitional fuels – kerosene, coal

Modern fuels – LPG, PNG, electricity

Economic growth and welfare schemes push households **up the energy ladder toward cleaner fuels**.

Price pressures-The Hindu Editorial

Economy

Easy Explanation

India's retail inflation, measured by the **Consumer Price Index**, increased to **3.2% in February 2026**, which is the highest level in the last ten months. Inflation means the **general rise in prices of goods and services**.

The rise in inflation is mainly due to **higher food prices and rising precious metal prices (gold and silver)**. Food items have a very large influence on inflation because they carry **about 36.75% weight in the CPI basket**.

In February, food inflation rose from **2.1% to 3.35%**, mainly because of higher prices of **meat, edible oils, fruits and nuts**. Tomato prices increased sharply by **over 45%**, though prices of onions and potatoes fell.

Looking ahead, there are several risks that may push inflation higher:

- **Weather conditions:** Climate scientists are predicting a possible **El Niño** during the monsoon. A weak monsoon can reduce agricultural production and increase food prices.
- **Global conflicts:** The ongoing conflict in West Asia may disrupt natural gas supplies. Natural gas is an important input in **fertiliser production**, which affects agricultural output and food prices.
- **Rising precious metal prices:** Due to global uncertainty, investors are buying gold and silver as **safe-haven assets**, leading to very high inflation in jewellery prices.

Higher oil prices and shortages of fuels such as LPG and LNG also increase **industrial production costs**, which businesses eventually pass on to consumers.

The **Reserve Bank of India** and its **Monetary Policy Committee** now face a challenge. Since inflation is driven by **supply problems rather than excess demand**, raising interest rates may not control inflation effectively and could slow economic growth.

Therefore, the government must focus on **improving supply chains and securing energy sources** to control inflation.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Retail Inflation Rising

CPI inflation increased to **3.2% in February 2026**, a 10-month high.

Food Prices as Major Driver

Food items have a **36.75% weight in CPI**.

Rising prices of meat, oils, fruits, and tomatoes drove inflation.

Impact of Climate Risks

Possible **El Niño** conditions could weaken the monsoon and reduce agricultural output.

Global Conflict Effects

West Asia conflict may disrupt **natural gas supplies**, affecting fertiliser production and food prices.

Precious Metal Price Surge

Inflation in **gold jewellery reached about 48%**, while silver prices rose sharply due to safe-haven demand.

Energy Price Pressures

Rising oil, LPG, and LNG prices increase **industrial costs**, which can raise consumer prices.

Policy Challenge for RBI

Since inflation is **supply-driven**, raising interest rates may not reduce inflation but could slow economic growth.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Key Components of CPI Inflation in India

The CPI basket broadly includes:

- **Food and beverages – ~36% weight**
- Housing
- Fuel and light
- Clothing and footwear
- Miscellaneous services (health, education, transport, etc.)

Food prices therefore have a **disproportionate influence on overall inflation in India**.

The fate of the Washington Consensus, once talisman-The Hindu Editorial

International relations

Easy Explanation

The **Washington Consensus** was a set of economic policy ideas developed in 1989 by economist **John Williamson**. It suggested that countries, especially developing nations facing economic crises, should adopt **market-oriented reforms** to achieve growth and stability.

These policies included measures like **fiscal discipline, trade liberalisation, privatisation of public sector enterprises, deregulation, foreign investment openness, and protection of property rights**. International institutions such as the **International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank** strongly promoted these reforms in the 1980s and 1990s.

The core idea was that **free markets and global integration would generate economic growth**, which would eventually benefit everyone through the “trickle-down effect.”

| Clear your doubts now.

However, over time many problems emerged. Several developing countries that implemented these policies experienced **debt crises, inequality, financial instability, and social unrest**. Major events such as the **Asian Financial Crisis** and the **Global Financial Crisis** exposed weaknesses in the free-market model.

Another criticism was that the Washington Consensus discouraged **industrial policy**, meaning governments were advised not to actively support domestic industries. But many successful economies such as **South Korea, Taiwan, and China** actually grew through strong **state intervention and industrial strategy**, contradicting the consensus.

Today, the world economy has changed significantly. Rising **geopolitical tensions, economic nationalism, climate challenges, and digital economies** require new policy approaches. Countries are now adopting a more flexible strategy that mixes **market mechanisms with state intervention, industrial policy, and social welfare programmes**.

Thus, the article argues that the **Washington Consensus no longer fits the modern global economy**, and there is a growing search for a **new development model suited to a multipolar world**.

Key Takeaways

Meaning of Washington Consensus
- A set of economic reforms proposed in 1989 by economist **John Williamson**.
- Promoted policies like **liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation**.

Role of Global Institutions
- Policies were promoted by institutions like the **IMF and World Bank**.
- Many developing countries adopted them during economic crises.

Core Economic Philosophy
- Belief that **free markets and global trade would drive economic growth**.
- Growth was expected to reduce poverty through **trickle-down effects**.

Criticism and Failures
- In some countries, reforms led to **debt crises, inequality, and social unrest**.
- Events like the **Asian Financial Crisis (1997)** and **Global Financial Crisis (2008)** exposed systemic weaknesses.

Rejection of Industrial Policy
- The Washington Consensus discouraged state-led industrial policies.
- However, successful economies like **South Korea and Taiwan** used strong government intervention.

Rise of Alternative Models
- China's state-led development and new industrial policies challenge the old model.
- Countries are increasingly adopting **mixed economic strategies**.

Towards a Post-Washington Consensus
- Modern economic thinking emphasises **state capacity, social welfare, industrial policy, and climate resilience** alongside markets.

UPSC Value Addition Box

The 10 Core Policies of the Washington Consensus

- Fiscal discipline
- Reordering public expenditure
- Tax reform
- Interest rate liberalisation
- Competitive exchange rates
- Trade liberalisation
- Liberalisation of foreign direct investment
- Privatisation of state enterprises
- Deregulation
- Protection of property rights

These policies aimed to create **market-driven economic growth in developing countries**.

The India-Canada turnaround is about deliverables-The Hindu Editorial

International relations

Easy Explanation

Relations between **India** and **Canada** had become tense in recent years, especially during the tenure of former Canadian Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**. However, the visit of Canada's new Prime Minister **Mark Carney** to India in February–March 2026 helped improve bilateral ties.

The visit focused on **practical cooperation and economic deliverables**, rather than revisiting past political disagreements. It followed earlier diplomatic engagements between Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** and Canadian leaders in 2025.

A key outcome was progress toward a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, which aims to expand trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Another important development was cooperation in **critical minerals and energy**, areas that are becoming strategically important worldwide. Many high-tech industries—such as **semiconductors, electric vehicles, and renewable energy technologies**—require minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements.

India also signed a **uranium supply agreement** with the Canadian company **Cameco**. This will help fuel India's nuclear power plants and support its long-term goal of expanding nuclear energy capacity.

Canada is rich in natural resources, while India has growing energy demand and aims to reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports. Cooperation in **nuclear energy, critical minerals, technology, and research** therefore benefits both countries.

The article argues that the renewed India–Canada partnership is driven less by ideology and more by **economic interests, supply chain diversification, and energy security** in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Improvement in India–Canada Relations

Diplomatic ties improved after tensions during the Trudeau government.

The visit of Prime Minister **Mark Carney** marked a reset in relations.

Focus on Economic Deliverables

The visit prioritised **trade, energy, technology cooperation, and investments**.

Progress Toward CEPA

The **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** aims to expand bilateral trade and investment.

Critical Minerals Cooperation

Critical minerals are essential for **semiconductors, batteries, and clean energy technologies**.

Diversifying supply chains reduces dependence on a few countries.

Uranium Supply Agreement

India signed a contract with **Cameco** for **uranium ore supply**.

This supports India's nuclear power expansion.

Energy Security for India

India aims to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and expand **nuclear and clean energy**.

Strategic Importance of the Partnership

Cooperation in **technology, supply chains, and energy resources** strengthens both countries in a geopolitically uncertain world.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Why Critical Minerals Matter

Critical minerals such as **lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements** are essential for:

- Electric vehicle batteries
- Renewable energy technologies
- Semiconductors and electronics
- Defence and advanced technologies

Control over these minerals has become a **major geopolitical issue**.

15th March 2026

How did the SC read the OBC creamy layer test?: TH FAQ

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court recently clarified an important rule related to reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The Court said that the income of parents alone cannot be used to decide whether an OBC candidate belongs to the "creamy layer" (the more privileged section of OBCs that is excluded from reservation benefits).

The concept of the creamy layer was introduced in the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment, which allowed reservations for OBCs but said that the most economically and socially advanced people within OBCs should not get reservation benefits.

In 1993, the government issued guidelines explaining who falls under the creamy layer. These guidelines excluded certain categories automatically, such as children of senior government officers, judges, or high-ranking armed forces

personnel. For others, the government introduced an income/wealth test. If parental income exceeded a certain limit for three consecutive years (currently ₹8 lakh), the candidate could be treated as part of the creamy layer.

However, the 1993 rules clearly said that income from salaries and agriculture should not be counted when applying this test. Only income from other sources like business, property, or investments should be considered.

Confusion arose after a 2004 government clarification, which suggested that salary income could be included when applying the income limit for certain cases, particularly for children of employees in public sector undertakings (PSUs) or private companies where their posts could not be directly compared with government posts.

Because of this confusion, many OBC candidates whose parents worked in PSUs or private jobs were denied reservation benefits simply because their salary income crossed the ₹8 lakh limit.

The Supreme Court ruled that this interpretation was wrong. It said salary income should not be used as the sole factor to decide creamy layer status. Doing so would create unfair discrimination between children of government employees and those whose parents work in PSUs or private sectors.

The Court also ordered the government to correct the situation. Candidates who were wrongly denied OBC reservation in past civil service exams may now receive benefits, and additional posts can be created if necessary to accommodate them.

Key Takeaways

Creamy Layer Concept
- Introduced after the 1992 Indra Sawhney (Mandal) judgment.
- Purpose: exclude socially and economically advanced OBCs from reservation benefits.

1993 Government Guidelines (DoPT OM)

Automatically excluded categories:
- Children of constitutional authorities (President, judges etc.).
- Children of Group A and Group B government officers.
- Children of senior armed forces and paramilitary officers.

Income/Wealth Test
- Current threshold: ₹8 lakh annual income (for 3 consecutive years).
- Wealth above Wealth Tax Act threshold also considered.
- Salary income and agricultural income were originally excluded.

Source of Confusion
- 2004 government clarification suggested salary income could be counted.
- This affected OBC candidates whose parents worked in PSUs or private sector.
- Many candidates were denied reservation benefits incorrectly.

Supreme Court Judgment (2026)
- Parental salary income alone cannot determine creamy layer status.
- Income test should exclude salary and agricultural income as originally intended.
- Court called previous interpretation discriminatory.

Equality Principle Highlighted
- Treating PSU/private employees' children differently from government employees violates equality.
- Constitution requires similarly placed individuals to be treated equally.

Who Benefits from the Ruling
- OBC candidates whose parents work in PSUs or private sector.
- Candidates denied reservation in civil service exams since 2015.
- Government may create supernumerary posts to correct past injustice.

| Clear your doubts now.

What is the Essential Commodities Act?: TH FAQ

Economy

Easy Explanation

India recently invoked the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 after tensions in the Persian Gulf disrupted energy supplies passing through the Strait of Hormuz. Since India depends heavily on imports for cooking gas (LPG), the government used this law to manage the situation and prevent shortages.

The Essential Commodities Act gives the central government wide powers to regulate the production, supply, and distribution of essential goods when there is a crisis. These goods include food items, fuels, fertilizers, medicines, seeds, and other crucial commodities needed for daily life.

Under Section 3 of the Act, the government can issue orders to increase supply, regulate distribution, fix prices, impose stock limits, control storage and transportation, and prevent hoarding or black marketing. The law is mainly used during emergencies to ensure that essential items remain available at fair prices.

In this case, the crisis arose because the Strait of Hormuz — through which a large share of global energy trade passes — became unstable due to military conflict involving Iran and Western countries. Since about 90% of India's LPG imports travel through this route, any disruption immediately threatens domestic supplies.

India's LPG consumption has increased sharply due to schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which expanded LPG coverage from about 62% of households in 2016 to nearly universal access today. However, domestic production has not kept pace with demand. In 2024–25, India produced about 12.8 million tonnes of LPG while consumption reached 31.3 million tonnes, meaning most of the demand is met through imports.

To deal with the shortage risk, the government ordered oil refineries to increase LPG production. Chemicals like propane and butane that are normally used in petrochemical manufacturing must now be redirected toward LPG production. Both public and private refineries — including Indian Oil, BPCL, HPCL, Reliance, and Nayara Energy — have been instructed to follow this rule.

As a result, domestic LPG production has increased by around 25%, though imports are still required to meet demand.

The government also issued rules on natural gas allocation. Instead of letting markets or contracts decide supply, gas is now distributed based on priority. Households using piped natural gas, transport using CNG, and LPG production receive top priority. Fertilizer production gets second priority, while industries and petrochemical plants receive reduced supplies.

Because of this prioritisation, commercial users like restaurants, hotels, and hostels are already facing LPG shortages and have had to limit operations.

Key Takeaways

Essential Commodities Act, 1955

- Allows the Union government to regulate production, supply, and distribution of essential goods.
- Used during emergencies to prevent shortages, hoarding, and price spikes.
- Government can impose stock limits, price controls, and distribution restrictions.

Key Provision – Section 3

- Government can increase supply of essential commodities.
- Regulate storage, transport, and distribution.
- Fix prices or control trade.
- Prevent hoarding and black marketing.

| Clear your doubts now.

Why the Act Was Invoked Now

- Military tensions disrupted shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Around 20% of global oil trade passes through this chokepoint.
- About 90% of India's LPG imports move through this route.

India's LPG Dependence

- LPG coverage expanded through PM Ujjwala Yojana.
- Domestic production: ~12.8 million tonnes.
- Consumption: ~31.3 million tonnes.
- Large import dependence creates vulnerability.

Government Emergency Measures

- Refineries ordered to convert propane and butane streams into LPG.
- Petrochemical production temporarily reduced.
- Both public and private refineries included.
- Domestic LPG production increased by about 25%.

Natural Gas Allocation Policy

Priority order:

Household piped natural gas
CNG for transport
LPG production
Pipeline compressor fuel

Other sectors:

- Fertilizer industry: ~70% allocation.
- Manufacturing and industries: ~80%.
- Oil refineries: ~65%.

Impact on Economy

- Commercial kitchens facing shortages.
- Petrochemical industries experiencing supply cuts.
- Government prioritising household energy security.

Why did the SC allow passive euthanasia?: TH FAQ

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court recently allowed the withdrawal of life support for a man who had been in a vegetative state for nearly 13 years. The Court said that continuing treatment was no longer useful and that allowing him to die naturally would respect his dignity. This is considered India's first judicial approval of passive euthanasia in a specific case.

Euthanasia refers to ending a person's life to relieve suffering. There are two types. Active euthanasia involves deliberately causing death, such as by giving a lethal injection. This is illegal in India. Passive euthanasia involves withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining medical treatment, such as removing a ventilator or stopping artificial nutrition, when recovery is impossible.

The Court explained that passive euthanasia should not simply be seen as "doing nothing." Even switching off life support is technically an action. The key difference is that passive euthanasia does not introduce a new cause of death. Instead, it removes artificial support and allows the natural process of dying to take place.

| Clear your doubts now.

The judges also emphasised that the Constitution protects not only the right to live but also the right to die with dignity. If a patient is terminally ill or in an irreversible vegetative state, forcing them to remain alive through machines may violate their dignity.

The Court used what is called the "best interests test." This test examines whether continuing medical treatment actually benefits the patient. If treatment only prolongs suffering without any chance of recovery, doctors and courts may decide that withdrawing treatment is in the patient's best interest.

The ruling also builds upon earlier legal developments in India. Previous Supreme Court judgments had already recognised the right to die with dignity and allowed passive euthanasia under strict conditions. However, India still does not have a specific law governing the issue, so courts continue to provide guidelines.

Key Takeaways

Passive vs Active Euthanasia
- Passive euthanasia: withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment.
- Active euthanasia: deliberately causing death (e.g., lethal injection).
- Active euthanasia remains illegal in India.

Supreme Court Ruling (2026)
- Allowed withdrawal of life support for a patient in a long-term vegetative state.
- Recognised that the right to life includes the right to die with dignity.
- Replaced the term "passive euthanasia" with "withdrawing or withholding medical treatment."

Meaning of Withdrawal of Treatment
- Removing life-support systems does not create a new cause of death.
- It simply removes artificial support and allows natural death to occur.

Right to Die with Dignity
- Derived from Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).
- Life with dignity includes dignity at the end of life.
- Forcing terminally ill patients to survive through machines may violate dignity.

Best Interests Test
- Used to decide whether treatment should continue.
- Considers both medical and non-medical factors.
- Focus: whether treatment benefits the patient or only prolongs suffering.

Evolution of Law in India

1996 – Gian Kaur v State of Punjab
- Recognised distinction between suicide and natural death in terminal illness.

2011 – Aruna Shanbaug Case
- Supreme Court allowed passive euthanasia under strict guidelines.

2018 – Common Cause v Union of India
- Recognised right to die with dignity.
- Introduced Advance Medical Directives (living wills).

2023
- Supreme Court simplified procedures for living wills and withdrawal of treatment.

Legal Gap
- No specific legislation yet governing end-of-life decisions.

| Clear your doubts now.

- Draft bill proposed in 2016 but not enacted.
- Courts continue to issue guidelines in the absence of law.

The pearl of the Persian Gulf: TH Profiles

International Relations

Easy Explanation

The conflict between the U.S., Israel, and Iran has intensified, and a key location in this conflict is Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf. The United States recently attacked military targets on this island. Kharg Island is extremely important because it is the main hub through which Iran exports its oil to the rest of the world.

Kharg Island is a small island located about 25–30 km off Iran's coast in the Persian Gulf. Despite its small size, it plays a huge role in global energy markets because most of Iran's oil exports pass through it. The island contains large oil storage tanks, terminals for loading oil onto ships, and infrastructure that connects it to Iran's oil fields through pipelines.

The island became important in the 1950s when Iran developed oil export facilities there with help from American companies. Its deep waters allow large oil tankers to dock easily, which is not possible in many other parts of Iran's coastline where the water is too shallow.

Over time, Kharg Island became the centre of Iran's oil export network. Oil from major Iranian fields like Ahvaz, Marun, and Gachsaran is transported through pipelines to Kharg Island and then shipped to global markets through the Strait of Hormuz.

Today, up to 90% of Iran's oil exports move through Kharg Island. Much of this oil is purchased by China, which has become the largest buyer of Iranian crude.

Because the island is so crucial to Iran's economy and global oil supply, it is heavily protected by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Any attack on the island could disrupt global oil markets and cause oil prices to rise sharply.

The recent attack is particularly significant because it comes at a time when tensions are already high in the region. Since the Strait of Hormuz is also threatened, the war could disrupt energy supplies worldwide, pushing oil prices higher and affecting economies across the globe.

Key Takeaways

Location and Geography
- Kharg Island lies in the Persian Gulf, about 25–30 km off Iran's coast.
- Small island: around 8 km long and about 20 sq. km in area.
- Located near the Strait of Hormuz, a key global maritime chokepoint.

Strategic Importance
- Main oil export terminal of Iran.
- Around 90% of Iran's crude oil exports pass through Kharg Island.
- Connected to major oil fields (Ahvaz, Marun, Gachsaran) via pipelines.

Infrastructure
- Massive oil storage tanks and loading terminals.
- Deep-water jetties allow supertankers to dock easily.
- Storage capacity: about 30 million barrels.
- Loading capacity: up to 7 million barrels per day.

| Clear your doubts now.

Oil Export Data
- Typical exports: about 1.3–1.6 million barrels per day.
- Pre-war surge: close to 3 million barrels per day.

Major Buyer
- China imports over 80% of Iran's crude exports.
- Iran earned about $35.76 billion from oil exports in 2024.

Historical Background
- Important trade stop since around the 10th century.
- Fortified by Dutch traders in the 18th century.
- Briefly occupied by the British in the 19th century.
- Oil export terminal built in the late 1950s.

Role in Iran–Iraq War (1980–88)
- Iraq repeatedly bombed Kharg Island.
- Iran rebuilt the facilities and continued exporting oil.

Current Conflict Impact
- U.S. strikes targeted military sites on the island.
- Disruption could reduce global oil supply.
- Oil prices have already risen (Brent crude above $100 per barrel).

Global Implications
- Threat to stability of global energy markets.
- Disruption of Strait of Hormuz trade route could worsen crisis.
- Rising oil prices impact inflation and global economic stability.

Earth's magnetic .ips can last 70,000 years, new study finds: TH Science

Science Tech

Easy Explanation

The Earth has a magnetic field that acts like a protective shield. It helps in navigation (for example, using a compass) and protects the planet from harmful solar radiation and charged particles coming from the Sun.

Scientists have known that the Earth's magnetic field sometimes reverses, meaning the magnetic north and south poles switch places. Earlier, geologists believed that these reversals usually happened relatively quickly, in about 10,000 years.

However, a new scientific study suggests that some magnetic reversals in Earth's past lasted much longer. By studying sediments from about 40 million years ago (during the Eocene epoch), researchers discovered that certain reversals could last up to 70,000 years.

To study this, scientists examined deep-sea sediment cores from the North Atlantic Ocean. When these sediments were deposited on the ocean floor, tiny magnetic minerals inside them aligned themselves with the Earth's magnetic field at that time. Once buried, they preserved a record of the field's direction and strength.

Using techniques like X-ray scanning and magnetic analysis, researchers were able to reconstruct the history of magnetic field changes. They also used astronomical cycles (changes in Earth's orbit and tilt) to accurately date the sediment layers.

| Clear your doubts now.

The study found two important reversal events — one lasting about 18,000 years and another lasting nearly 70,000 years. During these reversals, the magnetic field became weaker and unstable, sometimes showing temporary "rebounds" before finally flipping.

A weakened magnetic field means the Earth becomes less protected from solar radiation. This could allow more high-energy particles to reach the atmosphere and the surface, potentially influencing climate, atmospheric chemistry, and even biological evolution.

The findings suggest that the Earth's magnetic system (called the geodynamo), which is created by the movement of liquid iron in the outer core, is more complex than previously believed.

Key Takeaways

Earth's Magnetic Field
- Generated by movement of liquid iron in the outer core (geodynamo).
- Protects Earth from solar radiation and charged particles.
- Helps navigation using compasses.

Magnetic Pole Reversal
- Occurs when magnetic north and south poles switch positions.
- Has happened hundreds of times in Earth's history.

Previous Scientific View
- Scientists believed reversals lasted about 10,000 years.
- Most high-resolution data came from the last 17 million years.

New Research Findings
- Study examined sediments from about 40 million years ago (Eocene epoch).
- Found much longer reversals:
- One lasting ~18,000 years
- Another lasting ~70,000 years

How Scientists Studied It
- Used deep-sea sediment cores from the North Atlantic.
- Magnetic minerals in sediments record Earth's magnetic field direction.
- X-ray scans and magnetic measurements helped reconstruct the history.
- Astronomical cycles were used to date sediment layers precisely.

Characteristics of Long Reversals
- Magnetic field weakens significantly during reversal.
- Field becomes unstable and may show temporary rebounds.
- Stabilisation may take tens of thousands of years.

Possible Effects on Earth
- Weaker magnetic field exposes Earth to more solar radiation.
- Could affect atmosphere, climate, and evolution of life.
- Long periods of weak shielding may influence environmental conditions.

Experts clash over HALEU-Th fuel for Indian nuclear reactors: TH Science

Science Tech

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

A scientific debate has emerged in India's nuclear energy community over the use of a new type of nuclear fuel called HALEU-thorium. A study published in the journal *Current Science* by scientists from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) analysed whether this fuel could be used in India's existing nuclear reactors. While the study acknowledged some advantages, it concluded that the fuel may not be suitable for India's current reactors without major design changes.

HALEU stands for **High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium**, a type of uranium enriched more than normal reactor fuel but less than weapons-grade uranium. When combined with thorium, it can potentially produce more energy and generate less nuclear waste.

The BARC study compared three fuel options for India's **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)**:

Natural uranium (currently used in India's reactors)

Slightly enriched uranium

HALEU mixed with thorium

The researchers found that the HALEU-thorium combination produced the **highest burn-up**, meaning it generated more energy from the same amount of fuel. It also produced significantly less radioactive waste — about **14% of the waste produced by current reactors**.

However, the study also identified a potential safety issue. It suggested that using HALEU-thorium could make **shutdown rods about 26% less effective**. Shutdown rods are critical safety devices used to quickly stop nuclear reactions during emergencies. Because of this, the study concluded that HALEU-thorium fuel would not be a simple replacement ("drop-in fuel") for current PHWR reactors.

This conclusion triggered criticism from several nuclear experts. Former Atomic Energy Commission chairman **Anil Kakodkar** argued that the study's conclusions were misleading. According to him, India's newer **700-MW PHWR reactors may not require any modification**, while older reactors might need only minor adjustments.

Scientists connected with the U.S.-based company **Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE)** also criticised the study. The company has developed a HALEU-thorium fuel called **ANEEL**, which has already been tested in a U.S. reactor. They argue that the study compared the fuel with reactor designs meant for different fuel cycles, which makes the conclusions questionable.

Meanwhile, other experts believe India should remain cautious. India's nuclear programme already follows a **three-stage strategy** designed to eventually use thorium as a major energy source. With India preparing to start operating a **Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam**, some scientists argue that introducing HALEU-thorium now could disrupt the long-planned strategy and increase dependence on imported enriched uranium.

Key Takeaways

HALEU (High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium)
- Uranium enriched between 5% and 20% U-235.
- Higher enrichment than normal reactor fuel but below weapons-grade.
- Can improve reactor efficiency.

Thorium as Nuclear Fuel
- Thorium itself is not fissile but **fertile**.
- It absorbs neutrons and converts into **Uranium-233**, a fissile fuel.
- Produces less long-lived radioactive waste.

| Clear your doubts now.

BARC Study Findings

Fuel combinations tested in PHWR reactors:

- Natural uranium (current fuel)
- Slightly enriched uranium
- HALEU-thorium

Results:

- HALEU-thorium produced the **highest burn-up (≈50 GWd/t)**.
- Generated much **less nuclear waste** (~14% of current levels).

Concerns Identified

- Shutdown rods become **~26% less effective**.
- Reactor safety systems may require redesign.
- Therefore, not a simple replacement fuel for current reactors.

Scientific Disagreement

Critics (e.g., Anil Kakodkar, MIT researchers):

- Study conclusions exaggerated the safety issues.
- Modern PHWRs may need minimal modification.
- India should test HALEU-thorium fuel experimentally.

Supporters of the Study:

- Simulations reflect real-world reactor conditions.
- India should focus on its existing nuclear roadmap.

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

Stage 1

- PHWR reactors using natural uranium.

Stage 2

- Fast Breeder Reactors producing plutonium.
- Example: **500 MW Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam**.

Stage 3

- Thorium-based reactors using **U-233 fuel**.
- Aim: reduce dependence on imported uranium.

Strategic Debate

- HALEU is expensive and commercially limited.
- Could increase dependence on imported enriched uranium.
- Some experts believe India should stick to its long-term thorium strategy.

[When AI firms become power firms, who pays?: TH Science]

Science Tech

Easy Explanation

The U.S. government recently introduced a proposal called the **"Ratepayer Protection Pledge."** It asks major artificial intelligence companies to generate or procure their own electricity to power their massive data centres instead of relying on public power grids whose costs are shared by ordinary consumers.

Large technology companies such as Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, Oracle, and xAI operate huge data centres that run AI systems. These facilities require enormous computing power and therefore consume huge amounts

| Clear your doubts now.

of electricity. In the U.S., data centres already use about **4–5% of the country's electricity**, and this could rise to **9–17% by 2030** as AI expands.

Communities hosting these facilities have begun complaining that AI data centres are increasing electricity demand, raising power bills, and putting pressure on local power grids. The U.S. proposal therefore asks companies to **pay for the full cost of electricity generation and grid upgrades** needed to support their operations.

The pledge is not legally binding, but it signals an important shift in thinking. As AI grows, energy may become the biggest constraint, not computing chips. Companies developing AI may need to invest directly in power generation and infrastructure, making them similar to **hybrid technology–energy companies**.

At the same time, India is trying to attract these global cloud and AI companies. In the **Union Budget**, India announced a **tax holiday until 2047** for foreign cloud providers that build data centres in India and provide global services.

However, some analysts warn that this policy may overlook the environmental and infrastructure costs of hosting such facilities. Unlike traditional software companies, hyperscale data centres are **energy-intensive industrial installations**. They consume huge amounts of electricity, require large quantities of water for cooling, and need significant land.

If these facilities expand rapidly, they could put additional pressure on India's already strained electricity systems, water resources, and urban infrastructure. The key policy question therefore becomes: **who will bear the cost of the energy systems needed to run AI infrastructure — private companies or the public?**

Key Takeaways

Ratepayer Protection Pledge (U.S.)

- Proposal asking AI companies to generate or procure their own electricity.
- Aim: prevent electricity costs from being passed to ordinary consumers.
- Applies to major AI firms like Alphabet, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, Oracle, and xAI.
- Currently **non-binding** but signals policy direction.

AI and Energy Demand

- AI requires massive computing clusters running continuously.
- Data centres already consume **4–5% of U.S. electricity**.
- Could rise to **9–17% by 2030**.
- Energy may become the main constraint for AI growth.

Transformation of AI Companies

- Hyperscalers may evolve into **hybrid tech–energy companies**.
- Competitive advantage may include:
- computing power
- data
- electricity generation and infrastructure.

India's Policy Approach

- India is encouraging global data centres.
- **Tax holiday until 2047** offered to foreign cloud providers.
- Aim: make India a global data centre hub.

Concerns About Data Centre Expansion

Hyperscale data centres require:

- Gigawatts of electricity.
- Large volumes of water for cooling.
- Significant land area.

| Clear your doubts now.

Possible Risks

- Increased pressure on electricity grids.
- Rising energy demand in urban areas.
- Environmental stress due to water use.
- Public infrastructure subsidising private AI infrastructure.

Policy Debate

U.S. approach:

- Companies should finance their own power supply.

India's current approach:

- Offer incentives to attract investment.

Key question:

- Who pays for the energy infrastructure needed for AI growth?

16th March 2026

Why LPG sector is the worst hit by Iran war-The Indian Express Explained Page

Economy

Easy Explanation

The conflict in **West Asia** has disrupted energy supply routes for India. Among different fuels (crude oil, natural gas, and LPG), **LPG is facing the most serious shortage**. LPG is widely used as cooking gas in Indian households, so the government is taking special measures to ensure homes continue to receive cylinders.

The main reason for the crisis is the disruption in shipping through the **Strait of Hormuz**, a narrow sea route through which a large share of global oil and gas passes. Because of the conflict, maritime traffic there has nearly stopped.

India depends heavily on this route for LPG imports. Nearly **90% of India's LPG imports come through the Strait of Hormuz**, compared with about **40% for crude oil**. Since LPG imports are blocked, a large part of the supply has suddenly disappeared.

To handle the shortage, the government has taken emergency measures:

Households are given priority over commercial users like restaurants and industries.
Refineries are increasing LPG production and diverting petrochemical raw materials (propane and butane) to make LPG.
Waiting time between LPG cylinder bookings has been increased (25 days in urban areas and 45 days in rural areas).
Commercial users are being asked to shift to alternative fuels like kerosene, fuel oil, biomass, or coal.

Even after increasing domestic production, India still faces a gap because **around 60% of LPG demand normally comes from imports**.

In contrast, **crude oil supplies remain stable** because India has stockpiles and can import oil from other regions like Russia. Tankers carrying Russian crude were already near Indian waters and could be delivered quickly.

Natural gas supplies are also affected but not as severely. Since about **60% of India's LNG imports also pass through the Strait of Hormuz**, around **30% of gas supply has been disrupted**. The government has therefore prioritised gas supply to essential sectors like households (PNG), transport (CNG), fertiliser plants, and LPG production.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

LPG Most Affected Fuel

West Asia conflict has disrupted India's LPG supply more than crude oil or natural gas.
LPG is crucial because it is used as cooking fuel in millions of Indian households.

High Import Dependence

India consumes about **33 million tonnes of LPG annually**.
Domestic production meets only **around 40%**, while **60% is imported**.

Critical Role of Strait of Hormuz

Nearly **90% of India's LPG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**.
Disruption of this chokepoint has removed **over half of India's LPG supply**.

Government Emergency Measures

Household LPG supply prioritised over commercial use.
Refineries instructed to **increase LPG production and divert petrochemical streams**.

Restrictions on LPG Usage

Waiting period for LPG cylinder booking increased.
Commercial consumers asked to switch to **alternative fuels like kerosene or coal**.

Crude Oil Supply Still Stable

India has **6–8 weeks of crude oil, petrol, and diesel stocks**.
Supplies from Russia and other non-West Asian regions are helping maintain stability.

Natural Gas Supply Prioritisation

Government prioritised **PNG households, CNG transport, LPG production, and fertiliser plants**.
Industrial consumers are receiving **reduced gas supplies** to manage shortages.

[LPG imports rose with urbanisation, schemes, growing middle class-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India's dependence on LPG imports has increased significantly over the last few decades because demand for cooking gas has grown much faster than domestic production. LPG is widely used as cooking fuel in households and commercial kitchens, and today about 60% of India's LPG requirement is met through imports.

The sharp rise in demand is mainly due to rapid urbanisation, the expansion of middle-class households, and government schemes that expanded access to clean cooking fuel. A major push came from the **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana**, which provided free LPG connections and subsidised cylinders to poor households. Because of this scheme, millions of rural families shifted from traditional fuels like firewood and animal dung to LPG.

As LPG consumption increased rapidly, imports also rose sharply. India imported only about 1,722 thousand metric tonnes (TMT) of LPG in 1998–99, but imports increased to more than 20,000 TMT by 2024–25. In monetary terms, LPG imports grew from about ₹1,274 crore to more than ₹1 lakh crore, and today LPG accounts for more than half of India's expenditure on petroleum product imports.

Domestic LPG production has increased but has not kept pace with the growth in consumption. LPG is mainly produced as a by-product during crude oil refining or natural gas processing, which limits how much can be produced domestically. As a result, even though refining capacity has expanded, LPG production has remained almost stagnant in recent years.

Another major concern is that most of India's LPG imports come from West Asia and pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**. This narrow maritime route is one of the world's most important energy chokepoints. Any geopolitical tension or disruption in this region can therefore directly affect India's LPG supply and energy security.

Key Takeaways

India's LPG Import Dependence

| Clear your doubts now.

Around **60% of India's LPG demand is met through imports**.
LPG is now the **most imported petroleum product** in the country.

Massive Growth in Imports
Imports increased **12 times between 1998–99 and 2024–25**.
Import spending rose to **₹1.06 lakh crore**.

Demand Driven by Social and Economic Changes
Rising **urbanisation, middle-class growth, and clean fuel transition** increased LPG demand.
Cooking gas became the primary household fuel.

Impact of Ujjwala Scheme
PMUY expanded LPG access to rural households.
Over **10 crore subsidised LPG connections** were distributed.

Demand Growing Faster Than Production
Consumption increased **fivefold**, while production grew only **threefold**.
This created a large supply deficit.

Structural Limits to LPG Production
LPG is mainly a **by-product of crude oil refining and natural gas processing**.
Domestic production has plateaued at around **13 million tonnes annually**.

Geopolitical Vulnerability
About **90% of LPG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz**.
Any disruption in West Asia can threaten India's LPG supply.

[SHANTI Act:How thorium can power India's path to energy independence-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The **SHANTI Act 2025** is an important step in expanding India's nuclear energy sector. It allows greater participation of private companies, industry, and research institutions in nuclear power development to strengthen India's energy security.

India plans to achieve **100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047**, but this expansion depends heavily on imported uranium because domestic uranium reserves are limited and difficult to mine. As global demand for uranium rises, relying only on imported uranium may become difficult and unsustainable.

To solve this problem, experts suggest focusing on **nuclear fuel recycling and thorium-based energy**. Recycling nuclear fuel can extract much more energy from the same material and reduce nuclear waste.

India has a major advantage because it possesses some of the **largest thorium reserves in the world**. Thorium can be converted into uranium-233 inside reactors and used as nuclear fuel, which could help India achieve greater energy independence.

India's nuclear programme follows a **three-stage strategy**: first using uranium in **pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs)**, then using **fast breeder reactors (FBRs)** to produce more nuclear fuel, and finally moving to **thorium-based reactors** for long-term energy production.

Key Takeaways

SHANTI Act as a Nuclear Reform
The SHANTI Act 2025 opens nuclear energy development to **private sector, academia, and industry**.
It aims to accelerate India's nuclear energy expansion.

Target of 100 GW Nuclear Power
India plans to reach **100 GWe nuclear capacity by 2047**.
This would require large amounts of uranium annually.

| Clear your doubts now.

Dependence on Imported Uranium

Domestic uranium reserves are limited and low grade.

Expanding nuclear power may increase India's reliance on global uranium markets.

Need for Nuclear Fuel Recycling

Recycling nuclear fuel can increase energy extraction **50–100 times**.

It reduces waste and improves resource efficiency.

Thorium as India's Strategic Advantage

India has some of the **largest thorium reserves in the world**.

Thorium fuel can enhance **energy independence and reduce proliferation risks**.

Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

Stage 1: Uranium-based **PHWR reactors**.

Stage 2: **Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)** producing more nuclear fuel.

Stage 3: **Thorium-based reactors** using uranium-233.

Future Technologies for Clean Energy

SMRs and thorium molten salt reactors could expand nuclear capacity.

They may also support **green hydrogen production and low-carbon energy systems**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

SHANTI Act & Thorium Energy

- India holds **one of the world's largest thorium reserves**, mainly in monazite sands along coastal regions.
- India's **three-stage nuclear programme (Bhabha Strategy)** aims to convert thorium into **Uranium-233 for long-term energy security**.
- Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) are critical because they **produce more nuclear fuel than they consume**.

[Behind Karnataka liquor tax tweak from price to alcohol content-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Governance

Easy Explanation

The **Karnataka** government has decided to change how it taxes liquor. From April, the state will move to a new system called **Alcohol-in-Beverage (AIB) based taxation**, where tax will depend on the **percentage of alcohol in the drink**, rather than its selling price.

At present, liquor in Karnataka is taxed based on its **Declared Price**, which is the price decided by the distiller. The state has **16 different tax slabs**, and the excise duty increases with the price of the product. This means premium brands are taxed more simply because they are more expensive.

Under the new system, tax will depend only on **how much alcohol the drink contains**. For example, two drinks with **42% alcohol content**—one cheap and one premium—will attract the **same excise duty**, even if their prices are very different. This method is considered globally more accurate because the social harms of alcohol depend mainly on **alcohol strength**, not price.

The government plans to introduce the change **gradually**. First, the number of tax slabs will be reduced from **16 to 8**, and eventually the slab system may be removed completely.

Karnataka earns a large amount of revenue from liquor taxes and has set a target of **₹45,000 crore in excise revenue for 2026–27**. Currently, cheaper liquor generates most of the revenue because it sells in larger volumes. With the new

system, the government expects **premium liquor prices to fall slightly**, which could increase their sales and boost revenue.

Key Takeaways

- **Shift to Alcohol Content-Based Tax**
  - Karnataka will adopt **Alcohol-in-Beverage (AIB) based excise duty**.
  - Tax will depend on **alcohol percentage instead of product price**.
- **Current Price-Based Tax System**
  - Liquor is taxed based on **Declared Price set by distillers**.
  - The state currently uses **16 excise duty slabs**.
- **Equal Tax for Same Alcohol Strength**
  - Drinks with the same alcohol percentage will attract **similar excise duty**.
  - Price differences between brands will not affect tax rates.
- **Gradual Implementation**
  - Slabs will first reduce from **16 to 8**.
  - Eventually the government may **eliminate the slab system completely**.
- **Major Source of State Revenue**
  - Karnataka aims to collect **₹45,000 crore from excise revenue in FY2026-27**.
  - Liquor taxation is a key revenue source for the state.
- **Cheaper Liquor Currently Drives Revenue**
  - Around **60% of excise revenue comes from lower-priced liquor segments**.
  - Premium liquor currently contributes less due to high prices.
- **Expected Impact on Market**
  - Premium liquor prices may fall due to lower tax burden.
  - Increased premium sales could **boost government revenue**.

[To fill university posts,reframe recruitment-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

Public universities in India face a serious shortage of teachers. According to the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education**, about **26% of teaching posts in centrally funded institutions are vacant**, while state universities face shortages of up to **40%**. This affects the quality of higher education.

Recruitment rules made by the **University Grants Commission** have changed many times and often create confusion. The current system uses academic scores to shortlist candidates, but the final selection still depends heavily on **interviews**, which can be subjective and sometimes very short.

Recruitment processes have also faced controversies. For example, the **Haryana Public Service Commission** changed its recruitment pattern to a subjective exam followed by interviews. After complaints about fairness, the **Punjab and Haryana High Court** stayed the recruitment process.

Experts argue that India needs a **transparent, objective, and stable recruitment system** to fill vacant university teaching posts quickly.

Key Takeaways

- **Severe Faculty Shortage**
  - Around **26% of teaching posts are vacant in centrally funded institutions**.
  - Some state universities face **up to 40% faculty shortage**.
- **Impact on Higher Education**

| Clear your doubts now.

Lack of teachers weakens **teaching quality, research output, and academic development**.

Changing Recruitment Guidelines

UGC has issued recruitment rules since 2010.

Frequent changes created confusion and inconsistency.

Limitations of Current Selection Process

Heavy reliance on **interviews**, which are subjective and sometimes very brief.

Interview performance may outweigh academic qualifications.

Problems with Subjective Testing

Some recruitment exams rely on **essay-type questions**, which may test writing speed rather than knowledge.

Recruitment Disputes in Courts

The Haryana recruitment controversy led to a stay by the **Punjab and Haryana High Court**.

Court intervention delays hiring further.

Need for Transparent Recruitment Reform

Experts recommend **objective, transparent, and standardised recruitment procedures**.

Faster recruitment is essential to address the faculty deficit.

[Return of Russian oil signals US pragmatism-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The **Donald Trump** administration recently allowed a temporary **30-day relaxation of sanctions on Russian oil exports**. This decision came after tensions in West Asia disrupted global oil supplies and pushed oil prices sharply higher.

The crisis began when conflict involving the **United States**, **Israel**, and **Iran** led to the closure of the **Strait of Hormuz**, through which about **20% of the world's oil supply passes**. This caused global oil prices to jump from about **$70 to over $110 per barrel**, raising fears of a global energy crisis.

To stabilise oil markets, the U.S. decided to allow more Russian oil to reach international markets even though sanctions were imposed after Russia's invasion of **Ukraine**. Initially the relaxation applied mainly to **India**, which imports large quantities of Russian oil, but later it was extended to all buyers.

The move shows a **pragmatic approach by Washington**, recognising that Russia remains an important supplier in the global energy system. However, some European countries are concerned that easing sanctions could help Russia financially and weaken pressure related to the Ukraine war.

Overall, the decision highlights the tension between **geopolitical sanctions and the need for stable global energy supplies**, and it may also open possibilities for renewed diplomatic engagement between the U.S. and Russia.

Key Takeaways

Temporary Relaxation of Sanctions

The U.S. allowed a **30-day suspension of some sanctions on Russian oil exports**.

Aim: stabilise global energy markets.

Trigger: West Asia Crisis

Conflict involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran disrupted oil supplies.

Closure of the **Strait of Hormuz** caused a sharp rise in oil prices.

Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

Around **20% of global oil trade passes through this chokepoint**.

Disruption here can create global energy shocks.

Role of Russian Oil

| Clear your doubts now.

Russia remains a **major global energy supplier**.
Allowing its oil exports helps increase supply and reduce prices.

India's Strategic Position

India is a **major buyer of Russian oil**, making it important in global oil trade.
The initial waiver acknowledged India's energy dependence.

European Concerns

Some European countries fear easing sanctions may **strengthen Russia's finances**.
It could weaken pressure on Russia regarding the Ukraine war.

Geopolitical Implications

The move reflects **pragmatism in energy diplomacy**.
It may open space for **future U.S.–Russia political engagement**.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Return of Russian Oil & Energy Geopolitics

- Around **20% of global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz**, making it one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints.
- Russia remains one of the **largest global oil exporters**, shaping global energy markets.
- India became a major buyer of **discounted Russian crude after the Ukraine war**.

Ice patches on melting glaciers greater threat than thought: ISRO scientists-The Hindu Science

Environment

Easy Explanation

A study by scientists from the **Indian Space Research Organisation** has found that **exposed ice patches on melting glaciers can trigger dangerous flash floods**, a risk that has not received enough attention earlier. The research analysed the **August 5, 2025 flash flood in Dharali village** in **Uttarakhand**, which destroyed homes and caused several deaths.

The study showed that the flood was caused by the **collapse of an ice patch on the Srikanta Glacier**. Due to climate warming, glaciers are gradually melting (deglaciation), which exposes ice patches that were earlier protected by snow and firn (a layer between snow and glacier ice). When these exposed ice patches become unstable, they can suddenly break apart and release ice, water, and debris, causing flash floods downstream.

The researchers found that satellite images taken before the disaster already showed exposed ice patches on the glacier. These patches were a warning sign that the glacier was becoming unstable. The study highlights that monitoring glaciers with **satellite observations** can help identify such risks early and improve disaster warning systems.

Earlier, scientists mainly focused on **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)** as the main glacier-related hazard. However, the study suggests that **smaller cryospheric instabilities**, such as collapsing ice patches in nivation zones, can also trigger serious disasters in Himalayan regions.

Key Takeaways

New Glacier Hazard Identified

| Clear your doubts now.

Exposed **ice patches on melting glaciers** can collapse and trigger flash floods.
This hazard was previously under-recognised.

Dharali Flash Flood Case Study

The **2025 Dharali disaster in Uttarakhand** was linked to the collapse of an ice patch.
It occurred near the **Srikanta Glacier in the Bhagirathi basin**.

Role of Climate Change

Rising temperatures cause **deglaciation**, exposing unstable glacier ice.
Exposed ice reacts quickly to warming or rainfall.

Importance of Nivation Zones

Nivation areas form due to **freeze–thaw erosion under snow patches**.
Instability in these zones can release ice, debris, and meltwater.

Satellite Monitoring as Early Warning

Satellite imagery detected **exposed ice patches before the disaster**.
Remote sensing can help improve disaster prediction.

Beyond Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

Earlier focus was mainly on **GLOFs**.
The study highlights **new cryospheric hazards** linked to glacier melting.

Need for Himalayan Risk Monitoring

Systematic monitoring of glaciers and nivation zones is needed.
This can strengthen **disaster risk reduction in Himalayan regions**.

Why is the U.S. investigating India?-The Hindu Text and Context

International relations

Easy Explanation

The government of the **United States** has started two trade investigations against several countries, including **India**, to examine whether their policies are harming American businesses. These investigations were initiated by the **Office of the United States Trade Representative** and could eventually lead to new tariffs on imports into the U.S.

The first investigation focuses on whether countries like India are producing **excess manufacturing capacity** and exporting those goods to the U.S., which could hurt American industries. The U.S. claims India has a large trade surplus with it and that sectors like **solar modules, steel, petrochemicals, textiles, and automobiles** may have more production capacity than domestic demand.

The second investigation examines whether countries are doing enough to **prevent imports of goods made using forced labour**. The U.S. wants to check if weak enforcement in other countries affects American workers and businesses.

Both investigations are being conducted under **Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974**, which allows the U.S. government to take action against foreign practices that it believes harm U.S. commerce. This action can include imposing tariffs.

This comes after a legal dispute in the U.S. over tariffs imposed by **Donald Trump**. Earlier tariffs imposed using emergency powers were struck down by the **Supreme Court of the United States**, but the U.S. government has now imposed a temporary **10% tariff on imports from all countries** and may introduce additional tariffs later.

Indian industries have reacted cautiously. Some sectors such as textiles, steel, and automobiles fear more trade uncertainty, while experts believe the investigations will take time and will not have an immediate impact.

Key Takeaways

U.S. Launches Trade Investigations

| Clear your doubts now.

The U.S. started investigations against **India and several other economies**.
Aim: identify policies harming **U.S. businesses and commerce**.

Focus on Excess Manufacturing Capacity

The U.S. claims India has **excess production in sectors like solar modules, steel, and petrochemicals**.
These exports may affect American industries.

Investigation into Forced Labour Imports

The U.S. is examining whether countries **fail to prevent goods made using forced labour** from entering global supply chains.

Section 301 of Trade Act

Investigations are under **Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974**.
This law allows the U.S. to impose **retaliatory tariffs**.

Background of Tariff Dispute

The U.S. Supreme Court struck down earlier tariffs imposed using emergency powers.
A temporary **10% global tariff** is currently in place.

Possible Impact on Indian Exports

Sectors like **textiles, steel, auto components, and solar modules** may face uncertainty.
Existing tariffs on some goods already continue.

No Immediate Impact Expected

Experts say investigations will take **months to conclude**.
Any trade action would likely come later.

[Why is Rajasthan's property Bill drawing scrutiny?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The **Rajasthan Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property in Disturbed Areas Bill** was recently passed by the **Rajasthan Legislative Assembly**. The Bill allows the state government to declare certain places as **"disturbed areas"** if there is a risk of communal violence, riots, or public disorder.

In such notified areas, people cannot freely sell, gift, lease, or transfer property. They must first obtain approval from the **District Magistrate or Collector**, who will check whether the transaction is voluntary or forced. Property transfers without permission would be considered illegal, and violations can lead to imprisonment and fines.

The Bill is similar to the **Gujarat Disturbed Areas Act**, which was introduced after communal riots to prevent people from being forced to sell property cheaply and leave their neighbourhoods.

However, the Rajasthan Bill has drawn criticism. Some experts say the law could violate **Article 14 of the Constitution of India** if it affects certain communities or areas disproportionately. Others argue that although property is no longer a fundamental right, it is still protected under **Article 300A of the Constitution of India**, and excessive restrictions may raise constitutional concerns.

Opposition parties and critics also fear the law could slow property transactions, give too much power to local authorities, and encourage **residential segregation or "ghettoisation"** instead of promoting social integration.

Key Takeaways

Purpose of the Rajasthan Property Bill

Allows the government to declare areas as **"disturbed" due to communal tensions or public disorder**.
Property transactions in these areas require official approval.

Restrictions on Property Transfers

Sale, gift, lease, or exchange of property needs permission from the **District Magistrate/Collector**.
Transactions without approval become **legally invalid**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Penalties for Violations

Violations are **cognisable and non-bailable offences**.

Punishment can include **3–5 years of imprisonment and fines**.

Inspired by Gujarat Law

Similar to the **Gujarat Disturbed Areas Act** introduced after communal riots.

Intended to prevent **distress sale of property due to communal pressure**.

Constitutional Concerns

Could face scrutiny under **Article 14 (equality before law)**.

Property rights are protected under **Article 300A**.

Concerns About Administrative Power

Broad terms like "disturbed area" may allow **wide discretion to authorities**.

Critics fear misuse or arbitrary decisions.

Social and Economic Impact

May slow real estate transactions.

Could lead to **community segregation or ghettoisation**.

[Building India's climate resilience with water at the core-The Hindu Editorial]

Environment

Easy Explanation

At the **COP30**, global climate discussions shifted from promises to **practical implementation of climate adaptation**. One major outcome was recognising **water as central to climate resilience**. Climate change affects people mainly through water-related events such as floods, droughts, glacier melt, and irregular monsoons, making water management crucial for climate action.

The conference introduced **Belém Adaptation Indicators** under the **UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience**, which include water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) as key indicators of climate resilience. These indicators focus on improving water security, strengthening sanitation systems, reducing flood and drought risks, and building early warning systems.

India already has several initiatives that support this approach. After creating the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** in 2019, the country began integrating water governance more effectively. Programmes such as the **National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme** and the **National Mission for Clean Ganga** aim to improve groundwater management and river health while strengthening climate resilience.

However, several challenges remain. Water scarcity is uneven across regions, climate adaptation funding is uncertain, and hydrological data systems are not fully integrated into decision-making. Experts argue that India should combine water management, digital technology, and climate policies to strengthen resilience and protect communities from future climate shocks.

Key Takeaways

Water at the Centre of Climate Adaptation

Climate impacts are mainly experienced through **floods, droughts, and changing rainfall patterns**.

Water management is now central to climate resilience strategies.

COP30 Shift Toward Implementation

COP30 emphasised **practical climate adaptation measures**.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene were integrated into global climate indicators.

Belém Adaptation Indicators

Indicators focus on **water security, flood and drought resilience, and safe drinking water access**.

Also emphasise **multi-hazard early warning systems by 2027**.

India's Institutional Reforms

| Clear your doubts now.

Creation of the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** improved integrated water governance.
Water Vision 2047 aligns with global climate resilience goals.

Key National Water Initiatives

NAQUIM programme supports groundwater management.
National Mission for Clean Ganga integrates river rejuvenation and climate resilience.

Major Challenges

Uneven water scarcity and increasing climate-related disasters.
Limited adaptation finance and fragmented data systems.

Opportunity for Global Leadership

By strengthening water systems and digital integration, **India can lead climate adaptation efforts in the Global South**.

[Another barrier-The Hindu Editorial]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The **Supreme Court of India** recently refused to consider a petition asking for a national law that would make **menstrual leave mandatory for women workers and students**. The Bench, headed by **Surya Kant**, said such a law might unintentionally harm women's career opportunities.

The Court warned that mandatory menstrual leave could lead employers to assume women are less available for work, which might reduce their chances of getting important roles or promotions. Instead of a nationwide law, the Court suggested that **States may introduce voluntary policies** after consulting stakeholders.

Some States have already taken steps. For example, **Odisha** allows women government employees to take one additional leave day each month, while **Kerala** provides menstrual leave for female trainees in educational institutions. **Karnataka** also introduced menstrual leave for women employees, though the order has been challenged in court.

The debate is complex. Many women suffer from severe menstrual conditions such as **endometriosis, PCOD, and PCOS**, which can make working difficult during certain days. However, critics worry that a compulsory leave policy could reinforce workplace discrimination against women.

Experts suggest alternative solutions such as **flexible work policies, access to sanitary products and medicines at workplaces, and allowing leave through existing leave systems**. These steps could support women's health without unintentionally reducing their employment opportunities.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Decision

The Supreme Court refused to consider a petition seeking a **mandatory menstrual leave law**.
It suggested States adopt **voluntary policies instead**.

Concern Over Career Impact

Mandatory menstrual leave could lead employers to **avoid hiring or promoting women**.
This may worsen existing workplace inequalities.

Existing State-Level Policies

Odisha: One additional leave day per month for women government employees.
Kerala: Menstrual leave for female trainees in educational institutions.
Karnataka: One-day menstrual leave policy introduced but legally challenged.

Health Concerns for Women

Conditions like **endometriosis, PCOD, and PCOS** can cause severe menstrual pain.
Support systems are needed to address these health issues.

International Experience

| Clear your doubts now.

Countries like **Spain and Zambia** have menstrual leave policies.
In practice, many women **rarely use them or face stigma**.

Context of Women's Employment in India

Female Labour Force Participation Rate rose to **41.7% in 2023–24**.
Many women work in **informal or insecure jobs**, making leave difficult.

Suggested Alternative Measures

Provide **sanitary products, medicines, and flexible work arrangements**.
Use **existing leave provisions** rather than mandatory policies.

UPSC Value Addition Box

Menstrual Leave Debate

- India's **Female Labour Force Participation Rate rose from 23.3% (2017-18) to 41.7% (2023-24)**.
- Mandatory menstrual leave may unintentionally reinforce **hiring bias against women**.
- Some Indian states like **Odisha and Kerala** have introduced limited menstrual leave policies.

17th March 2026

The 'discrepancies' in India's new GDP data-The Indian Express Explained Page

Economy

Easy Explanation

India has introduced a **new GDP data series with 2022–23 as the base year**. The base year is the reference year whose prices and production patterns are used to compare economic growth in later years. Changing the base year helps reflect structural changes in the economy.

GDP measures the **total value of final goods and services produced in a country in a year**. It can be calculated in two ways. The **production method** adds the value created by all sectors and gives **Gross Value Added (GVA)**. The **expenditure method** adds all spending in the economy, including household consumption, investment, government spending, and net exports.

In theory, both methods should give the **same GDP value**, since GDP = **GVA + Net Indirect Taxes (taxes minus subsidies)**. But in practice, the numbers may not match because some spending data may be incomplete or reported late.

To balance this gap, statisticians add a **"statistical discrepancy"** component. Small discrepancies are normal, but large ones can raise concerns about data accuracy.

In the new GDP series, discrepancies have **increased sharply**, reaching several lakh crores. One reason is difficulty in accurately adjusting GDP for inflation using **deflators**, especially as the economy moves away from the base year. To improve accuracy, the government has increased the number of deflators used in calculations.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Base Year Revision
India's GDP series now uses **2022–23 as the base year**.
Two Methods of GDP Calculation
GDP can be measured through **production (GVA)** or **expenditure (spending)** approaches.
GDP–GVA Relationship
GDP = **GVA + Net Indirect Taxes (Taxes − Subsidies)**.
Statistical Discrepancy
The gap between production-side and expenditure-side GDP estimates.
Rising Discrepancies
Discrepancies have grown significantly in recent GDP data.
Credibility Concern
Ideally, discrepancies should remain **below about 2% of GDP**.
Improving Accuracy
Government increased **deflators from around 180 to about 600** to improve real GDP calculations.

[As NavIC loses atomic clock,India's own GPS remains a challenge-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

India developed its own regional navigation system called **NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation)** under the Indian Space Research Organisation. It works similar to the American Global Positioning System (GPS) and provides location and navigation services mainly for India and about 1500 km around it. It is used in sectors like transportation, aviation, shipping, mapping, and surveying.

Recently, ISRO reported that the **atomic clock in the satellite IRNSS-1F stopped working on 13 March 2026**. Atomic clocks are crucial because satellites use very precise timing signals to calculate positions on Earth. When the clock fails, the satellite cannot provide accurate navigation data, although it may still send basic signals.

NavIC was designed as a **7-satellite system** capable of providing location accuracy of around **10 metres** over India. However, the system has faced several problems over the years, including **atomic clock failures, aging satellites, and launch or technical issues** in replacement satellites like **IRNSS-1H** and **NVS-02**.

Despite these challenges, NavIC is gradually expanding. Its signals are already used in aviation, railways, and shipping, and some smartphones now support it. Newer satellites are also being improved with **indigenous atomic clocks, longer mission life (12 years), and an additional L1 frequency**, which improves compatibility with GPS and mobile devices.

Key Takeaways

NavIC system
India's regional navigation system developed by ISRO.
Provides positioning services over India and ~1500 km beyond.
Role of atomic clocks
Provide extremely accurate timing signals.
Essential for precise satellite-based location calculation.
Recent technical issue
Atomic clock of **IRNSS-1F satellite failed on 13 March 2026**.
Design and accuracy
Planned as a **7-satellite constellation**.
Designed to give **~10 m accuracy over India**.
Past failures
Atomic clock failures in earlier satellites.

| Clear your doubts now.

IRNSS-1H (2017) launch failure and **NVS-02 (2025)** orbit problem.

Aging satellites

Early satellites like **IRNSS-1A, 1B, and 1C** are nearing the end of their mission life.

Future improvements

New satellites with **indigenous atomic clocks, 12-year life, and L1 frequency**, improving compatibility with smartphones and global navigation systems.

UPSC VALUE ADDITION BOX:

Major satellite navigation systems in the world:

Global Positioning System – United States
GLONASS – Russia
BeiDou Navigation Satellite System – China
Galileo – European Union
NavIC – India
Japan has a regional satellite navigation system called the *Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS).* It currently *uses four satellites* to improve and strengthen the signals of the Global Positioning System (GPS) over Japan and nearby regions.

[Iran survives,Bibi gains,India's dilemma:5 takeaways after two weeks of war-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The war in West Asia between the United States, Israel, and Iran has entered its third week and is becoming more intense. The US recently attacked **Kharg Island**, Iran's main oil export terminal, and is sending more warships to the region. US President Donald Trump has also called for naval deployments near the **Strait of Hormuz**, a key route through which a large share of global oil passes. Because of this conflict, oil prices have risen and fears of a global energy shortage have increased.

Even though Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was killed in the conflict, Iran has not collapsed. The country had prepared for such a situation by decentralising its military system, allowing regional units to continue fighting independently. This has shown that Iran has stronger resilience than expected.

The conflict has politically benefited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel has weakened several Iran-backed leaders such as Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar, and Hassan Nasrallah, which may strengthen Netanyahu's position before upcoming elections.

India faces a diplomatic challenge because it has important relations with Israel, Iran, and the Gulf countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in contact with several regional leaders. Since India depends heavily on oil and LPG imports from the region, it wants the conflict to end quickly.

There are some signs that the war could eventually slow down. The US claims it has weakened Iran's leadership and military capabilities, while Iran claims success by threatening global oil routes through the Strait of Hormuz. Because both sides can claim some gains, negotiations or de-escalation may become possible.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

War enters third week
- Conflict between the US–Israel bloc and Iran has intensified in West Asia.
- US strikes on Iran's Kharg Island increased tensions.

Global energy concerns
- Tensions around the Strait of Hormuz threaten global oil supply.
- Oil prices have risen due to fears of disruption.

Iran's resilience
- Despite the death of Ali Khamenei, Iran's political and military system remains intact.
- Decentralised "mosaic defence doctrine" allows continued resistance.

Israel's political gains
- Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu benefits politically from weakening Iran-backed groups.

Regional conflict with global effects
- Around 20 countries are indirectly involved through arms or intelligence support.
- However, it has not escalated into a world war.

India's strategic dilemma
- India must balance relations with Israel, Iran, and Gulf countries.
- Energy dependence makes stability in the region crucial.

Possibility of de-escalation
- Both the US and Iran can claim partial success.
- This may create room for negotiations or a ceasefire.

| Clear your doubts now.

UPSC VALUE ADDITION BOX:

KHARG ISLAND

Aspect	Details
Location	Kharg Island is located in the **Persian Gulf**, about **25 km off the coast of Iran**.
Strategic Importance	It is **Iran's largest oil export terminal** and a major hub for crude oil shipment.
Share in Oil Exports	Nearly **90% of Iran's crude oil exports** pass through Kharg Island.
Infrastructure	Contains **large oil storage tanks, export terminals, and pipelines** connecting Iran's oil fields to global markets.
Historical Importance	The island was frequently attacked during the **Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)**, especially during the **"Tanker War"** phase.
Geopolitical Relevance	Located close to shipping routes leading to the **Strait of Hormuz**, a major global oil chokepoint.
Global Impact	Any disruption at Kharg Island can **affect global oil supply and raise energy prices**.

[Bihar mandates passes for minor minerals in bid for regulation-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Governance

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

The Bihar government has introduced a new rule for vehicles carrying **minor minerals** such as sand, stone, stone chips, moorum, and stone dust from other states. Now, every commercial vehicle entering Bihar with these materials must obtain a **Transit Pass (TP)** at the state border. The rule has been implemented by the Bihar Mines and Geology Department to regulate the transport of construction materials and reduce illegal mining.

Under the **Bihar Minerals (Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transportation and Storage) Rules, 2019**, all incoming mineral loads must be digitally registered at the border. Vehicles must obtain a digital transit pass before entering the state. The government has also introduced a regulatory fee system. If the mineral challan mentions weight, the fee is **₹60 per metric tonne**, and if it mentions volume, the fee is **₹85 per cubic metre**.

The government will install **CCTV cameras at border entry points** and digitally monitor trucks carrying minerals. This is meant to prevent illegal transport and stop the misuse of a single transport challan for multiple trips.

Bihar needs large quantities of construction materials because of major infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, and metro systems. However, the state does not have enough stone quarries for materials like stone chips and moorum. Therefore, it imports these materials from nearby states such as **Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal**.

Although **Article 301 of the Constitution of India** guarantees free trade across India, courts allow states to charge **regulatory fees** for monitoring environmental impacts and maintaining infrastructure. Bihar hopes that the new digital transit pass system will reduce illegal mining, improve transparency, and increase state revenue. However, the extra fee may slightly increase the cost of construction materials in the state.

Key Takeaways

Transit Pass rule
Bihar now requires a **Transit Pass (TP)** for vehicles carrying minor minerals from other states.

Legal framework
Implemented under **Bihar Minerals (Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transportation and Storage) Rules, 2019**.

Regulatory fee structure
₹60 per metric tonne (if weight mentioned).
₹85 per cubic metre (if volume mentioned).

Digital monitoring
Border checkpoints will use **digital registration and CCTV surveillance** to track mineral transport.

Dependence on other states
Bihar imports construction materials mainly from **Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal**.

Constitutional context
Article 301 allows free trade but states can impose **regulatory fees**.

Expected impact
Aims to curb illegal mining and increase revenue but may slightly raise construction costs.

[Environment: yet another casualty of the West Asia war-The Hindu Science]

Environment

Easy Explanation

The ongoing war in West Asia is also causing serious environmental damage. Military activities such as airstrikes, bombing missions, and naval operations use huge amounts of fuel, which releases large quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Warships, aircraft carriers, and military bases require continuous energy to operate. Even though some ships use nuclear power, many support systems rely on diesel and other fossil fuels, increasing carbon emissions.

| Clear your doubts now.

The war has also targeted oil refineries, fuel depots, and energy infrastructure. When these facilities burn, they release toxic smoke and harmful chemicals into the air and water. The conflict is happening near the **Strait of Hormuz**, one of the world's most important oil transport routes, which increases the risk of environmental pollution.

Past conflicts show how large the climate impact of war can be. For example, the **Gaza War** produced about **33 million tonnes of emissions**, while the **Russia–Ukraine War** has caused more than **300 million tonnes** of additional emissions.

At the same time, rising oil prices due to war may encourage countries to shift toward cleaner and renewable energy sources.

Key Takeaways

War increases emissions
Military operations release large amounts of greenhouse gases.
Fuel-intensive warfare
Fighter jets, bombers, and naval fleets consume huge quantities of fuel.
Environmental pollution
Bombing oil facilities releases toxic smoke and chemicals.
Strategic oil route risk
Conflict near the **Strait of Hormuz** threatens global energy routes.
Evidence from past wars
Gaza war: ~33 million tonnes emissions.
Russia–Ukraine war: >300 million tonnes.
Air, water, and soil contamination
War spreads hazardous pollutants into the environment.
Energy transition effect
Higher fossil fuel prices may push countries toward cleaner energy.

[Why India must electrify its kitchens-The Hindu Text and Context]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

India spends about **$26.4 billion every year importing LPG (cooking gas)**, much of which comes through the **Strait of Hormuz**. Although India has about **332 million LPG connections**, around **37% of households still use firewood or dung** for cooking. Rising global energy prices and dependence on imports are making gas-based cooking expensive.

Studies show that **electric cooking is becoming cheaper and more efficient than LPG**. Induction cooktops transfer about **85% of energy to the vessel**, while LPG stoves use only about **40% efficiently**. Electric cooking can therefore reduce fuel costs and energy waste.

However, shifting millions of households to electric cooking creates a new challenge: **higher electricity demand during evening peak hours**. India's peak electricity demand has already increased from **148 GW in 2014 to about 242.5 GW in 2025**. If many households start cooking with electricity at the same time, it could put pressure on the power grid.

To manage this, experts suggest using **smart technologies and demand-response systems** that automatically adjust electricity use during peak times. In addition, **rooftop solar panels and batteries** can help households generate and store their own electricity, reducing pressure on the grid.

The government has already started initiatives like the **PM Surya Ghar Yojana**, which promotes rooftop solar power. Expanding such programs and promoting electric cooking can reduce LPG imports, strengthen energy security, and support India's transition to cleaner energy.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

- **High LPG import dependence**
  - India spends **$26.4 billion annually** importing cooking gas.
- **Incomplete clean cooking transition**
  - Despite 332 million LPG connections, **37% households still use biomass fuels**.
- **Electric cooking advantage**
  - Electric cooking is **cheaper and more energy-efficient** than LPG.
- **Efficiency difference**
  - Induction cooktops: **~85% efficiency** vs LPG stoves: **~40%**.
- **Electricity demand challenge**
  - Mass electrification could increase **evening peak power demand**.
- **Grid management solutions**
  - Smart demand-response systems and battery storage can manage peak loads.
- **Role of renewable energy**
  - Rooftop solar and schemes like **PM Surya Ghar Yojana** can support electric cooking and improve energy security.

Belém as a test of a new model of forest finance-The Hindu Editorial

Environment

Easy Explanation

The climate summit held in **Belém, Brazil in 2025** focused on a key issue: protecting tropical forests requires not only promises but also strong financial support and fair decision-making. A major proposal discussed at the summit was Brazil's **Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF)**, which aims to create a new way of funding forest conservation.

The TFFF proposes paying countries for **maintaining existing forests**, not just for reducing deforestation. The fund has already received **over $5.5 billion in commitments**, including a major contribution from Norway. Unlike earlier conservation funds that mainly provided grants, this model is designed to generate financial returns and reward long-term forest protection.

An important feature of the proposal is that **at least 20% of the payments will go to Indigenous peoples and local communities**, who play a crucial role in protecting forests. These communities were involved in designing the programme through consultations with hundreds of leaders. However, critics point out that Indigenous representatives still do not have voting rights in the main governing bodies of the fund.

Some civil society groups have also criticised the proposal. Organisations such as the **Global Forest Coalition** argue that the fund may focus too much on financial incentives without addressing the real causes of deforestation, such as large-scale agriculture, mining, and infrastructure projects. Others worry that the payment rate may be too low and that governments might receive most of the funds instead of local communities.

The debate highlights a larger issue: forest conservation is closely linked to **land rights and political power**. Indigenous groups argue that protecting forests is also about protecting their homes, livelihoods, and cultural identity. Therefore, experts say that the success of the new financing model will depend on whether it truly empowers forest communities and ensures that funds reach them directly.

Key Takeaways

- **Belém climate summit**
  - Held in **Belém, Brazil (2025)** with focus on tropical forest conservation.
- **New forest finance model**
  - Brazil proposed the **Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF)**.
- **Funding commitments**

| Clear your doubts now.

Over **$5.5 billion pledged**, including **$3 billion from Norway**.

Payment for standing forests

Countries would be rewarded for **maintaining forests**, not only for reducing deforestation.

Role of Indigenous communities

At least **20% of funds allocated to Indigenous and local communities**.

Criticism of the model

Concerns about **low payments, lack of voting rights, and dominance of governments or intermediaries**.

Key challenge

Real success depends on **ensuring land rights, accountability, and community participation in forest governance**.

18th March 2026

[Iran war's economic fall out may be worse than Ukraine-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

This article says the Iran-West Asia war may hurt India more than the Russia-Ukraine war.

In the Ukraine war, India's main problem was expensive imports, especially fuel, food and fertilisers. This increased India's trade deficit. But India was still protected to some extent because it earned a lot from software exports and remittances from Indians working abroad.

In the present conflict, oil is again the biggest immediate risk because disruption in the Strait of Hormuz can raise crude oil and LNG prices. Food and fertiliser are not under immediate stress because India has good stocks and a better harvest situation than in 2022.

The bigger danger is that this war is closer to the Gulf, where millions of Indians work. If Gulf economies slow down, remittances to India may fall. At the same time, foreign capital inflows are already weak.

So, unlike the Ukraine war, this conflict can hurt India in three ways together: higher import costs, lower remittances, and weaker capital inflows. That is why its economic impact may be worse.

Key Takeaways

2022 war shock was mainly through imports

- Russia-Ukraine war pushed up prices of fuel, food and fertilisers
- India's import bill rose sharply
- This widened the merchandise trade deficit

India was protected by invisibles during Ukraine war

- Software exports and remittances remained strong
- These helped offset the pressure from the goods trade deficit
- So the overall external shock was manageable

In the current conflict, oil is the biggest immediate risk

- Disruption in the Strait of Hormuz affects crude oil and LNG flows
- India depends heavily on imported energy
- Higher oil prices can worsen inflation and external balance

Food situation is better than in 2022

- India has very high wheat and rice stocks
- A strong rabi harvest is expected
- Global food output is also projected to remain healthy

Fertiliser risk exists, but not instantly

- India has adequate fertiliser stocks for now

| Clear your doubts now.

- But a long war can disrupt supply of LNG, sulphur and ammonia
- This may later affect agriculture and food security

Biggest vulnerability is remittances from Gulf

- Millions of Indians work in Gulf countries
- A large share of India's remittance inflow comes from that region
- If Gulf economies weaken, India may lose an important external support

This war can hit India from three sides

- Higher import bill
- Lower remittances and services cushion
- Weak capital inflows
- That is why its fallout may be worse than the Ukraine war

[How the global energy shock threatens india's Goldilocks era-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India has recently been in a "Goldilocks" phase, meaning growth was strong and inflation was low. But the global energy shock is now threatening this balance.

India imports most of its energy, so when oil and gas prices rise because of global conflicts, the economy gets hit quickly. The article says crude oil prices have risen sharply and gas shortages have already started affecting India.

This creates three major problems. First, the rupee weakens because India has to spend more dollars on energy imports. Second, inflation rises as fuel and cooking gas become costlier. Third, economic growth may slow because businesses and the government both face higher costs.

The government is also under pressure because it may have to spend more on fertiliser subsidies and other support measures. At the same time, if it does not raise fuel prices fully, oil companies suffer; if it cuts taxes to give relief, government revenue falls.

So, the article's main point is that India's recent mix of high growth and low inflation may not last if the energy shock continues.

Key Takeaways

Goldilocks phase means strong growth with low inflation

- India recently had high GDP growth and low inflation
- This was seen as a comfortable economic situation
- Rising energy prices now threaten this balance

India is highly vulnerable because it imports most of its energy

- Oil and gas shocks abroad quickly affect India
- Conflict in West Asia and Strait of Hormuz disruptions worsen the risk
- Energy dependence is India's main weakness here

Rupee comes under pressure when oil prices rise

- Higher crude oil imports mean greater demand for dollars
- This weakens the rupee
- A weaker rupee can make imports even more expensive

Inflation may rise through fuel and cooking gas

- Higher global energy prices increase domestic costs
- LPG price hikes directly affect households
- This can push inflation above comfort levels

Growth can also slow down

- Higher fuel and energy costs raise production and transport costs

| Clear your doubts now.

- Supply disruptions hurt economic activity
- A prolonged conflict can reduce both Indian and global growth

Government finances may come under stress

- More fertiliser subsidy may be needed
- Support funds and relief measures increase spending pressure
- Lower fuel taxes or lower oil company profits can hurt revenues

Main risk is breakdown of the growth-inflation balance

- India may face slower growth and higher inflation together
- This would end the recent Goldilocks phase
- That is why the global energy shock is a serious macroeconomic threat

[Why Transgender Protection (Amendment) Bill 2026 has attracted criticism-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Governance

Easy Explanation

The Bill has attracted criticism because it changes the basic idea of the 2019 law. The 2019 Act recognised a broad range of transgender identities and allowed a person to identify their own gender. The new Amendment Bill narrows that definition, removes self-identification, and makes medical certification necessary for legal recognition.

This is controversial because the Supreme Court in the NALSA judgment of 2014 had clearly recognised the right of transgender persons to self-identify their gender and linked that right to dignity, equality, and personal liberty. Critics say the Bill goes against that principle by shifting power from the individual to doctors and state authorities.

Activists are also unhappy because the Bill appears to recognise mainly certain socio-cultural communities like hijra and kinnar, instead of protecting all trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse persons covered by the 2019 law. They argue that this makes the law narrower and more exclusionary.

Another major objection is the creation of a medical board. Under the 2019 framework, a certificate could be issued without medical examination. The new Bill requires recommendations from a medical board before a certificate is issued. Critics say this can increase gatekeeping, humiliation, delay, and discrimination, especially when trans persons already face social stigma in hospitals and public offices.

So, the core criticism is simple: the Bill is seen as moving from a rights-based approach to a control-based approach.

Key Takeaways

Removes self-identification

- The 2014 NALSA judgment recognised the right to self-identify gender
- The Bill weakens this by requiring outside approval
- Critics say this violates dignity and autonomy

Makes medical certification compulsory

- A medical board must now examine or recommend identity recognition
- Earlier, no such medical gatekeeping was required
- Activists say this is intrusive and discriminatory

Narrows the definition of transgender persons

- The 2019 Act had a wider definition
- The new Bill is seen as recognising only limited socio-cultural categories
- This may exclude many gender-diverse persons

Seen as contrary to NALSA spirit

- NALSA treated gender identity as part of constitutional freedom
- The Bill shifts authority from the person to the state and medical system
- That is why many see it as legally and morally regressive

Raises fear of harassment and exclusion

| Clear your doubts now.

Medical boards can create delay, stigma, and humiliation
Poor and marginalised trans persons may find the process harder
Access to welfare may also become more difficult if certification becomes stricter

Adds stricter punishments, but criticism remains

The Bill also adds stronger punishments for forcing a person into trans identity or exploitative practices
But critics say these additions do not justify removal of basic rights protections

Main criticism is loss of self-determination

The biggest objection is not only procedure
It is that the Bill takes away the right of a person to define their own gender identity
That is why transgender and LGBTQ+ groups are opposing it strongly

[China's ethnic unity law shows little tolerance for diversity-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

China's new ethnic unity law is being criticised because it gives more importance to national unity and assimilation than to genuine cultural diversity.

The law says all ethnic groups in China should build a common identity as part of the "Chinese nation." On the surface, it talks about harmony and unity, but critics say it pushes minority communities to adjust to the dominant Han-Chinese and state-led national identity instead of protecting their distinct languages, cultures, and traditions.

For example, the law emphasises the common national language, which means Mandarin gets priority over minority languages. It also says foreign forces should not interfere in ethnic matters, which is seen as a response to international criticism over China's treatment of Uyghurs and Tibetans.

China officially recognises 56 ethnic groups, but the Han form more than 90% of the population. So when the state talks about unity in this way, many fear it really means greater assimilation into Han-majority culture.

The law has come now because it fits with Xi Jinping's broader vision of national rejuvenation, stronger territorial control, and tighter political integration of frontier and minority regions like Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

So, the main criticism is that the law speaks of unity, but shows limited tolerance for cultural and ethnic diversity.

Key Takeaways

Focus is on unity, not diversity

The law stresses a common Chinese national identity
It gives priority to integration and assimilation
Critics say minority distinctiveness gets less space

Assimilation is the core concern

Minority groups are expected to fit into a larger national culture
This may weaken separate ethnic identities
That is why the law is seen as intolerant of diversity

Mandarin gets stronger importance

The law promotes the common national language in schools
Minority languages may become less important in education
This can gradually reduce linguistic diversity

Law also targets outside criticism

It says foreign forces should not interfere in ethnic matters
This is linked to criticism over Xinjiang and Tibet
China presents such criticism as external interference

China is ethnically diverse but Han-dominated

China officially recognises 56 ethnic groups
Han Chinese form the overwhelming majority
So “unity” often reflects majority-led nation-building

It fits Xi Jinping’s political vision

Xi has strongly promoted national unity and rejuvenation
The law continues this approach
It supports tighter control over minority and border regions

Main message is stronger state control

The law is not only about harmony
It is also about shaping identity, language, and loyalty
That is why many see it as politically driven rather than diversity-friendly

[During Nowruz,Iran’s Persian culture collides with regime’s ideology-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

This article says Nowruz in Iran is not just a cultural festival anymore. It has become a symbol of the struggle between Iran’s old Persian identity and the Islamic Republic’s ideological rule.

Nowruz is the Persian New Year and comes from ancient pre-Islamic traditions linked to Zoroastrian culture. Chaharshanbe Suri, the fire festival held before Nowruz, is an important part of it. People light bonfires and jump over them as a symbol of renewal, purification, and hope.

The Islamic Republic has long been uncomfortable with these festivals because they come from Iran’s pre-Islamic past, while the regime is based on an Islamic revolutionary ideology. Over time, the regime tried to restrict, control, or reinterpret such celebrations, but it could not fully erase them.

Today, for many Iranians, celebrating Nowruz and Chaharshanbe Suri has become more than a tradition. It is also a way of asserting Persian cultural identity against the state’s ideological control. That is why Reza Pahlavi and other critics use these festivals politically, presenting them as symbols of resistance.

So, the article’s main point is that Nowruz shows a deeper clash in Iran between an ancient civilisational identity and the ideology of the present regime.

Key Takeaways

Nowruz is more than a festival

It marks Persian New Year and arrival of spring
It comes from ancient pre-Islamic traditions
In today’s Iran, it also carries political meaning

Chaharshanbe Suri is highly symbolic

It is the fire festival before Nowruz
Fire represents purification, renewal, and victory over darkness
This symbolism makes it powerful in political language too

Regime is uneasy with pre-Islamic traditions

The Islamic Republic was built on Islamic revolutionary ideology
It has often viewed such Persian festivals with suspicion
That is because they reflect a cultural identity beyond regime ideology

Festival became a form of identity assertion

Many Iranians now see celebrating Nowruz as affirming Persian heritage
It becomes a cultural act of resistance
Especially for younger generations, it can mean more than religion

Reza Pahlavi is using this symbolism politically

| Clear your doubts now.

- He links the festival to anti-regime mobilisation
- Cultural celebration is being turned into political messaging
- This shows how tradition can become a tool of protest

Iran faces a deeper identity conflict

- One side is ancient Persian civilisation
- The other is the Islamic Republic's theocratic ideology
- The article says this tension has sharpened in recent times

Main question is about Iran's future

- Will Iran be shaped more by Persian civilisational identity
- Or by the current regime's ideological control
- Nowruz has become a visible symbol of that larger struggle

On scientific collaborations in BRICS-The Hindu Text and Context

International relations

Easy Explanation

This article says BRICS is not only an economic and political grouping, but is also becoming an important platform for science, technology, and innovation cooperation.

BRICS countries have been working together in areas like research, technology transfer, innovation, health, energy, environment, AI, digital technology, and space. Over time, this cooperation has moved from basic scientific research to more practical and development-oriented fields.

The article argues that this is important because the world is becoming more divided by geopolitical tensions, sanctions, and techno-nationalism. In such a situation, BRICS can help its members reduce dependence on Western technology systems and build their own scientific and innovation capacities.

At the same time, BRICS scientific cooperation still has many weaknesses. There is no permanent institutional mechanism to manage it properly, funding remains limited, progress is uneven across sectors, and new BRICS+ members have very different levels of scientific capacity.

So, the article's main point is that BRICS has made real progress in scientific collaboration, but if it wants to become a serious alternative global STI platform, it needs stronger institutions, bigger funding, and deeper long-term cooperation.

Key Takeaways

BRICS is becoming an STI platform

- BRICS is not limited to economics and politics
- It is increasingly cooperating in science, technology, and innovation
- STI is now an important pillar of the grouping

Cooperation became stronger after 2015

- A 2015 memorandum gave STI a formal structure
- Action plans and working groups were created
- This gave continuity to joint research and innovation programmes

Focus has shifted from basic science to practical areas

- Earlier cooperation was more about basic research
- Now it includes health, energy, water, environment, AI, ICT, and space
- This makes BRICS collaboration more development-oriented

BRICS matters in a divided global technology order

- Global science cooperation is increasingly affected by sanctions and strategic rivalry
- BRICS offers a platform for reducing technological dependence
- It can help Global South countries build shared capacities

| Clear your doubts now.

Progress is uneven across sectors

- ICT, high-performance computing, AI, and space cooperation have moved ahead faster
- Heavy infrastructure and exploratory areas have developed more slowly
- So cooperation is growing, but not equally everywhere

Major weaknesses still remain

- There is no permanent secretariat or stable mechanism
- Funding is limited and competition is high
- BRICS+ members also have uneven innovation capacities

India has an opportunity in 2026

- Under India's presidency, BRICS can deepen scientific partnerships
- India can push for stronger institutions, long-term projects, and governance reforms
- This can make BRICS a more credible global STI platform

UPSC VALUE ADDITION BOX

The West speaks the language of rules-based order; BRICS increasingly speaks the language of voice, equity, and multipolar legitimacy.
India sees BRICS less as an anti-West forum and more as a pro-multipolar platform.
In science and technology, BRICS is becoming important because future global influence will depend not only on military and economic power, but also on control over data, AI, digital infrastructure, innovation, and technology standards.
BRICS may become for the Global South what the G20 became for macroeconomics — a platform for coordination without full uniformity.

Cholesterol makes cells' nuclei squishy, helping melanoma spread-The Hindu Science

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

This article explains a new reason why melanoma, a dangerous skin cancer, spreads quickly. Scientists found that cholesterol around the cell nucleus makes the nucleus softer and more fragile.

The nucleus is the control centre of the cell and contains DNA. For cancer to spread, cells often have to squeeze through very narrow spaces in the body. If the nucleus becomes more "squishy," the cancer cell can move more easily and spread to other tissues.

At the same time, too much cholesterol makes the nuclear envelope fragile. This can cause small tears, which may damage DNA and create new mutations. These mutations can make the cancer more aggressive.

The study found that a protein called LBR helps increase cholesterol in the nuclear membrane. When LBR levels were high, cancer cells became more invasive. When researchers reduced LBR or lowered cholesterol, the cells became less aggressive.

This is important because it suggests that LBR and cholesterol-related pathways may become treatment targets to slow cancer spread. It also helps explain why statins, which reduce cholesterol, may be linked to slower melanoma progression.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Melanoma becomes dangerous mainly when it spreads
- Melanoma starts in pigment-producing skin cells
- Its deadliness increases when it metastasises
- Metastasis means spreading to other body parts

Cholesterol makes the nucleus more squishy
- High cholesterol in the nuclear membrane softens the nucleus
- A softer nucleus helps cancer cells squeeze through tight spaces
- This makes spread easier

It also makes the nucleus more fragile
- High cholesterol weakens the nuclear envelope
- Small tears can occur in the membrane
- This exposes DNA to damage

DNA damage can worsen cancer
- Damage inside the nucleus can cause new mutations
- Some mutations may make cancer more aggressive
- So cholesterol may help both spread and progression

LBR protein plays a major role
- LBR helps increase cholesterol around the nucleus
- Higher LBR made the nucleus more deformable and fragile
- Lower LBR reduced invasiveness

Possible treatment target has emerged
- Reducing cholesterol made cancer cells less aggressive
- LBR may become a therapeutic target
- This could help slow melanoma metastasis

Study may explain statin benefit
- Statins lower cholesterol
- Earlier observations showed slower melanoma progression in some statin users
- This study provides a possible biological explanation

Prison outbreak-The Hindu Editorial

Governance

Easy Explanation

This article says Indian prisons are facing a serious public health crisis. The recent herpes outbreak in Jalpaiguri Central Correctional Home, where many inmates were infected and some died, shows how dangerous prison conditions can become.

The main reasons are overcrowding, poor hygiene, weak medical care, and shortage of health staff. When prisons are packed far beyond capacity, it becomes very difficult to maintain cleanliness, isolate sick prisoners, or stop infections from spreading.

This is not only about herpes. Indian prisons have also seen high levels of tuberculosis, skin diseases, HIV, and even COVID-19 outbreaks. Prisoners are especially vulnerable because many facilities lack doctors, psychologists, proper screening, and adequate treatment.

The article stresses that prisoners do not lose their right to health. So the state has a duty to provide proper healthcare in prisons. But at present, medical neglect often continues until diseases become serious.

The solution is not only better prison healthcare, but also reducing overcrowding. This requires more bail, faster trials for undertrials, non-custodial punishment for minor offences, and quicker repatriation of foreign prisoners.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

Prisons face a serious health crisis
- The Jalpaiguri outbreak shows that prison diseases can become deadly
- Poor prison health is a systemic problem, not an isolated event
- It reflects neglect of inmate healthcare

Overcrowding is the biggest cause
- Many prisons operate far above capacity
- Overcrowding worsens hygiene, infection control, and isolation
- It makes disease outbreaks more likely

Multiple diseases spread easily in prisons
- Herpes, TB, skin diseases, HIV, and COVID-19 have all been concerns
- Closed and poorly ventilated prisons create ideal conditions for infection
- Vulnerable inmates face greater risk

Prisoners still have a right to health
- Imprisonment does not remove the right to medical care
- Courts have repeatedly affirmed this principle
- The state remains responsible for inmate health

Medical infrastructure is badly inadequate
- There are major shortages of doctors and psychologists
- Screening and treatment systems are weak
- Many illnesses are detected too late

Health reform must be institutional
- Prisons should be integrated better with the public health system
- More health workers and proper screening are essential
- Uniform prison health standards are needed across states

Decongestion is also a health solution
- Fast-tracking undertrial cases can reduce overcrowding
- Bail and non-custodial alternatives should be expanded
- Prison reform and judicial reform must go together

A bit of a blur over India's new carbon credit plan-The Hindu Editorial

Environment

Easy Explanation

This article says there is confusion over India's new carbon credit plan announced in Budget 2026. Many people think it is a scheme to help farmers earn money through carbon credits, but official documents suggest the main focus is actually on heavy industries.

The Budget has provided Rs 20,000 crore for a carbon-related programme. According to the policy road map behind it, this money is meant for Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS). CCUS is a technology used in sectors like steel, cement, power, refineries, and chemicals to capture carbon dioxide from factory emissions and either use it or store it underground.

Agriculture is not part of this CCUS plan because farm emissions are very different. Industrial emissions come from concentrated sources like smokestacks, while agricultural emissions are spread out and mostly involve methane and nitrous oxide. So the same capture technology cannot be applied in the same way.

The confusion happened because the term "carbon credit programme" sounds broad and many people linked it with carbon farming. In reality, carbon farming and soil carbon sequestration belong to a different area, where farmers may earn credits through practices like agroforestry or improving soil health. That requires a separate policy framework.

So, the article's main point is that the present Budget outlay is mainly for industrial decarbonisation through CCUS, not for direct farmer carbon-credit income, though a separate agricultural carbon market may be possible in future.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

Main Budget focus is industrial decarbonisation
- The Rs 20,000 crore allocation is mainly linked to CCUS
- It is aimed at reducing emissions from heavy industries
- It is not primarily a farm income scheme

CCUS targets hard-to-abate sectors
- These include power, steel, cement, refineries, and chemicals
- Such sectors have concentrated emissions that can be captured
- They are difficult to decarbonise through renewables alone

Agriculture is not part of this CCUS design
- Farm emissions are diffuse and biologically generated
- They are not suited to point-source carbon capture technology
- So agriculture is outside the present industrial CCUS framework

Confusion arose due to the term carbon credit
- The phrase sounded wider than the actual policy design
- Many interpreted it as support for carbon farming
- This created a gap between expectation and official intent

Carbon farming is a separate opportunity
- Farmers can potentially earn credits through soil carbon, agroforestry, and sustainable farming
- But that belongs to carbon removal and voluntary carbon markets
- It would need separate funding and policy support

Both industry and agriculture matter in climate policy
- Industry needs CCUS for emissions reduction
- Agriculture has carbon sequestration potential in soils and landscapes
- India needs parallel strategies for both sectors

India needs a clearer multi-sectoral carbon strategy
- Government must clearly distinguish smokestack carbon capture from soil-based carbon sequestration
- Better policy communication is needed
- A broader climate framework should support both industrial transition and future farmer participation

19th March 2026

Large Hadron Collider discovers a new particle: TH Science

Easy Explanation

Scientists at CERN have discovered a new subatomic particle called **Xi-cc-plus** using the Large Hadron Collider. This is one of the rare particles made of three quarks (called a baryon), similar to protons and neutrons, but much heavier.

All matter around us is made of tiny particles. Protons and neutrons, which form atoms, are themselves made of even smaller particles called **quarks**. Quarks come in six types (called flavours): up, down, charm, strange, top, and bottom.

A normal proton contains two up quarks and one down quark. The newly discovered Xi-cc-plus particle is different because it contains **two charm quarks and one down quark**. Charm quarks are much heavier than up quarks, which is why this new particle is about four times heavier than a proton.

Scientists create such particles by smashing protons together at extremely high speeds inside the Large Hadron Collider. These collisions briefly produce unstable particles, which quickly decay. By studying how they decay, scientists can figure out their properties.

| Clear your doubts now.

This discovery is important because it helps scientists better understand **quantum chromodynamics (QCD)** — the theory that explains how quarks are held together by the strong nuclear force. Studying rare particles like Xi-cc-plus allows physicists to test and improve their understanding of how matter behaves at the most fundamental level.

Interestingly, a similar particle was discovered earlier in 2017, but the new one replaces one quark (up → down), which significantly changes its behaviour. Due to quantum effects, the new particle has a much shorter lifetime, making it harder to detect.

The discovery was confirmed with very high confidence (7 sigma), well above the standard required in physics (5 sigma), meaning scientists are extremely certain that the particle exists.

Key Takeaways

Baryons and Quarks
- Baryons are particles made of three quarks (e.g., protons, neutrons).
- Quarks are fundamental particles with six types: up, down, charm, strange, top, bottom.

New Particle – Xi-cc-plus
- Contains: 2 charm quarks + 1 down quark.
- Much heavier than a proton (≈4 times).
- Rare example of a **double-heavy quark baryon**.

Why It Matters
- Helps test **quantum chromodynamics (QCD)** — theory of strong nuclear force.
- Improves understanding of how quarks combine to form matter.
- Useful for studying exotic particles like tetraquarks and pentaquarks.

How It Was Discovered
- Created in high-energy proton collisions in the Large Hadron Collider.
- Detected through decay patterns of unstable particles.
- Observed with **7 sigma statistical significance** (very high certainty).

Comparison with Earlier Discovery (2017)
- Earlier particle: 2 charm + 1 up quark.
- New particle: 2 charm + 1 down quark.
- Small change leads to very different properties.

Lifetime and Detection
- Much shorter lifetime than its earlier counterpart.
- Harder to detect due to rapid decay.

Large Hadron Collider (LHC)
- 27-km underground ring between France and Switzerland.
- Smashes particles at near light speed.
- Also confirmed the Higgs boson in 2012.

NCERT book ban, a chapter on judicial transparency: TH Editorial

Easy Explanation

This article discusses a recent Supreme Court order banning certain passages in an NCERT Class 8 textbook that talked about **judicial delay and corruption in India's judiciary**. The Court felt that these references undermined the dignity of the judiciary and ordered not only a ban but also action against those who prepared the content.

| Clear your doubts now.

The author argues that this decision raises serious concerns about **freedom of speech and democratic functioning**. In a democracy, institutions like the judiciary must be open to criticism, especially when the criticism is based on facts such as case backlogs or known issues like delays.

The Constitution under **Article 19(1)(a)** guarantees freedom of speech and expression. This right can only be restricted under specific conditions listed in **Article 19(2)**, such as public order, security of the state, defamation, or contempt of court. The author points out that there is **no specific law** that justified banning the textbook. A court order itself is not considered "law" for restricting fundamental rights, as clarified in the **Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra** case.

The article also questions whether the textbook content actually amounted to **contempt of court**. Under the **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**, contempt requires serious interference with justice or scandalising the court. Simply discussing issues like judicial delay or corruption may not meet this high threshold.

A key concern raised is that when courts themselves impose such bans, citizens are left with **no remedy**, since courts are the final authority for protecting fundamental rights.

The article then compares India with other countries. For example, in Kenya, reforms in the judiciary improved public trust significantly by **acknowledging problems rather than suppressing criticism**. The message is clear: transparency and openness to criticism strengthen institutions, while censorship weakens them.

Finally, the author stresses that even Indian courts have recognised issues like corruption and delay. The solution lies in **introspection and reform**, not in banning discussion. In a democracy, freedom of expression must include the right to critique institutions — including the judiciary.

<u>Key Takeaways</u>

Core Issue
- Supreme Court banned parts of an NCERT textbook discussing judicial delay and corruption.
- Also directed action against contributors.

Freedom of Speech
- Article 19(1)(a): guarantees freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(2): allows reasonable restrictions under specific grounds only.
- No clear legal basis (law) for banning the book.

Important Judgment
- Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra

→ Court orders are not "law" for restricting fundamental rights.

Contempt of Court
- Defined under Contempt of Courts Act, 1971.
- Requires serious interference with justice or scandalising the court.
- General discussion of corruption/delay may not qualify.

Judicial Accountability
- Judiciary is not above criticism in a democracy.
- Transparency and accountability improve public trust.

Comparative Example (Kenya)
- Judicial reforms (2011–13) improved public trust (27% → 61%).
- Achieved through openness, not suppression of criticism.

Indian Context
- Courts themselves have acknowledged:
    - Case backlog issues

| Clear your doubts now.

- Possibility of corruption (“bad apples”)
- K Veeraswami vs Union of India

→ Judges considered public servants for corruption law purposes.

Key Concern

- Judicial censorship leaves citizens without remedy.
- Courts are the final protector of fundamental rights.

Broader Argument

- Freedom of speech includes the right to criticise institutions.
- Suppressing criticism weakens democracy.
- Reform requires acknowledgement, not denial.

The opportunity in Cameroon to rebalance the WTO: TH Editorial

International Relations

Easy Explanation

Global trade is no longer just about buying and selling goods. Countries are increasingly using trade as a **geopolitical weapon** — imposing tariffs, restricting exports, or creating dependencies to gain strategic advantage. In this context, the upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé (Cameroon) is very important.

The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** was created to ensure that global trade runs on rules, not power. But today, it is facing a major crisis.

One of its biggest problems is that its **dispute settlement system is not functioning properly**. The Appellate Body (which acts like a final court for trade disputes) has been paralysed because new judges have not been appointed. This means countries cannot effectively resolve disputes, weakening trust in the system.

At the same time, global trade itself has changed. Digital trade, services, and technology-based exports have grown rapidly, but WTO rules are still based on an older, industrial-era model of trade. Also, decision-making has become very slow because the WTO has **166 members**, all with different interests, making consensus difficult.

Meanwhile, countries are increasingly bypassing WTO rules by using **unilateral tariffs, bilateral deals, and economic pressure tactics**. This shift is described as “power-based trade” instead of “rule-based trade.”

Despite these problems, the WTO is still important. Most global trade still follows WTO rules. If the WTO weakens further, global trade could become unpredictable, and smaller countries would suffer the most because they rely on rules to protect themselves from powerful economies.

The article argues that WTO reform is urgently needed. First, the dispute settlement system must be restored so that rules can be enforced. Second, the system must become fairer — especially for developing countries, which often feel that WTO rules favour developed nations.

There is also a need to update WTO rules to reflect modern realities like digital trade and climate-related policies. Smaller group agreements (like those on e-commerce) can help, but they must remain inclusive and connected to the larger WTO framework.

Ultimately, the choice is between two paths:

- A **rule-based global trade system** (WTO strengthened and reformed)
- A **power-based system** where strong countries dominate weaker ones

The MC14 conference will be a key moment in deciding which path the world takes.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

WTO Crisis
- World Trade Organization facing its biggest challenge since 1995.
- Dispute settlement system weakened due to non-functional Appellate Body.
- Weak enforcement reduces trust in global trade rules.

Changing Nature of Trade
- Rise of digital trade and services.
- Climate-related trade measures increasing.
- Global production networks becoming more complex.

Key Problems
- Slow decision-making due to 166-member consensus requirement.
- Growing use of tariffs as political tools.
- Increase in bilateral and unilateral trade actions.

“Wrecking-Ball Politics”
- Countries prefer short-term, power-based deals.
- Weakening of multilateral institutions like WTO.

Why WTO Still Matters
- Most global trade still governed by WTO rules.
- Protects smaller countries from economic coercion.
- Ensures predictability and stability in trade.

Reform Priorities

Restore Dispute Settlement System
- Re-establish Appellate Body.
- Ensure binding and enforceable rulings.

Ensure Fairness
- Address issues like:
- Agricultural subsidies
- Market distortions
- Make rules more equitable for developing countries.

Update Rules
- Include digital trade and new economic realities.
- Address climate-related trade measures.

Improve Flexibility
- Allow smaller group negotiations (plurilateral agreements).
- Ensure they remain inclusive and integrated into WTO.

Core Debate
- Rule-based trade vs power-based trade.
- Rules protect weaker countries from domination.

MC14 Significance
- Opportunity to reform WTO.
- Decide future direction of global trade governance.

| Clear your doubts now.

No end to suffering: TH Editorial

International Relations

Easy Explanation

The situation in India's neighbourhood has become tense due to rising conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially along the **Durand Line** (the border between the two countries). This escalation is happening at the same time as the larger U.S.-Israel–Iran conflict, which is drawing global attention.

Recently, Pakistan carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan, which reportedly hit a rehabilitation centre in Kabul and caused heavy civilian casualties. Pakistan claimed it was targeting militant bases, but evidence suggests civilian infrastructure was destroyed. India strongly condemned these strikes, calling them a "massacre" and demanding an international investigation.

The root cause of tensions lies in Pakistan's accusations that the Taliban government in Afghanistan is supporting the **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, a militant group that carries out attacks inside Pakistan. In response, Pakistan has launched military operations inside Afghan territory.

This conflict has been escalating for months. Earlier, Pakistan conducted airstrikes under an operation targeting Taliban-linked positions. At the same time, TTP attacks inside Pakistan have increased, killing soldiers and civilians.

Another factor is geopolitics. Pakistan is uneasy about improving India–Afghanistan relations, especially India hosting Taliban representatives. Pakistan views this as a threat to its influence in Afghanistan.

There is also a broader strategic angle. With global attention focused on the West Asia war (U.S.–Israel vs Iran), Pakistan may feel it has more freedom to act aggressively. The U.S. statement supporting Pakistan's right to defend itself has further emboldened its actions.

For India, this situation has mixed implications. On one hand, Pakistan facing pressure on multiple fronts (India, Afghanistan, and internal militancy) may reduce its focus on India. On the other hand, instability in the region can harm trade, security, and connectivity.

India's direct role is limited because:
- There is no active dialogue with Pakistan
- India does not formally recognise the Taliban government

However, India can work through regional platforms like the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** to push for de-escalation.

The broader concern is that continued conflict could destabilise the region further, especially affecting Afghanistan, where vulnerable groups — particularly women — are already facing severe hardships.

Key Takeaways

Durand Line Conflict
- Border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Long-standing source of tension.

Immediate Trigger
- Pakistan airstrikes in Afghanistan targeting alleged militant bases.
- Civilian casualties reported, including destruction of a rehabilitation centre.

Core Issue
- Pakistan accuses Taliban of supporting Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).
- TTP responsible for attacks inside Pakistan.

| Clear your doubts now.

Pakistan's Position
- Claims strikes targeted "military installations".
- Sees Taliban as enabling anti-Pakistan terrorism.

India's Response
- Strong condemnation of civilian targeting.
- Called for international inquiry.

Geopolitical Context
- Conflict coincides with U.S.–Israel–Iran war.
- Global focus elsewhere may embolden regional actors.
- U.S. support for Pakistan's self-defence adds to its confidence.

India's Strategic Position
- Limited diplomatic engagement with Pakistan and Taliban.
- Some strategic advantage as Pakistan faces multi-front pressure.

Role of SCO
- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation can act as a platform for regional intervention.
- Important for maintaining regional stability.

Regional Impact
- Increased instability in South and Central Asia.
- Disruption of trade, energy routes, and connectivity.
- Humanitarian concerns, especially in Afghanistan.

What is new in transgender rights Bill?: TH Text&Context

Polity

Easy Explanation

The government has introduced a new amendment to the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, which has triggered strong reactions from the transgender community. The biggest issue is that the amendment seeks to **remove the right to self-perceived gender identity**, which was a core principle recognised earlier by the Supreme Court.

In 2014, in the landmark NALSA vs Union of India case, the Court held that every individual has the right to **self-identify their gender**. This right was linked to dignity, personal autonomy, and liberty under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

The 2019 Act was based on this judgment and allowed transgender persons to identify their gender based on self-declaration, without mandatory medical tests.

However, the new amendment proposes several major changes. First, it removes the explicit provision that guarantees the right to self-perceived gender identity. Second, it introduces a **more restrictive definition** of a transgender person, focusing on biological and medical conditions rather than identity.

The amendment also introduces a **medical verification process**. Instead of self-declaration, a person will now require certification based on recommendations of a medical board before the District Magistrate issues a transgender certificate. Additionally, if a person undergoes **Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)**, they must apply again for a revised certificate.

| Clear your doubts now.

The government argues that the earlier definition was too vague and made it difficult to identify who should receive benefits. It says the law should focus only on those who face severe social exclusion due to biological reasons.

However, activists and experts argue that this approach goes against the spirit of the NALSA judgment. They fear that removing self-identification will:

- Undermine dignity and autonomy
- Create divisions within the transgender community
- Exclude many individuals who identify as transgender but do not meet strict biological criteria

Another concern is that making medical certification mandatory could lead to **bureaucratic hurdles and discrimination**, and may force individuals into medical procedures, which the Supreme Court had earlier rejected.

While the Bill also strengthens punishments for crimes against transgender persons, the central debate remains about **identity vs medical control** — whether gender is a matter of personal identity or state verification.

Key Takeaways

Core Issue

- Amendment removes the right to **self-perceived gender identity**.
- Introduces stricter, biology-based definition of transgender persons.

2014 NALSA Judgment

- NALSA vs Union of India
- Recognised "third gender".
- Established right to self-identification of gender.
- Linked to dignity and personal liberty under Article 21.
- No mandatory medical procedures required.

Changes Proposed in Amendment

Removal of Self-Identification

- Deletes provision guaranteeing self-perceived gender identity.

New Definition

- Focus on biological/intersex conditions.
- Includes socio-cultural identities (hijra, kinner, etc.).
- Excludes broader gender identities and self-perception.

Certification Process

- District Magistrate must rely on medical board recommendations.
- Moves from self-declaration → medical verification.

Surgery Requirement

- After SRS, fresh certificate required.
- Medical institutions must report such procedures.

Expanded Punishments

- Stronger penalties for offences against transgender persons.

Concerns Raised

- Violates principles of NALSA judgment.
- Undermines autonomy and dignity.

| Clear your doubts now.

- May exclude many transgender individuals.
- Risk of bureaucratic control and discrimination.
- Potential divisions within the community.

Government's Justification

- Existing definition is "vague".
- Difficult to identify genuine beneficiaries.
- Focus should be on those facing biological and social disadvantage.

Core Debate
- Gender identity as **self-determined** vs **state-defined/medicalised**.

India's national symbols under scrutiny over use, meaning, and law: TH Text&Context

Polity

Easy Explanation

A recent controversy involving cricketer Hardik Pandya has brought attention to how India's national flag should be used. A complaint was filed claiming that the flag was handled in a disrespectful way during celebrations after India's T20 World Cup win. This has led to discussions about the rules, history, and importance of national symbols like the flag and national song.

India's national flag (tricolour) did not come into existence suddenly. It evolved over many years during the freedom struggle. Early versions of the flag appeared as far back as 1907. Different leaders and freedom fighters experimented with designs to create a symbol that could unite people.

For example, the **Calcutta Flag** had red, yellow, and green stripes with lotus symbols. Sister Nivedita designed a flag with religious symbols like the thunderbolt. Bhikaji Cama famously hoisted an Indian flag abroad in Germany in 1907. Later, during the Home Rule Movement, Annie Besant introduced another version.

The modern tricolour was shaped mainly by Pingali Venkayya and Mahatma Gandhi, who added the charkha (spinning wheel) as a symbol of self-reliance. Eventually, this evolved into the current flag we see today.

Even though the flag became a national symbol at independence, the right of citizens to fly it freely was only recognised later in the case of Union of India vs Naveen Jindal. Today, its use is governed by the Flag Code of India, 2002, and disrespecting it is punishable under the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.

The article also talks about the emotional importance of symbols like the flag. People often feel a strong emotional connection to it, similar to how they react to religious or cultural symbols.

Another debate discussed is about India's national song, *Vande Mataram*. It played a major role in the freedom struggle but has been controversial because parts of it refer to the goddess Durga, which some communities may not relate to.

Because of this, *Jana Gana Mana* was chosen as the national anthem as it was seen as more inclusive. The debate around *Vande Mataram* continues, especially after the government made it mandatory to sing the full song in certain official settings.

Overall, the article highlights how national symbols are not just legal or historical objects — they carry deep emotional and political meaning.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

National Flag Controversy
- Complaint against Hardik Pandya for alleged disrespect to the flag.
- Brings focus on rules governing flag usage.

Evolution of Indian Flag
- Developed gradually during freedom struggle.
- Early versions: Calcutta Flag (1907), Sister Nivedita's flag.
- Bhikaji Cama hoisted flag in Germany (1907).
- Annie Besant introduced Home Rule flag (1917).
- Pingali Venkayya + Gandhi shaped final tricolour concept.

Legal Framework

Right to Fly Flag
- Recognised in Union of India vs Naveen Jindal.

Flag Code of India, 2002
- Rules for display, handling, and use.

Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971
- Punishes disrespect (burning, trampling, improper use).

Symbolism of the Flag
- Evokes emotional and patriotic feelings.
- Acts as a unifying national symbol.

National Song Debate

- *Vande Mataram* linked to freedom struggle.
- Contains religious imagery (Durga), leading to controversy.
- Rabindranath Tagore raised concerns about inclusivity.

National Anthem Choice
- *Jana Gana Mana* chosen for inclusiveness.
- Seen as neutral and unifying.

Recent Developments
- Government made full singing of *Vande Mataram* mandatory in some contexts.
- Debate continues on its role and interpretation.

Silence on West Asia war is not moral surrender, but responsible statecraft: IE Editorial

International Relations

Easy Explanation

This article discusses why India has remained mostly silent on the U.S.-Israel war against Iran, and whether that silence is right or wrong.

Many people believe India should strongly condemn the war because it violates international law and goes against India's traditional values like respect for sovereignty and peaceful conflict resolution. The author agrees that the war is unjustified, but argues that **India's silence is a strategic choice, not moral weakness**.

India's foreign policy has always tried to balance **principles (morality)** with **pragmatism (national interest)**. For example, during the Cold War, India did not openly criticise the Soviet Union in events like Hungary (1956) or

| Clear your doubts now.

Afghanistan (1979), even though those actions violated international law. This was because India depended on the Soviet Union for defence and diplomatic support.

Similarly today, India has strong interests in multiple regions:
- The U.S. (defence, technology, countering China)
- Gulf countries (energy supply, trade, Indian workers)

If India openly criticises the U.S. or Israel, it could damage these important relationships. For instance:
- India depends heavily on Gulf oil and gas
- Around 9 million Indians live and work in the Gulf
- Huge trade flows (around $200 billion) pass through this region

So, speaking out strongly may harm India's economy, security, and citizens abroad.

The article also points out that the U.S. under leaders like Donald Trump may react strongly to criticism, which could affect India's strategic partnerships.

The key idea is that foreign policy is not just about doing what is morally right in theory, but about **making decisions that protect the country's interests in the real world**. Sometimes, remaining silent helps maintain relationships and allows for "quiet diplomacy" instead of public confrontation.

The author criticises those who demand immediate condemnation, saying they ignore the real-world consequences of such actions. According to the author, true leadership lies in **carefully balancing morality with practical needs**, not just making strong statements.

In short, India's silence is presented as a **deliberate and cautious strategy**, not approval of the war.

Key Takeaways

Core Debate
- Should India prioritise **moral principles** or **national interest**?
- Silence vs public condemnation in foreign policy.

Author's Position
- War violates international law.
- But India's silence is **strategic, not cowardly**.

India's Foreign Policy Approach
- Balance between principle and pragmatism.
- Shift from Non-Alignment → Multi-alignment.
- Engage with multiple powers simultaneously.

Historical Precedents
- India did not strongly condemn Soviet actions:
  - Hungary (1956)
  - Czechoslovakia (1968)
  - Afghanistan (1979)
- Reason: strategic dependence on USSR.

Current Strategic Interests

United States
- Defence cooperation
- Technology partnerships
- Countering China

| Clear your doubts now.

Gulf Region

- Energy security (oil & gas)
- ~$200 billion trade
- ~9 million Indians living/working there

Risks of Condemnation

- Damage to India–U.S. relations
- Threat to energy supply
- Impact on remittances and trade
- Reduced strategic leverage

Concept: Silence as Strategy

- Avoids unnecessary confrontation
- Preserves diplomatic flexibility
- Enables "quiet diplomacy"

Criticism of Moral Absolutism

- Foreign policy ≠ academic debate
- Decisions affect millions of lives
- Moral statements must consider consequences

Key Idea

- "Loud lecturing + low leverage = ineffective diplomacy"

[Killing Iran's leaders is fraught and escalatory: IE Editorial]

International Relations

Easy Explanation

The war between the U.S. and Israel against Iran is becoming more serious and dangerous. In recent developments, top Iranian leaders have been killed, including Ali Larijani (a senior security official) and even Iran's Supreme Leader earlier in the war. Israel is following a strategy of targeting top leaders to weaken the Iranian government and possibly trigger internal unrest.

However, this strategy is not working as expected. Instead of people rising against the government, it may actually be reducing chances of diplomacy and peace talks. History shows that attempts to overthrow regimes often create chaos and instability rather than stability.

For Israel, however, a weak or unstable Iran might not be a bad outcome. It could reduce Iran's power in the region. Also, domestic politics (like elections) may influence such decisions.

The U.S. is also involved in the war, but many of its allies (Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada) are not supporting it. This has left the U.S. relatively isolated. Even within the U.S., there are concerns about why the war started and what its clear objectives are.

For India, this conflict is very important because of its strong connections with the Gulf region:

- India depends on the region for energy (oil and gas)
- A large number of Indians (around 1 crore) live and work there
- Trade and remittances from the region are crucial

Another key concern is the **Strait of Hormuz**, a critical sea route for global oil transport. Any disruption here can affect India's economy.

India has taken a careful and balanced approach. It has not taken a strong public stance but has kept communication open with all sides. This “quiet diplomacy” is already helping — for example, Indian ships are still able to pass through the Strait safely.

However, India must stay alert. While India and Israel have strong ties, their interests may not always align, especially if the conflict escalates further.

Key Takeaways

Conflict Escalation
- War entering third week with rising intensity.
- Targeted killings of top Iranian leaders (decapitation strategy).

Israel’s Strategy
- Target leadership to weaken regime.
- Aim: trigger internal unrest in Iran.
- So far, limited success in causing public uprising.

Risks of Regime Change
- History shows regime change → instability and chaos.
- Power vacuums may be exploited by armed groups.

U.S. Position
- Actively involved in war.
- Allies (Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada) reluctant to join.
- U.S. appears relatively isolated.
- Leadership under Donald Trump facing criticism over unclear war goals.

Global Strategic Concern

Strait of Hormuz
- Critical chokepoint for global oil supply.
- Any disruption affects global and Indian economy.

India’s Interests

Energy Security
- Heavy dependence on Gulf oil and gas.

Indian Diaspora
- ~1 crore Indians in the region.
- Remittances are crucial.

Trade
- Significant economic linkages with Gulf countries.

India’s Approach
- Balanced and cautious diplomacy.
- Maintains communication with all sides.
- Avoids direct confrontation.

Positive Outcome
- Indian ships safely crossing Strait of Hormuz.

Future Risk
- Possible divergence between India–Israel interests if war escalates.

| Clear your doubts now.

How to define an ancient hill range? By protecting a delicate balance: IE Ideas

Environment

Easy Explanation

This article discusses a technical but very important issue: **how to define the Aravalli Hills**. The debate may seem academic, but it has serious environmental consequences.

The Supreme Court had asked for a clear definition of the Aravalli range, mainly to regulate activities like mining and protect the environment. A recent committee proposed defining the Aravalli based on areas that are **at least 100 metres above a reference level**.

However, the author (a former Director General of the Forest Survey of India) strongly opposes this definition.

Why? Because using a strict "100 m elevation" rule would exclude many low-lying hills that are actually part of the Aravalli system. If these areas are excluded, they may lose legal protection and become vulnerable to mining, deforestation, and environmental degradation.

The author argues that this problem had already been solved earlier. In 2011, the Forest Survey of India had mapped the Aravalli region using advanced tools like **remote sensing and GIS**. Instead of elevation, they used a **3-degree slope criteria**, which is more accurate in identifying hill terrain.

According to the FSI's analysis:
- Around **62 districts** should be considered part of the Aravalli
- But the recent committee included only **37 districts**

This means many important regions — even places like Sawai Madhopur and Chittorgarh — could be excluded from protection.

This is worrying because:
- Rajasthan already has very low forest cover (~8%)
- Most of its forests lie in the Aravalli region
- Excluding areas could lead to irreversible environmental damage

The article suggests that instead of creating new definitions, the new committee should rely on the **existing scientific mapping (2011 FSI work)** and re-evaluate it carefully.

In simple terms, the debate is about:
Scientific accuracy vs administrative simplicity — and the risk is that a poor definition could lead to environmental destruction.

Key Takeaways

Core Issue
- How to define the **Aravalli Hills** for legal and environmental protection.

Controversial Proposal
- Definition based on **100 m elevation**.
- Opposed due to risk of excluding genuine hill areas.

FSI's Alternative Approach
- Forest Survey of India used:
  – Remote sensing & GIS
  – 3-degree slope criteria (more accurate)

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Findings

- FSI (2025 report): 62 districts part of Aravalli
- Committee (2025): Only 37 districts included
- Many important districts excluded

Environmental Concerns

- Excluded areas may:
  – Lose legal protection
  – Face mining and deforestation

- Rajasthan forest cover: ~8%
- Majority located in Aravalli region

Institutional Role

- Supreme Court monitoring definition process
- New expert committee to re-examine issue

Key Technical Debate

- Elevation-based definition (simple but inaccurate)

vs

- Slope-based definition (scientific and terrain-sensitive)

Risk

- Incorrect definition → irreversible ecological damage
- Loss of biodiversity and forest cover

BRICS should step in, restrain US-Israel: IE Ideas

International Relations

Easy Explanation

This article talks about the **lack of strong global response** to the ongoing U.S.–Israel war against Iran, and how this is pushing the world towards instability.

The conflict has intensified with the killing of key Iranian leaders and rising casualties. It is also affecting global energy prices and security. Despite this, most countries are not taking strong action.

The main problem is a **leadership vacuum** — no country or group is willing to step forward and take responsibility. Every country recognises the danger, but no one wants to act first. This is described as the "**who will bell the cat**" problem.

There are two major groups that could influence the situation:

- European countries
- Global South leaders (especially BRICS countries)

But both are hesitant.

European countries are reluctant because they depend on the U.S. for security and alliances. Even though they are unhappy with the war and were not consulted, they are not openly criticising the U.S. This shows a contrast — Europe strongly criticised Russia over Ukraine, but is much more cautious when it comes to the U.S.

| Clear your doubts now.

On the other hand, BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, etc.) have also failed to act strongly. Even though they often speak about sovereignty and opposing Western dominance, they have only issued mild statements calling for dialogue and ceasefire.

This raises questions about their credibility. If they cannot act during such a crisis, their claim of representing the Global South becomes weaker.

The article suggests that BRICS, especially under India's leadership, should take stronger and coordinated action. A united stand by major countries like China, India, Russia, and Brazil could influence the situation.

However, internal differences and fear of antagonising the U.S. (especially under Donald Trump) are preventing such coordination.

In simple terms, the world is stuck because:
- Everyone sees the problem
- No one wants to take the first step

Key Takeaways

Current Situation
- Escalating war in West Asia
- High casualties and rising energy prices
- Threat to global security

Core Problem
- Lack of global leadership
- Strategic hesitation by all major powers

Concept: "Who Will Bell the Cat"
- Everyone recognises danger
- No one wants to act first
- Fear of consequences and uncertainty

European Position

- Reluctant to oppose the U.S. openly
- Not joining the war actively
- Dependent on U.S. security alliance
- Double standards:
  – Strong on Russia–Ukraine
  – Soft on U.S.–Iran conflict

Global South / BRICS Response

- BRICS issued mild statements
- No strong condemnation of U.S.–Israel actions
- Focus on dialogue and ceasefire

Concerns

- Weakens credibility of BRICS
- Questions its role as Global South leader
- Shows gap between rhetoric and action

Role of Other Organisations

| Clear your doubts now.

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation issued neutral statement
- Avoided blaming any side

India's Role

- As BRICS chair, expected to lead coordination
- Opportunity to shape global response
- Must balance relations with U.S. and Global South

Key Insight

- World moving towards disorder due to lack of collective action
- "Powerful do what they can, weak suffer what they must"

Why NATO doesn't have to answer Trump's call to join Iran war: IE Explained

International Relations

Easy Explanation

This article explains why the U.S. President Donald Trump is asking NATO to join the ongoing war against Iran, and why NATO is not doing so.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a military alliance, but it operates under strict rules. Its main purpose is **collective defence**, not offensive wars.

Trump has criticised NATO for not supporting the U.S. in this war. He believes that NATO should stand with the U.S., especially since the U.S. contributes the most to the alliance's defence budget.

However, NATO's rules (its charter) make it clear that:
- Members should resolve disputes peacefully
- Military action should not violate UN principles
- Collective defence (Article 5) applies only if a member is attacked

In this case, the war is happening in and around Iran, which is **outside NATO's geographical area**. So NATO is not obligated to join.

Also, Article 5 (collective defence) is only triggered when a NATO country is attacked. For example, it was invoked only once after the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.

Instead of joining as an alliance, some NATO countries are acting individually:
- The UK allowed U.S. use of bases in Cyprus
- Greece and France sent military support
- NATO forces are helping with missile defence and logistics

So NATO is indirectly involved, but not officially part of the war.

Trump's frustration also comes from burden-sharing. The U.S. spends a large share of NATO's defence budget, and he believes other countries should contribute more. However, NATO data shows that while the U.S. contributes a lot in total terms, it is not the highest when measured as a percentage of GDP.

Another reason for NATO's caution is past experience. The Iraq war (2003) is seen by many European countries as a mistake based on faulty intelligence. So they are reluctant to join another conflict without clear justification.

| Clear your doubts now.

In simple terms, NATO is staying out because:

- The war does not meet its legal conditions
- It is outside its geographical scope
- Member countries are cautious due to past experiences

Key Takeaways

About NATO

- NATO is a military alliance for collective defence.

NATO Charter Principles

Article 1

- Peaceful resolution of disputes
- No use of force against UN principles

Article 5

- Collective defence (attack on one = attack on all)
- Invoked only once (9/11 attacks)

Article 6

- Limits defence obligations to specific regions (Europe, North America, etc.)

Why NATO is Not Joining

- War in Iran is outside NATO territory
- No direct attack on NATO member
- Does not meet Article 5 conditions
- High threshold for military intervention

Current NATO Role

- Providing logistics and missile defence
- No formal military involvement
- Individual countries acting separately

Examples of Individual Actions

- UK: Allowed U.S. use of bases in Cyprus
- Greece & France: Sent military assets
- NATO forces: Intercepting drones near Turkey

Trump's Criticism

- Donald Trump argues NATO is not supporting U.S.
- Complains about unequal defence spending

Burden Sharing

- NATO guideline: 2% of GDP on defence
- U.S. contributes ~63% of total NATO defence spending (2024)

Historical Context

- NATO intervened after 9/11 in Afghanistan
- Iraq War (2003) seen as a mistake by many European countries

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Insight
- NATO is a **defensive alliance, not an automatic war partner**

20th March 2026

[Women and tuberculosis: a story of deprivation, discrimination and debt: TH Health]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

This article highlights how **tuberculosis (TB) affects women in India differently**, not just medically but also socially and emotionally.

The story begins with a woman (Rekha) who recovered from TB but faced **severe stigma** — friends left her, relatives avoided her, and she now fears marriage and social acceptance. This shows that even after recovery, TB continues to affect a person's life.

India has the **highest TB burden in the world**, with millions of cases and deaths each year. While more men get TB, women face **greater hidden suffering** because of social stigma and discrimination.

Women with TB often face:
- Social isolation and broken relationships
- Abandonment by husbands or families
- Loss of education or career opportunities

Many women also **hide their symptoms** due to fear of stigma. This leads to **late diagnosis or misdiagnosis**, which can worsen the disease.

There are also medical challenges. TB symptoms in women are often **not typical** (like just fever or fatigue instead of coughing), so doctors may miss early signs. Women are also more likely to suffer from **extrapulmonary TB (EPTB)**, which affects organs other than lungs and is harder to detect.

Another serious issue is **nutrition and access to healthcare**. Women in India often:
- Have less control over money and decisions
- Eat less or poorer quality food
- Delay seeking treatment

All this increases their vulnerability to TB.

Even after treatment, many survivors suffer from long-term problems like lung damage and breathing issues. Mental health support is also largely missing.

The government has launched programmes like **TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (2024)** and is using AI-based chest X-rays to detect TB early. However, many gaps still remain, especially in diagnosis, treatment access, and awareness.

The article suggests that TB control in India cannot succeed unless we address **gender inequality, stigma, and healthcare access for women**.

Key Takeaways

TB Burden in India
- India accounts for ~25% of global TB cases
- ~2.7 million cases and 3 lakh deaths (2024, WHO)
- Decline in incidence, but burden still very high

| Clear your doubts now.

Gender Dimension

- Men: higher number of cases
- Women: greater social and emotional impact

Social Impact on Women

- Stigma → isolation, abandonment
- Reduced marriage prospects
- Loss of education and career
- Mental health trauma

Healthcare Challenges

Delayed Diagnosis
- Women hide symptoms due to stigma
- Atypical symptoms (fever, fatigue)
- Less suspicion by doctors

Diagnostic Inequality
- Men: more bacteriological testing
- Women: more clinical (less accurate) diagnosis

Extrapulmonary TB (EPTB)
- More common in women
- Harder to detect (non-specific symptoms)
- Includes reproductive TB → infertility issues

Nutrition & Vulnerability

- Undernutrition = major risk factor
- Women face food insecurity + higher nutritional needs
- Anaemia and low immunity increase risk

Socio-Economic Barriers

- Limited decision-making power
- Restricted mobility
- Poor access to healthcare

Post-TB Issues

- ~50% survivors develop lung problems (PTLD)
- Risk of chronic diseases like COPD
- Long-term physical and mental health impact

Government Initiatives

- TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (2024)
- AI-powered chest X-rays for early detection
- Gender-responsive TB framework (2019)

Gaps in System

- Poor awareness of EPTB
- Limited access to specialised treatment
- Lack of mental health support
- Need for better training of healthcare workers

| Clear your doubts now.

Way Forward

- Address stigma and discrimination
- Improve nutrition and healthcare access
- Involve TB survivors in support systems
- Focus on gender-sensitive policies

New GDP series, charting the path ahead: TH Editorial

Economy

Easy Explanation

India has released a **new GDP calculation series** with a base year of **2022–23**. This is important because GDP (Gross Domestic Product) tells us how big the economy is, and updating the base year makes the data more accurate and relevant to today's economy.

Earlier, India was using **2011–12 as the base year**, which had become outdated. The new series gives a more realistic picture of the economy.

According to the new data:
- India's GDP is slightly lower (by 3–4%) than earlier estimates
- The economy is still growing steadily
- Services (tertiary sector) dominate the economy

The new series also improves how GDP is calculated. Earlier, companies doing multiple businesses were counted under just one main activity. Now, their contribution is split properly across all activities. It also uses better data sources like:
- Corporate filings (MCA data)
- GST data
- Surveys like PLFS (employment) and ASUSE (small businesses)

This makes the estimates more accurate and closer to international standards.

However, there are still some challenges. One major issue is **how to distribute national GDP across states (GSDP)** because company data is available only at the national level. Another problem is that data from surveys (especially for small businesses) can fluctuate a lot, making estimates unstable.

So while the new GDP series is a big improvement, further refinement is still needed in data collection and methodology.

Key Takeaways

New GDP Series

- Base year updated to **2022–23**
- Released by Ministry of Statistics (2026)
- Replaces old 2011–12 base year

GDP Size (Current Prices)

- 2022–23: ₹261 lakh crore
- 2023–24: ₹289 lakh crore
- 2024–25: ₹318 lakh crore
- Slightly lower (3–4%) than previous estimates

Sectoral Composition (GVA)

| Clear your doubts now.

- Primary (Agriculture): ~21%
- Secondary (Industry): ~26%
- Tertiary (Services): ~53%

- Manufacturing growth strong (~9–12%)

Consumption

- Private consumption ~56% of GDP
- Major driver of economic growth

Key Improvements in Methodology

Better Corporate Data
- Multi-activity firms' output split across sectors
- Uses MCA (company filings) data

Inclusion of LLPs
- More comprehensive coverage of business sector

Improved Household Sector Estimation
- Uses PLFS (employment data) + ASUSE (small businesses)

Advanced Techniques
- Double deflation (better real GDP calculation)
- Volume extrapolation

Better Consumption Data
- Uses Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)

Challenges

State-Level GDP (GSDP)
- Difficult to allocate national data to states
- ASI data incomplete
- Need to use GST + MCA data better

Survey Data Issues
- ASUSE data shows large fluctuations
- Example: big changes in productivity estimates

Reliability Concerns
- Household sector estimates depend on survey accuracy

Suggested Solutions

- Improve ASI sampling frame
- Use GST + MCA databases
- Introduce better survey designs (rotating panel)
- Reduce volatility using moving averages

Key Insight

- New GDP series = **more accurate but still evolving system**

[Fire and fury: TH Editorial]

International Relations

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

This article strongly criticises the U.S.–Israel war against Iran, arguing that it has led to **regional instability and global economic disruption**.

The conflict has escalated rapidly. Iran is responding with missile and drone attacks not just on Israel, but also on Gulf countries hosting U.S. bases. One of the most serious developments is Iran's **closure of the Strait of Hormuz**, a key route for global oil supply. This has pushed up energy prices and is affecting the global economy.

The war has also seen targeted killings of top Iranian leaders and attacks on critical energy infrastructure like the South Pars gas field. These actions have increased the risk of a wider regional war.

The article highlights that Donald Trump had earlier campaigned against long wars ("forever wars"), but is now leading another prolonged conflict. It suggests that the U.S. did not anticipate how long or complex the war would become.

There is growing pressure within the U.S. as well, with casualties increasing and criticism rising over the decision to enter the war. Some officials have even claimed that the U.S. was influenced by Israel's pressure.

The situation is now difficult for the U.S.:
- If it withdraws, Iran can continue attacks
- If it escalates, it risks a full-scale war and economic collapse

The article argues that the **only practical solution is diplomacy**. It suggests that:
- The U.S. should engage Iran through mediation
- Iran should reopen the Strait of Hormuz
- Both sides should agree to a ceasefire

In short, the war is seen as **costly, miscalculated, and dangerous**, with diplomacy as the only way forward.

Key Takeaways

Conflict Overview
- U.S.–Israel war against Iran escalating
- Heavy casualties and regional instability

Major Developments

- Targeted killings of Iranian leaders
- Attacks on energy infrastructure (e.g., South Pars gas field)
- Iran retaliating with missile and drone strikes

Strait of Hormuz

- Critical global oil chokepoint
- Closure by Iran → rise in energy prices
- Threat to global economy

Global Impact

- Rising oil, gas, and fertilizer prices
- Risk of economic slowdown worldwide

U.S. Position

- Led by Donald Trump
- Facing domestic backlash
- Casualties among U.S. soldiers
- Accusations of being influenced by Israel

| Clear your doubts now.

Strategic Dilemma

If U.S. withdraws
- Iran continues attacks

If U.S. escalates
- Risk of full-scale war
- Possible ground invasion
- Severe economic consequences

Key Criticism

- War seen as ill-planned and avoidable
- Failure to anticipate long-term consequences

Solution Suggested

- Diplomacy and mediation
- Ceasefire agreement
- Reopening of Strait of Hormuz
- Security guarantees to Iran

Key Insight

- Military escalation → instability
- Diplomacy → only sustainable solution

AI-powered tax governance in India and its challenges: TH Editorial

Economy

Easy Explanation

India faces a major problem: **low tax collection (tax-to-GDP ratio)** and **high tax evasion**. To tackle this, the government is using Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially through a system called **Project Insight**.

Project Insight, launched by the Income Tax Department of India, uses AI and big data to track financial activities and detect mismatches between what people earn and what they report in taxes.

The system works in three main ways:
- It collects financial data (banking, GST, property, credit cards, etc.)
- It analyses patterns using AI
- It sends "nudges" (SMS/email reminders) to taxpayers to correct mistakes

Instead of directly punishing people, the system encourages **voluntary compliance**.

This approach is showing results:
- Over 1 crore revised tax returns filed
- ₹11,000 crore additional tax collected
- Faster tax refunds (93 → 17 days)
- Detection of large-scale tax evasion (e.g., ₹70,000 crore suppressed sales by restaurants)

Many countries like the U.S., U.K., and Australia are also using similar AI-based tax systems.

However, there are serious concerns.

| Clear your doubts now.

First, AI depends on data quality. It may wrongly flag people (false positives), especially in complex financial situations.

Second, there can be **bias in algorithms**. AI trained on past data may unfairly target certain groups or regions.

Third, there is a lack of **transparency**. People may not know why they were flagged or how decisions were made.

Fourth, there are **privacy risks**, since sensitive financial data is being used.

Finally, India does not yet have strong oversight systems (like an AI ombudsman) to ensure fairness and accountability.

So, while AI can improve tax collection, it must be used carefully to avoid turning into a **surveillance system** that reduces trust.

Key Takeaways

Core Issue

- Low tax-GDP ratio (~16%)
- High tax evasion (~4.3% revenue loss)

Solution: AI in Tax Governance

- Project Insight by Income Tax Department of India
- Uses AI + big data for tax compliance

How Project Insight Works

Data Collection
- Banking, GST, property, credit card, etc.

AI Analysis
- Creates 360° taxpayer profile
- Detects mismatch between income and spending

NUDGE Strategy
- Sends SMS/email reminders
- Encourages voluntary correction

Benefits

- Better detection of tax evasion
- Prioritisation of high-risk cases
- Automation of routine tasks
- Improved taxpayer services (chatbots, faster refunds)

Results

- 1 crore+ revised returns filed
- ₹11,000 crore additional tax collected
- ₹70,000 crore evasion detected (restaurants)
- Refund time reduced (93 → 17 days)

Global Context

- Countries like U.S., U.K., Australia using similar AI systems

Concerns

| Clear your doubts now.

Data Quality
- AI may misidentify genuine cases as evasion

Algorithmic Bias
- May target certain groups unfairly

Lack of Transparency
- Taxpayers may not understand decisions

Privacy Risks
- Sensitive financial data at risk

Lack of Oversight
- No AI ombudsman
- No clear audit or accountability system

Key Insight

- AI can improve tax collection
- But must balance **efficiency with fairness and privacy**

[Losing the way: TH Editorial]

Science

Easy Explanation

India's indigenous navigation system **NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation)**, developed by ISRO, is currently facing serious problems.

NavIC was created to provide India with its own alternative to GPS, especially after the U.S. refused to share GPS data during the Kargil War (1999). It is important for both civilian use (navigation, timing) and defence.

However, the system is now in **operational distress**. Out of the satellites launched since 2013, only **three are currently working properly**, while at least **four are needed** for accurate positioning services. This means NavIC is currently unable to fully perform its function.

The main issue is with **atomic clocks**, which are critical for navigation accuracy. Many satellites used imported rubidium atomic clocks, which have failed frequently. Even recent efforts to replace them with indigenous clocks are still facing challenges.

Another setback was the failure of a new satellite (NVS-02), which was launched into the wrong orbit. Several older satellites have either failed, been decommissioned, or are not functioning properly.

There are also deeper structural issues:
- ISRO is doing too many roles (design, launch, operation)
- India lacks a dedicated agency like the U.S. GPS Directorate
- Budget constraints and multiple priorities (human spaceflight, rockets, satellites) are stretching resources
- Slow launch rate means failed satellites are not replaced quickly

Even though India plans to launch more satellites in 2026, there are doubts about whether this will fix the problem quickly.

In short, NavIC is a strategically important system, but it is currently struggling due to **technical failures, institutional gaps, and resource constraints**.

Key Takeaways

NavIC System
- India's regional navigation system (alternative to GPS)

| Clear your doubts now.

- Developed by ISRO
- Provides Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) services

Current Crisis

- Only 3 satellites functional
- Minimum 4 required for operations
- Constellation unable to fully function

Technical Issues

- Failure of rubidium atomic clocks
- Earlier dependence on imported clocks (SpectraTime)
- Indigenous clocks introduced but still evolving

Satellite Failures

- Many satellites decommissioned or malfunctioning
- NVS-02 launch failure (wrong orbit)
- IRNSS-1F clock failure after 10-year life

Institutional Problems

- ISRO handling too many roles (design + operator)
- No dedicated agency like:
  - GPS Directorate (USA)
  - EUSPA (Europe)

Operational Challenges

- Slow satellite replacement rate
- Budget constraints
- Competing priorities:
  - Human spaceflight
  - Earth observation
  - Rocket development

Policy & Ecosystem Issues

- No national space law
- Limited private sector maturity
- Push for NavIC compatibility in devices (L1 band)

Strategic Importance

- Origin linked to Kargil War (1999)
- Crucial for defence and self-reliance

Future Plan

- 3 new satellites planned (2026)
- But concerns remain over execution

Key Insight

- Strategic autonomy in space requires **both technology + institutional strength**

| Clear your doubts now.

Oil, power, and politics of disruption: TH Text&Context

International Relations

Easy Explanation

The **Strait of Hormuz** is a very narrow sea route that connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea. Even though it is just about 33 km wide at some places, it is extremely important because **around 20% of the world's oil passes through it**.

Recently, due to the war involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran, Iran blocked this route. This has caused **oil prices to rise sharply** and created instability in the global economy.

The world depends heavily on oil and gas for energy. Countries in West Asia like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran produce large amounts of oil, while countries like India, China, and Japan consume a lot but do not have enough reserves. So, they depend on imports—many of which pass through this strait.

The U.S. has always played a major role in global energy politics. It has tried to control or influence oil supply through wars and interventions (like Iraq War, Gulf War). At the same time, it increased its own oil production through shale oil.

Now, because of the current conflict and closure of the Strait, oil supply from West Asia is affected. This has unexpectedly benefited Russia, whose oil was earlier under sanctions after the Ukraine war. Now, countries are turning to Russian oil to stabilise prices.

India is heavily affected because it is one of the largest importers of oil. When oil prices rise, everything becomes expensive—transport, food, electricity, etc. India had earlier started buying discounted Russian oil after 2022, increasing its share significantly.

Indian refineries process crude oil into products like petrol and diesel and even export them, making profits.

Now, with the Strait closed and oil prices rising above $110 per barrel, even the U.S. wants countries to buy more Russian oil to stabilise the market.

Overall, this situation shows how **a small disruption in one region can affect the entire global economy**, and how energy politics shapes international relations.

Key Takeaways

Strait of Hormuz

- Narrow sea route connecting Persian Gulf to Arabian Sea
- ~20% of global oil trade passes through it
- Critical chokepoint in global energy supply

Current Crisis

- Iran blocked the strait after conflict with U.S. and Israel
- Oil prices surged (> $110/barrel)
- Global energy markets disrupted

Global Energy Structure

- Oil & gas = major energy sources globally
- Producers: West Asia (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran)
- Consumers: India, China, Japan (import dependent)

| Clear your doubts now.

Geopolitics of Oil

- Energy resources concentrated in few regions
- U.S. plays key role in energy politics
- Past interventions: Gulf War, Iraq War
- Rise of shale oil → U.S. became top producer

Russia Factor

- Sanctioned after Ukraine war (2022)
- Now benefits due to reduced West Asia supply
- Becomes key supplier to stabilise prices

India's Position

- 2nd largest oil importer
- 3rd largest consumer
- Increased Russian oil imports (2.5% → 39%)
- Strong refining capacity → exports refined products

Economic Impact on India

- Higher oil prices → inflation
- Increased cost of goods and services
- Energy security becomes critical

Global Interdependence

- Oil markets are interconnected
- Local disruptions → global impact

Emerging Trend

- Shift in global energy order possible
- Greater role for Russia and alternative supply chains

Key Insight

- Energy security = economic security + geopolitical strategy

Before salt, there was water: why Mahad Satyagraha deserves its centenary: TH Text&Context

History

Easy Explanation

This article talks about the life experience of B. R. Ambedkar and an important movement called the **Mahad Satyagraha (1927)**.

As a child, Ambedkar faced extreme caste discrimination. Even though water was available, he could not drink it because he was considered "untouchable." Someone from an upper caste had to pour water for him without touching him. If that person was absent, he remained thirsty. This shows how deep caste discrimination was in society.

Years later, Ambedkar led a movement in Mahad (Maharashtra) where thousands of Dalits went to a public water tank called **Chavdar Tank** and drank water from it. This was not just about water—it was about **human dignity and equality**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Even though laws already allowed Dalits to use the tank, upper castes did not accept it. When Dalits drank water, violence followed. The tank was even "purified" by upper castes, showing how society rejected equality.

Ambedkar later burned the Manusmriti, which symbolised caste hierarchy. This act was a protest against social inequality.

The issue went to court and took **10 years (1927–1937)** to resolve. Finally, the court ruled that the tank was public and everyone had the right to use it. But the delay showed how strong caste resistance was.

The article compares this movement with Mahatma Gandhi's **Salt March (1930)**.
- Salt March fought against British rule (external oppression)
- Mahad Satyagraha fought against caste discrimination within Indian society (internal oppression)

The article argues that Mahad was even deeper because it challenged society itself, not just the government.

These struggles influenced the Indian Constitution.
- Article 15 → No discrimination in access to public places
- Article 17 → Abolition of untouchability

The article suggests that the **100th anniversary (2027)** of Mahad Satyagraha should be celebrated seriously. But more importantly, it asks whether caste discrimination truly ended or just changed forms.

It reminds us that equality is not just in laws—it must exist in real life.

Key Takeaways

Ambedkar's Childhood Experience

- Faced untouchability in basic needs (water access)
- "No peon, no water" symbolises caste oppression

Mahad Satyagraha (1927)

- Led by B. R. Ambedkar
- Location: Chavdar Tank, Mahad
- Demand: Right to access public water
- Symbol of dignity and equality

Social Reaction

- Violence against Dalits
- Tank "purified" by upper castes
- Shows deep-rooted caste discrimination

Burning of Manusmriti

- Protest against caste hierarchy
- Rejection of inequality-based traditions

Legal Battle

- Case lasted 10 years (1927–1937)
- Bombay High Court upheld equality
- Public resources open to all

Mahad vs Salt Satyagraha

| Clear your doubts now.

• Mahad: Against internal social injustice
• Salt March: Against British colonial rule
• Mahad addressed deeper social inequality

Constitutional Impact

• Article 15 → No discrimination in public access
• Article 17 → Abolition of untouchability
• Ambedkar's experiences shaped constitutional rights

Contemporary Relevance

• Question: Has caste discrimination really ended?
• Issues like manual scavenging still exist
• Equality in law vs reality gap

Centenary (2027)

• 100 years of Mahad Satyagraha
• Call for national reflection and awareness

Key Insight

• True freedom requires **social equality, not just political independence**

Ras Laffan attack deepens India's worries over LNG: IE Explained

International Relations

Easy Explanation

The conflict in West Asia has now become more serious because both sides are attacking **energy infrastructure**.

Israel attacked the **South Pars gas field** (shared by Iran and Qatar), which is the **largest natural gas field in the world**. In response, Iran attacked major energy facilities, including the **Ras Laffan LNG complex in Qatar**, which is one of the world's biggest gas export hubs.

These attacks are very important because they are not just affecting transport routes (like the Strait of Hormuz), but now also **actual production of oil and gas**. This means the problem is moving from a supply-chain disruption to a **real supply crisis**.

As a result, oil prices have risen sharply (above $110 per barrel), and gas prices have also increased. This affects the global economy because energy is essential for transport, electricity, and industries.

The attack on Ras Laffan is especially serious. This facility alone contributes **around 20% of global LNG supply**. Due to the damage, Qatar has stopped production, and it is unclear when it will restart.

This has a direct impact on India.
India depends heavily on imported energy:
• About 50% of its natural gas comes from imports
• Around 40% of its LNG imports come from Qatar

Since supplies from Qatar are disrupted and the Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed, India is already facing shortages and has reduced gas supply to some industries.

| Clear your doubts now.

If the conflict worsens and more energy facilities are damaged, the situation could turn into a full-scale **global energy crisis**, not just a temporary disruption.

The article also shows uncertainty in global leadership. The U.S. claims it did not know about Israel's attack, and its ability to control the situation is unclear. This adds to instability.

Overall, the situation shows how fragile global energy systems are and how conflicts in one region can affect the entire world, especially countries like India that depend heavily on imports.

Key Takeaways

Escalation of Conflict

- Israel attacked South Pars gas field
- Iran retaliated by targeting multiple energy facilities
- Conflict now directly hitting energy production

Key Locations

- South Pars → World's largest gas field
- Ras Laffan (Qatar) → Major LNG export hub (~20% global supply)

Impact on Energy Markets

- Oil prices > $110/barrel
- Gas prices surged
- ~50% increase from pre-war levels

Shift in Nature of Crisis

- Earlier: Supply chain disruption (Strait of Hormuz)
- Now: Direct supply disruption (production damage)

India's Energy Dependency

- ~88% crude oil imported
- ~50% natural gas imported
- ~60% LNG via Strait of Hormuz
- ~90% LPG via Strait of Hormuz

Dependence on Qatar

- Largest LNG supplier to India (~40% share)
- Ras Laffan is key source

Immediate Impact on India

- Reduced gas supply to industries
- Risk of higher inflation
- Energy security concerns

Global Implications

- Possible prolonged supply disruption
- Risk of global energy crisis
- Highly interconnected energy markets

| Clear your doubts now.

Geopolitical Uncertainty

- U.S. unclear role and control
- Rising instability in West Asia

Key Insight

- Energy infrastructure is now a **strategic target in modern warfare**

[Why Punjab CM wants Rajasthan to pay for water used since 1960: IE Explained]

Polity

Easy Explanation

There is a new dispute between Punjab and Rajasthan over river water sharing. Punjab's Chief Minister says that Rajasthan should pay for the water it has been using for decades.

Before Independence, the princely state of Bikaner (now part of Rajasthan) had an agreement with Punjab to take water from the Sutlej River through a canal (Gang Canal). In return, Bikaner paid money (royalty) to Punjab based on how much land was irrigated.

After Independence, things changed with the **Indus Waters Treaty (1960)**. This treaty gave India full control over the eastern rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi). Now, water sharing became an internal matter within India, not a paid arrangement. So Rajasthan stopped paying.

Later, in 1981, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan signed an agreement to share river water. Rajasthan was given the largest share, even though it is not directly located on these rivers (non-riparian state). This water is carried through canals like the Indira Gandhi Canal to the desert regions.

In 2004, Punjab tried to cancel such agreements through a law. But in 2016, the Supreme Court said that a state cannot cancel inter-state agreements on its own.

Now, Punjab is raising the issue again. It argues that:
- It is a **riparian state** (rivers flow through it), so it should have priority
- Rajasthan is using a large share despite not being in the river basin
- Punjab itself is facing water scarcity (groundwater depletion)

Punjab is also calculating the "cost" of water supplied over time and demanding compensation (~₹1.44 lakh crore).

To resolve this issue, Punjab may go to the Supreme Court or the Ravi-Beas Tribunal. The matter is both legal and political.

Key Takeaways

Historical Background

- Pre-Independence agreement: Bikaner paid Punjab for water
- Gang Canal carried Sutlej water to Bikaner

Post-Independence Shift

- Indus Waters Treaty
- India got control over eastern rivers
- Water sharing became internal (no payment system)

| Clear your doubts now.

1981 Water Sharing Agreement

- Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan agreement
- Total water: ~17.17 MAF
- Rajasthan allocated 8.6 MAF (largest share)
- Supports Indira Gandhi Canal

Punjab's 2004 Law

- Punjab Termination of Agreements Act
- Tried to cancel water-sharing agreements
- Protected existing usage

Supreme Court (2016)

- States cannot unilaterally cancel agreements
- Restored earlier framework

Core Issue Today

- Punjab demanding ₹1.44 lakh crore compensation
- Questioning historical arrangements

Punjab's Argument

- Based on **riparian principle** (river states get priority)
- Rajasthan is non-riparian
- Water stress in Punjab (groundwater depletion)

Political & Economic Angle

- Converts historical grievance into financial claim
- Strengthens negotiation position

Way Forward

- Approach Supreme Court (inter-state dispute)
- Ravi-Beas Tribunal (pending case)
- Need cooperative federal solution

Key Concepts

- Riparian principle
- Inter-state river water disputes
- Tribunal system in India

[Citing equality, SC scraps age limit for maternity leave in adoptions: IE Explained]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court has said that women who adopt children should get maternity leave, even if the child is older than three months.

| Clear your doubts now.

Earlier, the law (under the Maternity Benefit Act and Code on Social Security) allowed maternity leave for adoptive mothers **only if the child was less than 3 months old**. This meant many women adopting older children were denied leave.

The Supreme Court, in a judgment by Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan, said this rule is unfair and violates equality (Article 14). The Court said that motherhood is not just about giving birth—it is about **raising and caring for a child**.

The Court also pointed out a practical issue. Under adoption laws (Juvenile Justice Act), it takes time for a child to be legally declared free for adoption. By the time the process is completed, the child is often already older than 3 months. So, many women were automatically excluded from maternity benefits.

The Court said adoptive mothers need time to bond with the child and help the child adjust to a new family, especially since many adopted children come from stressful backgrounds.

The Court also linked this issue to fundamental rights:
- Article 14 → Equality before law
- Article 21 → Right to dignity and personal liberty

It said reproductive autonomy is not just about biological childbirth—it includes the decision to adopt.

Finally, the Court also raised a broader issue: the absence of **paternity leave**. It said parenting is a shared responsibility, and the government should consider making paternity leave a legal right.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Ruling

- Struck down 3-month age limit for adoptive mothers
- Held it violates Article 14 (equality)

Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers

- Entitled to 12 weeks leave
- Applicable regardless of child's age at adoption

Key Legal Framework

- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- Code on Social Security, 2020
- Juvenile Justice Act, 2015

Why Earlier Rule Was Problematic

- Adoption process takes time
- Children often older than 3 months at placement
- Benefit became practically inaccessible

Court's Interpretation of Motherhood

- Not limited to biological childbirth
- Includes caregiving and emotional bonding

Fundamental Rights Involved

| Clear your doubts now.

- Article 14 → No arbitrary classification
- Article 21 → Dignity, autonomy, personal liberty

Reproductive Autonomy

- Includes adoption decisions
- Not limited to biological reproduction

Purpose of Maternity Leave

- Bonding between mother and child
- Helping child adjust to family
- Emotional development support

Special Needs of Adopted Children

- Often from institutional backgrounds
- Higher stress levels → need more care

Wollstonecraft Dilemma

- Conflict between caregiving role and work participation
- Highlights gender inequality

Paternity Leave Issue

- Court suggested need for legal provision
- Parenting should be shared responsibility

Key Insight

- Law must evolve from **biological view of motherhood → social and caregiving perspective**

Motions against Speaker, CEC point to a wider trust deficit. That is the real worry: IE Editorial

Polity

Easy Explanation

This article talks about a growing **trust crisis in Indian democracy**.

Recently, the Opposition tried two major actions:
- A no-confidence motion against the Lok Sabha Speaker
- A move to impeach the Chief Election Commissioner

The article says these are not just political fights—they reflect a deeper issue: **people are losing trust in institutions**.

In a democracy, two things must exist together:
- Citizens should question and scrutinise those in power
- But at the same time, they should trust institutions to act fairly

If trust disappears, democracy becomes weak.

The article argues that today many institutions (like investigative agencies, watchdog bodies, even courts) are being seen as biased or influenced by the government. This creates a **trust deficit**.

| Clear your doubts now.

It also criticises the ruling government's approach:
- Treating electoral victory as total control ("we alone represent the nation")
- Weakening or ignoring institutions
- Not working constructively with the Opposition
- Trying to dominate public opinion and social space

This leads to a situation where:
- The Opposition is delegitimised
- Institutions lose independence
- Citizens stop trusting the system

The article also challenges the idea that questioning institutions weakens democracy. Instead, it says questioning is necessary—what weakens democracy is **lack of accountability and concentration of power**.

Overall, the article warns that if trust in institutions continues to decline, democracy itself may become weaker or "truncated" (limited in practice).

Key Takeaways

Core Issue

- Growing **trust deficit in democratic institutions**
- Triggered by recent Opposition actions

Concept of Democracy

- Balance between:
  – Suspicion (accountability)
  – Trust (institutional functioning)

- Trust ensures:
  – Power used responsibly
  – Accountability maintained
  – Neutral decision-making

Institutional Crisis

- Investigative agencies losing credibility
- Constitutional watchdogs underperforming
- Judiciary facing criticism
- Perception of institutional capture

Role of Opposition

- Essential for democracy
- Questioning institutions ≠ weakening democracy

Critique of Ruling Government

- Treating electoral victory as full mandate
- Delegitimising Opposition
- Weakening institutional autonomy
- Attempting control over state and society

Key Trends Identified

Delegitimising Opposition
Misreading electoral mandate
Expanding control over public sphere

Impact on Democracy

- Weakening of institutional neutrality
- Decline in public trust
- Risk of "truncated democracy"

Important Concept

- Trust + Accountability = Healthy democracy
- Loss of trust → Democratic decline

Key Insight

- Democracy survives not just on elections, but on **strong, trusted institutions**

22nd march 2026

Why is Israel attacking Lebanon?: TH FAQ

International Relations

Easy Explanation

A major war is now happening in Lebanon along with the wider conflict in West Asia. Israel has started a ground attack in southern Lebanon against Hezbollah, along with heavy airstrikes. This has caused large-scale destruction, killing many people and forcing around a million to leave their homes.

Even though there was a ceasefire in 2024, tensions never really ended. After the Gaza war and later events like the killing of Iran's top leader in 2026, Hezbollah began firing rockets again at Israel. Israel responded by increasing its military action.

Hezbollah is a powerful group in Lebanon that is both political and military. It is supported by Iran and was formed after earlier Israeli invasions of Lebanon. Over time, it became one of the strongest non-state armed groups in the region.

Israel now wants to weaken Hezbollah, push it away from its borders, and create a buffer zone inside Lebanon. However, Hezbollah is still resisting strongly using guerrilla tactics and continues to launch rockets and drones.

At the same time, Hezbollah has become weaker in recent years. Its leadership has been targeted, Syria (its key ally) has weakened, and support from Iran and Russia has reduced. Still, it remains capable of fighting.

The biggest suffering is faced by ordinary people in Lebanon, who are caught between both sides, facing displacement and destruction.

Key Takeaways

Current Situation

- Israel launched ground offensive in Lebanon (2026)
- Heavy airstrikes + large-scale displacement
- ~1 million people affected

Background of Conflict

- Ceasefire in 2024, but tensions continued
- Trigger events:
  – Gaza war (2023)
  – Killing of Iran's leader (2026)
- Hezbollah resumed attacks → escalation

What is Hezbollah?

- Shia militant + political organisation in Lebanon
- Backed by Iran
- Emerged after Israeli invasions (1978, 1982)
- Strong military + political presence

Strength of Hezbollah

- Possesses thousands of rockets and missiles
- Experience from Syrian civil war
- Uses guerrilla (asymmetric) warfare

Recent Weakening Factors

- Loss of leadership (targeted strikes)
- Fall of Assad government (Syria link broken)
- Reduced external support (Iran, Russia)

Israel's Objectives

- Destroy Hezbollah's military capability
- Push Hezbollah away from border
- Create buffer zone in Lebanon
- Pressure Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah

Nature of Conflict

- Conventional + asymmetric warfare
- Urban and hill-based fighting
- Ongoing resistance by Hezbollah

Humanitarian Impact

- Large-scale civilian displacement
- Heavy casualties
- Lebanon population most affected

Key Insight

- Regional conflicts are interconnected (Iran–Israel–Lebanon axis)

[Why do electric vehicle batteries catch fire?: TH FAQ]

Environment

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

A fire in Indore killed eight people, and it may have started from an electric vehicle (EV) charging point. This raises concerns about how safe EV batteries are.

Most EVs use **lithium-ion batteries**, similar to those in phones and laptops. These batteries are generally safe, but problems can occur if something goes wrong.

The main danger is something called **thermal runaway**. Inside a battery, many small cells are packed together. If one cell overheats, it can trigger nearby cells to overheat too. This creates a chain reaction, producing heat and flammable gases, which can quickly lead to a fire.

There are several reasons why this can happen:
- Damage to the battery (like a strong impact)
- Overcharging, especially with poor-quality or third-party chargers
- Manufacturing defects inside the battery
- Faulty home wiring that cannot handle high power

External conditions also matter.
- Hot weather can make cooling difficult
- Charging immediately after a long drive increases heat
- Old batteries degrade and become riskier
- Floodwater entering the battery can cause short circuits

EV fires are not more common than petrol vehicle fires, but they are **more intense and harder to extinguish**.

In the Indore case, the situation worsened because LPG cylinders and other flammable items were present, and the electronic door lock failed during the fire.

To reduce risks, manufacturers are improving battery safety with better cooling systems and new battery designs. At the same time, users must follow precautions like using proper chargers, avoiding unattended charging, and ensuring good electrical wiring at home.

India has also introduced stricter safety standards for EV batteries to prevent such incidents.

Key Takeaways

EV Battery Basics

- Most EVs use lithium-ion batteries
- High energy density but require careful management

Thermal Runaway

- Chain reaction of overheating cells
- Leads to fire and release of toxic gases
- Main cause of EV battery fires

Causes of EV Fires

- Physical damage to battery
- Overcharging (especially with faulty chargers)
- Manufacturing defects
- Poor electrical wiring

External Risk Factors

| Clear your doubts now.

• High temperature / sunlight exposure
• Charging after long drives
• Battery ageing
• Floodwater exposure

EV vs Petrol Vehicles

• Petrol vehicles catch fire more often
• EV fires:
– Burn hotter
– Spread faster
– Harder to extinguish

Indore Incident Factors

• EV charging point suspected trigger
• LPG cylinders present
• Electronic locks failed

Safety Improvements

• Advanced cooling systems
• Solid-state battery research
• Internal firewalls in battery design

User Precautions

• Use certified chargers
• Avoid unattended charging
• Ensure proper home wiring
• Inspect battery after damage
• Allow cooling before charging

Regulatory Measures

• BIS updated safety norms (2023)
• AIS-156 standard:
– Heat propagation testing
– Minimum escape time (5 minutes)

What did the SC say about paid maternity leave?: TH FAQ

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court has said that adoptive mothers should get **12 weeks of paid maternity leave**, no matter how old the child is when adopted.

Earlier, the law allowed this benefit only if the child was **less than 3 months old**. This created a problem because in India, adoption takes time, and most children are older than 3 months by the time they are adopted. So many mothers were not getting any maternity leave at all.

The Court said this rule was unfair and treated adoptive mothers differently from biological mothers. It clarified that motherhood is not just about giving birth, but also about **caring for and raising a child**.

| Clear your doubts now.

The judgment also highlighted that adopted children, especially those coming from institutions, may need more emotional support and bonding time. Maternity leave helps both the child and the mother adjust to each other.

Many women earlier had to leave their jobs or take unpaid leave because of this gap in the law. Now, this judgment ensures that adoptive mothers can spend proper time with their children without risking their careers.

The Court also talked about a bigger issue: fathers should also get paternity leave. It said parenting should be a shared responsibility, but currently, India does not have strong laws for paternity leave (except limited leave for government employees).

Overall, the decision expands the idea of motherhood and makes the law more fair and practical.

Key Takeaways

Supreme Court Judgment

- Adoptive mothers entitled to 12 weeks paid leave
- No restriction based on child's age

Earlier Law

- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- Amendment (2017):
  – 26 weeks leave (biological mothers)
  – 12 weeks for adoptive mothers (only if child < 3 months)

Problem with Earlier Law

- Adoption process takes time
- Most children older than 3 months
- Benefit became inaccessible in practice

Constitutional Issue

- Violates equality (Article 14)
- Discriminates between adoptive and biological mothers

Court's View on Motherhood

- Not limited to childbirth
- Includes caregiving and emotional bonding
- Adoption = part of reproductive autonomy

Impact on Children

- Adopted children may have higher emotional needs
- Need time to adjust to new family

Real-life Impact

- Women forced to:
  – Quit jobs
  – Take unpaid leave
- Judgment improves work-life balance

Paternity Leave

| Clear your doubts now.

- Court recommended formal law
- Parenting should be shared responsibility
- Currently limited (15 days for govt employees)

Same field, two fates: TH Profiles

Environment

Easy Explanation

The conflict in West Asia has become more serious because it is now directly affecting **major energy resources**.

Israel attacked Iran's **South Pars gas field**, which is the largest gas field in the world and is shared with Qatar. In response, Iran attacked energy facilities in several countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait.

This has increased global tensions and caused energy prices to rise. Oil prices crossed $100 per barrel, and gas prices also went up. This is because energy supplies are getting disrupted, especially through the Strait of Hormuz.

The South Pars (Iran) and North Field (Qatar) together hold a huge amount of natural gas—enough to supply the world for many years. Qatar has successfully used this resource to become very rich by exporting LNG through facilities like Ras Laffan.

Iran, however, could not fully benefit from this gas because of long-standing U.S. sanctions. These sanctions have limited its ability to export energy.

For India, this situation is worrying. India depends heavily on imports for energy—especially from West Asia. A large share of its LNG comes from Qatar. If supplies from this region are disrupted, India may face higher prices and shortages.

India had earlier planned projects with Iran (like gas pipelines and investments in gas fields), but these did not work out due to political and security issues.

Now, because of the attacks, Qatar's LNG production has been affected, reducing global supply. Even if the war ends soon, it may take years for full recovery.

Overall, this shows how conflicts in one region can disturb global energy supply and directly impact countries like India.

Key Takeaways

Recent Escalation

- Israel attacked South Pars gas field
- Iran retaliated with strikes on regional energy infrastructure
- Conflict expanding to energy sector

Global Energy Impact

- Oil prices > $100/barrel
- Gas prices surged
- Supply disruptions via Strait of Hormuz

South Pars / North Field

- World's largest gas reserve
- Shared by Iran and Qatar
- ~1,800 trillion cubic feet of gas

| Clear your doubts now.

Qatar vs Iran

• Qatar:
– Developed LNG infrastructure (Ras Laffan)
– ~20% of global LNG supply

• Iran:
– Large reserves but limited exports
– Impacted by U.S. sanctions

Impact on India

• Imports ~80% crude oil
• ~50% natural gas imports
• ~47% LNG imports from Qatar

India–Iran Energy Relations

• Proposed Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline (not completed)
• Planned investments in South Pars & Farzad-B (not realised)

Current Risks

• Damage to Qatar LNG capacity (~17%)
• Reduced global supply
• Higher prices and inflation

Structural Issue

• LNG markets have limited reserves
• Supply chains pass through conflict zones

Cost concerns delay safer building codes for Himalayas: TH Science

Science

Easy Explanation

There is a debate going on about whether buildings in the Himalayas and Northeast India are at a higher earthquake risk than currently assumed.

India has rules (called IS 1893) that engineers follow while designing buildings to make them earthquake-resistant. Recently, new stricter rules were introduced, but the government withdrew them because they could increase construction costs and affect ongoing projects like metro rail and dams.

However, scientists say the risk is actually **higher than what India currently assumes**. Many studies over the past decade show that buildings in Himalayan regions could face stronger shaking than expected.

India divides areas into earthquake zones. Zone V is the most dangerous, especially along the Himalayas where very strong earthquakes (magnitude 8) have happened in the past. But even these classifications may underestimate the real danger.

The earlier method mainly looked at past earthquakes. The new method (probabilistic approach) looks at many factors—like soil conditions, hidden stress in the earth, and possible future earthquakes—to estimate how strong shaking could be.

| Clear your doubts now.

According to scientists, current design standards use lower values for ground shaking compared to countries like Japan and the U.S., where stricter standards are used.

The new research suggests introducing even higher risk zones (like Zone VI) and increasing safety standards. But this would make construction more expensive because stronger materials like steel and cement would be needed.

The government is concerned that higher standards will increase costs so much that fewer infrastructure projects (like schools, hospitals) can be built.

So, there is a trade-off:
- Higher safety → higher cost
- Lower cost → higher risk

Experts warn that most deaths in earthquakes happen in poorly built small houses, not big buildings. So improving building quality is very important.

Key Takeaways

Issue

- Debate over earthquake risk in Himalayas & Northeast
- Withdrawal of updated BIS seismic standards

Current System (IS 1893)

- India divided into Zones II–V
- Zone V = highest risk (Himalayan region)

Problem with Current Model

- Based on past earthquakes only
- Ignores:
  – Soil conditions
  – Hidden tectonic stress
  – Future risk possibilities

New Approach (Probabilistic Model)

- Uses multiple variables
- Includes long-term earthquake data (2600 BC–2019)
- Considers 36 seismic zones + monitoring stations

Key Findings

- Current PGA (ground shaking) values are too low
- Himalayan risk underestimated
- Global standards (Japan, USA) are stricter

New Proposal

- Higher PGA values (0.15–0.75 g)
- Introduction of Zone VI
- Stronger building norms

Concerns

| Clear your doubts now.

- Higher construction costs (steel, cement)
- Impact on infrastructure projects
- Budget constraints for public projects

Human Impact

- 95% deaths in earthquakes → poorly built houses
- Need for better compliance with safety codes

Institutional Conflict

- Scientists: increase safety standards
- Government agencies: concerned about cost

24th March 2026

[Why India must step on the gas with ethanol-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India imports nearly **90% of its crude oil**, which makes it highly vulnerable to **global oil price shocks**, especially during geopolitical conflicts like those in West Asia. To reduce this dependence, the government is promoting **ethanol blending in petrol**, where ethanol (a **biofuel made from sugarcane, rice, and maize**) is mixed with petrol.

A successful example is **Brazil**, which started its **Proálcool programme after the 1973 oil crisis**. It gradually increased ethanol blending, introduced **E100 fuel (100% ethanol)**, and developed **flex-fuel vehicles** that can run on both petrol and ethanol. Today, **more than 50% of Brazil's transport fuel comes from ethanol**, making it a global model.

India has made strong progress, increasing ethanol blending from **1.6% (2013-14) to around 20% (2024-25)**. Earlier dependent on sugarcane, India now produces ethanol largely from **grains like rice and maize**, helping utilize surplus food stocks.

Going forward, experts suggest increasing blending to **E30 (30%) and even E100**, along with promoting **flex-fuel vehicles** and creating **separate fuel infrastructure**. However, challenges like **taxation issues (petrol outside GST)** and the need for **policy support** remain.

Key Takeaways

1. Energy Security and Import Dependence

India's heavy reliance on imported crude oil exposes it to global price volatility and geopolitical risks
Oil shocks directly impact inflation, fiscal stability, and current account balance
Ethanol blending helps reduce import dependence and strengthens energy security

2. Brazil as a Proven Model

Brazil launched the Proálcool programme after the 1970s oil crises
It promoted ethanol blending, E100 fuel, and flex-fuel vehicles
Today, ethanol accounts for over half of its transport fuel usage

3. Significant Progress by India

Ethanol blending increased from 1.6% to about 20% in a decade

| Clear your doubts now.

Government support through pricing and procurement boosted production
India is nearing its E20 target, showing strong policy implementation

4. Diversification of Ethanol Sources

Earlier ethanol was produced mainly from sugarcane molasses
Now production includes rice, maize, and damaged food grains
Grain-based ethanol dominates, improving supply stability

5. Future Roadmap: E30 and E100

Experts recommend increasing blending to 30% and moving towards 100% ethanol fuel
This requires expansion of fuel infrastructure and distribution systems
Consumers should have options based on price and availability

6. Importance of Flex-Fuel Vehicles

Flex-fuel vehicles can operate on different ethanol-petrol blends
Engine systems automatically adjust to fuel composition
Policy push is needed for adoption and retrofitting of vehicles

7. Need for Policy and Tax Reforms

Ethanol is under GST while petrol is outside it, creating distortions
Ethanol-blended fuels are taxed similar to pure petrol
A uniform tax structure and incentives are needed to promote ethanol use

[Hyderabad's special task force, set to tackle food adulteration-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Governance

Easy Explanation

Due to a recent rise in **food adulteration cases**, the Hyderabad Police has launched a special unit called **H-FAST (Hyderabad Food Adulteration Surveillance Team)**. Its main aim is to **detect and prevent the sale of unsafe and fake food products** through surprise raids and intelligence-based operations.

Authorities found alarming cases where commonly used items like **paneer, ghee, spices, milk products, and even ginger-garlic paste** were being adulterated using **synthetic chemicals, detergent, and low-quality materials**. These products were manufactured in **illegal and unhygienic units** and supplied cheaply to eateries and restaurants, posing a **serious health risk to consumers**.

The H-FAST team will conduct inspections at **food manufacturing units, shops, and restaurants**, working in coordination with **food safety officials**. The government has adopted a **zero-tolerance approach**, meaning strict legal action will be taken against offenders.

To involve the public, a **toll-free number and social media channels** have been set up so that citizens can report cases of food adulteration, making enforcement more effective.

Key Takeaways

1. Rising Threat of Food Adulteration

There has been a significant increase in cases of adulterated and fake food products in Hyderabad
Items like dairy products, spices, and processed foods are being tampered with harmful substances

| Clear your doubts now.

This poses serious risks to public health and food safety

2. Launch of H-FAST Initiative

Hyderabad Police created a dedicated unit called H-FAST to tackle food adulteration
It is an intelligence-driven task force focusing on surveillance and enforcement
The initiative shows a shift towards specialised policing in public health issues

3. Nature of Adulteration Practices

Fake products are made using chemicals like acetic acid, synthetic colours, and detergents
Adulteration is carried out in illegal, unhygienic manufacturing units
These products are distributed to eateries at low prices, increasing their spread

4. Enforcement and Raids

The task force will conduct surprise inspections at food units, restaurants, and shops
Seizures of large quantities of fake products highlight the scale of the problem
Strict monitoring aims to break the supply chain of adulterated food

5. Institutional Coordination

H-FAST will work closely with food safety officers and regulatory authorities
This ensures better implementation of food safety laws and regulations
Coordination improves efficiency in detection and prosecution

6. Zero-Tolerance Policy

Authorities have declared food adulteration as a serious offence
Strict legal action and penalties will be imposed on offenders
This approach aims to create deterrence and ensure compliance

7. Public Participation Mechanism

A toll-free helpline and social media channels have been introduced
Citizens can report unsafe food practices and adulteration cases
Public involvement strengthens monitoring and quick response systems

[US-Iran pause is a relief for Gulf desalination plants,water supply-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The recent pause in tensions between the **United States and Iran** is important not just for energy security but also for **water security in the Gulf region**. Iran had threatened to target **desalination plants**, which are crucial for supplying drinking water in Gulf countries.

Desalination plants convert **seawater into freshwater**, mainly using **reverse osmosis (RO)** or **thermal methods**. In RO, salt is filtered out using membranes, while in thermal methods, water is evaporated and condensed. These plants are widely used in regions with **very low rainfall and no rivers**.

Countries in the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**—like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Oman—depend heavily on desalination because they receive **very little rainfall (4–30 cm annually)** and lack permanent freshwater sources. Due to **rapid urbanisation and population growth**, their water demand has increased, making desalination essential.

| Clear your doubts now.

However, desalination has challenges. It is **highly energy-intensive**, relying on fossil fuels, which leads to **large carbon emissions**. It also produces **brine (highly salty waste)** that harms marine ecosystems.

Unlike GCC countries, **Iran mainly depends on groundwater (aquifers)**, but due to **prolonged drought**, it is also expanding desalination capacity, though slowly due to **economic sanctions and infrastructure constraints**.

Key Takeaways

1. Strategic Importance of Desalination Plants

Desalination plants are critical infrastructure for water supply in arid Gulf countries
Any geopolitical tension, like US-Iran conflict, can threaten these facilities
Protection of such infrastructure is linked to both energy and water security

2. What is Desalination and How it Works

Desalination converts seawater into potable water using methods like reverse osmosis and thermal distillation
Reverse osmosis is the most widely used method globally
It allows coastal regions with water scarcity to meet their freshwater needs

3. Heavy Dependence of GCC Countries

GCC nations receive very low rainfall and lack perennial rivers
Groundwater is limited and not sufficiently replenished
Hence, desalination is the primary source of drinking water

4. Drivers of Increasing Water Demand

Rapid population growth, urbanisation, and economic expansion in Gulf countries
Rising industrial and domestic water consumption
Increasing pressure on already scarce natural water resources

5. Environmental Concerns

Desalination is energy-intensive and contributes significantly to carbon emissions
Disposal of brine into oceans harms marine ecosystems, including fish and plankton
Raises sustainability concerns despite solving water scarcity

6. Iran's Water Strategy

Iran relies mainly on groundwater sources like aquifers
Faces severe drought conditions in recent years
Slowly expanding desalination capacity but constrained by sanctions and costs

7. Growing Global Relevance

Over 150 countries use desalination, and the sector is expanding rapidly
Climate change and water scarcity are increasing its importance worldwide
Balancing water security with environmental sustainability is a key challenge

[How the Narendra Modi stadium became an economic hub for Ahmedabad-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

The **Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad**, the **world's largest cricket stadium (capacity ~1.1 lakh)**, has evolved from just a sports venue into a **major economic hub for the city**. Large events like cricket matches, concerts, and international visits attract huge crowds, creating a **temporary but massive local economy** around the stadium.

During major events like the **T20 World Cup final**, a whole marketplace emerges with vendors selling merchandise, while services like **parking, transport, hotels, and food businesses** see a sharp rise in demand. Even railways and metro services increase operations, generating additional revenue.

The stadium has hosted significant events such as the **"Namaste Trump" event (2020)** and large concerts like **Coldplay (2025)**, which alone generated around **₹392 crore economic impact** through tourism, hospitality, and retail spending. This shows how **sports and entertainment infrastructure can drive urban economic growth**.

The stadium is part of the **Sardar Patel Sports Complex near the Sabarmati Riverfront**, further boosting tourism appeal. It has led to **rising property prices, infrastructure development, and employment generation** in surrounding areas.

However, challenges like **traffic congestion during large events** and political debates over its naming and usage also exist. Overall, the stadium highlights how **mega sports infrastructure can transform cities into economic and global entertainment hubs**.

Key Takeaways

1. Stadium as an Economic Engine

The Narendra Modi Stadium has become more than a sports venue, acting as a driver of local economic activity
Large events generate demand across sectors like transport, retail, food, and services
It demonstrates how sports infrastructure can contribute to urban economic growth

2. Boost to Tourism and Local Businesses

High-profile events attract visitors from across India, increasing tourism inflow
Hotels, restaurants, and local vendors experience significant revenue growth
Temporary markets and informal sector activities also flourish during events

3. Role of Mega Events

Events like international matches, political gatherings, and concerts create large-scale economic impact
Example: Coldplay concert generated around ₹392 crore through direct and indirect spending
Such events enhance the city's visibility as a global destination

4. Infrastructure and Connectivity Development

Improved transport systems like metro, railways, and BRTS support event management
Extended service hours and special trains increase accessibility
Infrastructure development around the stadium improves overall urban mobility

5. Urban Development and Real Estate Growth

The stadium's presence has increased property prices in nearby areas
Development of the Sardar Patel Sports Complex and Sabarmati riverfront adds to attractiveness
It contributes to planned urban expansion and city branding

6. Employment and Economic Opportunities

Generates direct and indirect employment in hospitality, transport, and event management
Supports both formal and informal sectors, including small vendors

| Clear your doubts now.

Encourages growth of service-based urban economy

7. Challenges and Concerns

Large crowds lead to traffic congestion and strain on urban infrastructure
Political debates and governance issues sometimes surround such mega projects
Requires efficient planning to balance economic benefits with urban management

[The evolving diagnostic landscape for tuberculosis-The Hindu Editorial]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

The diagnosis of **tuberculosis (TB)** is rapidly improving due to new technologies. Recently, the **WHO recommended new near point-of-care molecular tests**, which allow faster and more accessible TB detection, even at **primary health centres**. It also supported **tongue swab testing** and **sputum pooling**, making testing easier and more efficient.

Earlier, India mainly relied on **sputum smear microscopy**, which had low accuracy and could not detect drug resistance. Now, there is a shift towards **molecular tests like CBNAAT and Truenat**, which are faster and more accurate. However, access to these tests is still uneven, especially in remote areas.

A major innovation is the use of **portable chest X-rays combined with AI**, which helps in early detection of TB in communities. This allows **active case finding**, especially in rural, urban poor, and tribal areas. AI can also analyse routine X-rays in hospitals to detect TB early.

New methods like **non-sputum samples (tongue swabs, saliva)** are useful for children and patients who cannot produce sputum. However, challenges remain in diagnosing **asymptomatic TB, TB in children, and extra-pulmonary TB**, which are harder to detect.

Overall, India now has a growing **"diagnostic toolbox"**, but needs better **infrastructure, research, and implementation** to ensure early, affordable, and accurate diagnosis for all.

Key Takeaways

1. Shift Towards Advanced TB Diagnostics

India is moving from traditional sputum microscopy to advanced molecular diagnostic techniques
New WHO-recommended tests like near point-of-care NAAT improve accessibility and speed
These technologies help in early detection and identification of drug-resistant TB

2. Role of AI and Portable X-ray Technology

Portable chest X-rays combined with AI enable large-scale community screening
Helps in early identification of TB cases even in remote and underserved areas
AI can also analyse routine X-rays, reducing diagnostic delays

3. Limitations of Traditional Methods

Sputum smear microscopy has low sensitivity and cannot detect drug resistance
Dependence on laboratory infrastructure limited its reach
This led to delays in diagnosis and treatment initiation

4. Expanding Diagnostic Options

| Clear your doubts now.

Introduction of CBNAAT, Truenat, and other molecular tools has improved accuracy
Use of non-sputum samples like tongue swabs benefits children and vulnerable groups
Sputum pooling improves efficiency in large-scale testing

5. Persistent Challenges in TB Diagnosis

Unequal access to molecular testing, especially in rural and remote areas
Difficulty in diagnosing asymptomatic TB and extra-pulmonary TB
Children face challenges due to low bacterial load and inability to produce sputum

6. Need for System Strengthening

Better sample collection, transport, and faster turnaround time are essential
Integration of diagnostics within the broader health system is required
Capacity building for use of AI and new technologies is crucial

7. Importance of Research and Innovation

Need for new biomarkers to identify high-risk individuals and prevent disease progression
Development of non-invasive and cost-effective diagnostic tools is essential
Strong evidence-based policies and implementation research will help scale solutions

[Path ahead for Nepal's new leadership-The Hindu Text and Context]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Nepal has recently seen the rise of **Balendra (Balen) Shah** and the **Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)**, representing a **new, reform-oriented political force**. His victory reflects the frustration of young voters with **traditional political parties** and their failure to deliver good governance. Shah's unique campaign style—**minimal speeches, no vote appeals, and anti-establishment stance**—helped him emerge as a symbol of change.

However, while his rise is rooted in **domestic dissatisfaction**, Nepal's major challenge lies in its **geopolitical position between India and China**. Shah has tried to project **strong nationalism and independence**, distancing himself from both countries' influence. But in reality, Nepal cannot avoid balancing relations with both.

India remains Nepal's most important partner due to open borders, trade, energy supply, and social ties. At the same time, **China plays a key role in infrastructure investments**, such as airports and connectivity projects. Managing these relationships carefully will be Shah's biggest test.

Additionally, global factors like tensions in **West Asia** affect Nepal because of its migrant workers and energy dependence. This means Nepal must adopt **pragmatic diplomacy**, not just nationalist rhetoric.

For India, this political change is an opportunity to **reset relations with Nepal**, moving away from past mistrust (like the 2015 blockade) and building a **respect-based partnership**. Overall, Nepal's internal political change is significant, but its **external challenges remain complex and unchanged**.

Key Takeaways

1. Rise of New Political Leadership in Nepal

The emergence of Balendra Shah and RSP reflects public dissatisfaction with traditional political elites
Youth-driven mandate focused on governance, transparency, and reform
Represents a shift from ideological politics to performance-based politics

| Clear your doubts now.

2. Anti-Establishment and "Outsider" Appeal

Shah's unconventional campaign style (minimal communication, no direct vote appeal) built credibility
His image as a clean, disciplined reformer resonated with a young electorate
Symbolises a broader demand for political accountability and efficiency

3. Nepal's Geopolitical Reality

Nepal is strategically located between India and China, making foreign policy unavoidable
Domestic political changes do not alter this structural geopolitical constraint
Any leadership must balance external pressures while maintaining sovereignty

4. Balancing India-China Relations

India is Nepal's primary partner in trade, energy, and people-to-people ties
China contributes through infrastructure investments and economic engagement
Effective diplomacy requires maintaining equilibrium without overdependence on either side

5. Emerging Global Pressures

The U.S. is becoming an important strategic player in Nepal
West Asia tensions impact Nepal due to migrant workers and energy links
Nepal must engage in pragmatic and multi-dimensional foreign policy

6. Challenges for the New Leadership

Shah's nationalist approach must adapt to real-world diplomatic complexities
Managing infrastructure projects, economic growth, and foreign relations is critical
Transition from domestic popularity to effective governance and diplomacy is key

7. Opportunity for India-Nepal Relations

India can rebuild trust by avoiding past coercive approaches and respecting Nepal's autonomy
Scope for deeper cooperation in energy, connectivity, and crisis management
A balanced and respectful partnership can benefit both countries in the long term

[Nepal's political shift opens a strategic window for India-The Hindu Text and Context]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Nepal's recent election results mark a **major political shift**, where voters have **rejected traditional parties** and given a strong mandate to **Balendra Shah and the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)**. This reflects the aspirations of a **young, educated, and tech-savvy population** seeking **better governance, jobs, and economic growth**.

However, this victory comes with **huge expectations**. The new government must deliver on issues like **employment, reducing migration, and improving governance**, even though it has not clearly laid out a detailed reform roadmap. This creates a risk of **public frustration** if results are not visible quickly.

For India, this political change presents a **strategic opportunity to reset relations with Nepal**. In recent years, India has focused on **development cooperation, infrastructure, connectivity, and energy**, which has created goodwill. Now, both countries can move towards a **modern, forward-looking partnership**, leaving behind past issues like mistrust and outdated frameworks.

| Clear your doubts now.

The developments in Nepal are also part of a broader **regional trend**, where youth-led movements in countries like **Sri Lanka and Bangladesh** are demanding better governance. India should avoid viewing new leadership as anti-India and instead engage pragmatically.

Overall, Nepal's internal political transformation offers a chance for both countries to build a **stronger, people-centric and development-oriented relationship**, while addressing past challenges.

Key Takeaways

1. Political Transformation in Nepal

Nepal has witnessed a decisive rejection of traditional political parties and leadership
Rise of a young, reform-oriented leadership backed by Gen Z voters
Reflects demand for governance, accountability, and development over ideology

2. Strong Mandate with High Expectations

The RSP government has received a two-thirds majority, indicating strong public trust
Expectations include job creation, economic growth, and reduced migration
However, lack of a clearly defined reform agenda may create future uncertainty

3. Risk of Public Disillusionment

Voters' support is driven more by dissatisfaction with the old system than a clear alternative vision
Failure to deliver quickly could lead to renewed protests and instability
Managing expectations will be a key governance challenge

4. Opportunity for India-Nepal Relations

Political transition opens a window for India to strengthen ties with Nepal
Existing cooperation in infrastructure, energy, and connectivity provides a strong foundation
India has adopted a balanced and non-intrusive approach in recent engagement

5. Need for Relationship Restructuring

India-Nepal relations are still influenced by historical legacies and past mistrust
Both countries need to adopt a forward-looking, pragmatic approach
Focus should be on development, mutual benefit, and people-centric policies

6. Regional Trend of Political Change

Similar youth-driven political shifts are visible in countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh
These movements demand better governance and faster development
India should avoid labeling new regimes as anti-India based on past perceptions

7. Scope for Sub-Regional Cooperation

Nepal can be an important partner for India in South Asian regional development
Cooperation in areas like energy, connectivity, and trade can be expanded
A clear sub-regional strategy can enhance growth and stability in the region

[How do we know climate science is credible?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Environment

| Clear your doubts now.

Easy Explanation

A recent paper questioned whether **global warming is actually happening**, claiming that after adjusting for uncertainties, **oceans are not warming and Earth's heat imbalance is nearly zero**. However, scientists argue that these claims are misleading and help explain **why climate science is considered credible**.

First, scientists don't just average temperature; they calculate **total thermal energy (heat content)** of oceans, which is a more accurate measure. Multiple datasets show that **ocean heat content has been increasing**, confirming warming.

Second, the paper raises doubts about **Argo floats (devices that measure ocean temperature and salinity)**. While there are uncertainties, scientists already account for them using **robust methods, cross-checks, and multiple calculations** to avoid errors or overestimation.

Third, the paper claims a "circular argument" in climate data (CERES and Argo). But in reality, **adjustments only fix baseline values**, not trends. The **warming trend over time remains unchanged**, proving that Earth is accumulating heat.

Most importantly, climate science relies on **multiple independent sources**—satellites, ocean data, models, and observations. All of them consistently show **rising temperatures and energy imbalance**. This consistency across different methods is what makes climate science **highly reliable**.

Key Takeaways

1. Climate Science is Based on Multiple Independent Evidence

Climate conclusions are not based on a single dataset or method
Evidence comes from satellites, ocean measurements, climate models, and observations
Consistency across independent sources strengthens credibility

2. Ocean Heat Content Confirms Global Warming

Scientists measure total heat energy, not just temperature averages
Ocean heat content has been steadily increasing over time
Oceans absorb most of the excess heat, making them key indicators

3. Role of Advanced Measurement Systems (Argo, Satellites)

Argo floats provide global ocean data on temperature and salinity
Satellite systems like CERES measure Earth's energy balance
Cross-verification between different systems ensures reliability

4. Handling of Uncertainty in Climate Data

Scientific methods account for uncertainties through repeated calculations and validation
Errors are not simply added but carefully analysed to avoid duplication
Robust statistical techniques ensure accurate results

5. Misinterpretation by Climate-Sceptic Claims

Some studies exaggerate uncertainties or use flawed assumptions
Claims like "no warming" ignore well-established scientific methods
Lack of independent testing reduces the credibility of such papers

6. Importance of Trends Over Absolute Values

Climate science focuses on long-term trends, not single measurements

| Clear your doubts now.

Adjustments in data do not affect the trend of rising temperatures
Evidence clearly shows increasing energy imbalance over time

7. Foundation of Scientific Credibility

Credibility comes from **independent verification and reproducibility of results**
Multiple methods arriving at the same conclusion reduces chances of error
This makes the evidence for global warming strong and scientifically reliable

[Hope builds for nations to save bird that flies 30,000 km-The Hindu Science]

Environment

Easy Explanation

The **Hudsonian godwit**, a migratory bird, travels an incredible **30,000 km every year** from the **Arctic to South America and back**. However, its population has declined by **95% in the last 40 years**, mainly due to **climate change and habitat loss** across different countries.

Migratory birds like the godwit depend on **predictable food and safe stopover sites** during their journey. But **climate change has disrupted seasonal patterns**, causing problems like chicks hatching when food (insects) is not available. At the same time, **human activities** such as aquaculture in Chile and changing farming practices in the U.S. are destroying feeding habitats.

Because these birds travel across many countries, their survival depends on **international cooperation**. The issue is being discussed under the **UN Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)**, where countries are working to **protect endangered migratory species, conserve habitats, and ensure safe migration routes**.

This highlights a broader concern: species that depend on **precise natural cycles ("biological clocks")** are highly vulnerable to rapid environmental changes.

Key Takeaways

1. Decline of Migratory Bird Species

The Hudsonian godwit population has declined by about 95% over four decades
Many migratory species worldwide are facing rapid and alarming declines
Indicates broader biodiversity loss linked to environmental changes

2. Unique Migration and Ecological Dependence

The godwit undertakes a 30,000 km annual journey, including long non-stop flights
Survival depends on availability of food and safe habitats at multiple locations
Even small disruptions in this chain can threaten the entire migration cycle

3. Impact of Climate Change

Climate change alters seasonal timing, especially in Arctic breeding grounds
Leads to mismatch between chick hatching and food availability
Disrupts migration timing and natural biological cycles

4. Human-Induced Habitat Loss

Aquaculture, infrastructure, and increased human activity disturb feeding areas
Changes in agricultural practices reduce wetlands and stopover sites

| Clear your doubts now.

Habitat degradation across multiple countries compounds the problem

5. Complexity of Multiple Stress Factors

Species can adapt to one change, but struggle with multiple simultaneous pressures
Combination of climate change, habitat loss, and human disturbance is critical
Makes conservation more challenging and urgent

6. Role of International Cooperation (CMS)

Migratory species cross national boundaries, requiring global coordination
CMS provides a framework for protecting species, habitats, and migration routes
Countries are legally obligated to take conservation measures

7. Broader Environmental Significance

Migratory species act as indicators of ecosystem health
Their decline reflects larger issues of climate change and biodiversity loss
Protecting them requires integrated, global environmental governance

📦 UPSC Value Addition Box

Hudsonian godwit travels ~30,000 km annually (Arctic → South America)
Can fly ~11,000 km non-stop without feeding
Population declined ~95% in last 40 years
Protected under **CMS (Convention on Migratory Species)**
Threat: "phenological mismatch" (timing of food vs breeding)
Habitat loss across continents (wetlands, coasts) affects migration chain
Key term: **"Flyways as ecological networks"**
Prelims trap: Flyways ≠ political boundaries; they are ecological routes across continents

25th March 2026

'Regime change needs air power with ground troops'-The Indian ExpressExplained Page

International relations

Easy Explanation

Former IAF Chief Birender Singh Dhanoa explains that in modern wars, air power is usually the first step, but it cannot win wars alone. Air strikes can weaken the enemy and send strong signals, but for complete victory—especially regime change—ground forces are necessary to capture and control territory.

| Clear your doubts now.

In the US–Israel vs Iran conflict, Iran's claim of hitting a US F-35 jet is not very significant in military terms. Despite thousands of air missions, the loss rate for the US and Israel remains extremely low, showing their strong air superiority. Iran mainly relies on missiles, drones, and underground tunnels, which help it survive and create disturbance, but do not lead to decisive victory.

A key feature of this conflict is cost imbalance. Iran uses cheap drones, while Israel and others use expensive systems to intercept them. This makes defence more costly than attack and allows Iran to sustain pressure despite limited resources.

Looking ahead, Iran cannot win a direct war but can create indirect pressure by targeting global oil routes like the Strait of Hormuz. This can increase oil prices and affect global economies, putting pressure on the US. The US may step back if its public faces high casualties or economic strain.

Overall, air power works as a tool of pressure and deterrence, but decisive outcomes in war depend on coordinated ground operations.

Key Takeaways

- **Air Power as Opening Strategy**
  - First stage of modern warfare
  - Targets enemy infrastructure and defences
  - Cannot ensure final victory alone
- **Necessity of Ground Forces**
  - Required for regime change and control
  - Air superiority supports land operations
  - Essential for decisive outcomes
- **Behaviour Change vs Regime Change**
  - Air strikes → behavioural change (deterrence)
  - Ground war → political transformation
  - Important distinction in strategy
- **Nuisance Warfare Strategy (Iran Model)**
  - Use of drones, missiles, tunnels
  - Focus on disruption and survival
  - Psychological and perception warfare
- **Cost Asymmetry in Warfare**
  - Cheap drones vs costly interception systems
  - Defence becomes economically draining
  - Strategy of long-term pressure
- **Geoeconomic Pressure via Chokepoints**
  - Targeting Strait of Hormuz
  - Impacts oil supply and global economy
  - Indirect leverage in conflict
- **Lessons for India**
  - Strengthen air defence (guns + CIWS)
  - Integrate air and ground operations
  - Prepare for drone and hybrid warfare
  - Use air power effectively for deterrence

[Do protections for SCs carry over with conversion?What law says-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that a person who converts to Christianity cannot continue to claim Scheduled Caste (SC) benefits. According to the Court, SC status is not just about birth but is also legally linked to the religion a person follows.

The law comes from the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, which clearly states that only those who follow Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism can be considered Scheduled Castes. Once a person converts to another religion like Christianity, their SC status legally ends, even if they were born into an SC community.

In this case, a person who had converted to Christianity and was working as a pastor filed a complaint under the SC/ST Act. However, the Court said he could not use this law because he no longer legally belonged to a Scheduled Caste. The Court also clarified that just having a caste certificate is not enough if it does not match the current religion.

This issue is complex because caste-based discrimination is known to continue even after conversion, especially among Dalit Christians. However, the law strictly links SC status with specific religions, and the Court said this rule is absolute with no exceptions.

The Court also noted that this rule is different for Scheduled Tribes (STs), where religion is not the deciding factor. For STs, identity depends more on community practices and recognition rather than religion alone.

Key Takeaways

- **SC Status Linked to Religion**
  - SC identity is both social and legal
  - Legally tied to religion a person professes
  - Not solely based on birth
- **Constitutional Basis (1950 Order)**
  - Governed by Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950
  - Allows SC status only for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists
  - Explicit exclusion of other religions
- **Effect of Conversion**
  - Conversion to Christianity/Islam ends SC status
  - Change is immediate in eyes of law
  - No continuation of legal protections
- **No Exception Rule**
  - Supreme Court called the bar “absolute”
  - No exceptions even if caste discrimination continues
  - Strict interpretation of law
- **Caste Certificate Not Sufficient**
  - Mere possession of caste certificate not valid
  - Must align with current religion
  - Legal status overrides documentation
- **SC/ST Act Applicability**
  - Benefits and protections apply only to legally recognised SCs
  - Converted individuals cannot invoke SC/ST Act
  - Limits scope of legal protection
- **Difference with Scheduled Tribes (STs)**
  - ST status not strictly linked to religion
  - Based on community, customs, and recognition
  - More flexible compared to SC classification

[Finance, management,legal sectors:The jobs that AI is most likely to replace-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

| Clear your doubts now.

Easy Explanation

A recent study by Anthropic shows that Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially tools like large language models (LLMs), is increasingly capable of performing tasks that many white-collar jobs involve. Jobs in sectors like finance, management, legal services, and IT are more at risk because their work is mostly digital and rule-based, making it easier for AI to automate.

The study distinguishes between what AI can theoretically do and what it is actually doing today. For example, AI can potentially perform up to 90% of tasks in fields like programming or data analysis, but in reality, current usage is still lower. However, the trend clearly shows increasing adoption, meaning more tasks will gradually be automated.

Some of the most exposed jobs include computer programmers, customer service representatives, financial analysts, and data entry workers. These roles involve repetitive, information-based tasks that AI can handle efficiently. On the other hand, jobs in sectors like construction, agriculture, and personal care are less affected because they require physical work and human interaction.

The study also highlights that certain groups are more vulnerable. Highly educated workers, women, and older professionals are more represented in jobs that are exposed to AI. Interestingly, hiring of younger workers in these roles has already started declining after the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT.

For India, the impact could be significant, especially in the IT services sector, which relies heavily on routine digital tasks. AI tools can replace some of these services, potentially reducing revenues. At the same time, challenges like low investment in education and lack of advanced skills may make adaptation difficult. However, the situation is not entirely negative—industries can evolve by upgrading skills and shifting to more complex, creative roles.

Key Takeaways

- **AI Exposure in White-Collar Jobs**
  - High impact on finance, legal, management, IT sectors
  - Tasks are digital and rule-based
  - Easily automatable by LLMs
- **Theoretical vs Actual AI Use**
  - AI can theoretically perform majority of tasks
  - Current real-world usage still limited
  - Rapid growth expected in coming years
- **Most At-Risk Occupations**
  - Programmers, data entry operators, analysts
  - Customer service and administrative roles
  - Repetitive and information-heavy tasks
- **Low-Risk Sectors**
  - Construction, agriculture, personal care
  - Require physical labour and human interaction
  - Less automatable by AI
- **Demographic Impact**
  - Higher exposure among women and educated workers
  - Older workforce slightly more vulnerable
  - Hiring of young workers declining
- **Implications for India**
  - IT services sector highly vulnerable
  - Potential revenue loss (9–12% estimate)
  - Skill gap and low R&D investment add risk
- **Need for Adaptation**
  - Shift towards high-skill, creative roles
  - Upskilling and education reforms crucial

| Clear your doubts now.

AI seen as both challenge and opportunity

[Gulf's geopolitical predicament cannot be solved. It can only be managed-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The article argues that the Gulf region's tensions, especially involving Iran and Arab countries, cannot be permanently solved—they can only be managed. Even though US President Donald Trump announced a temporary pause in attacks, a long-term peace remains difficult because of deep structural issues.

The main problem is **power imbalance**. Iran is a large, unified country with around 90 million people, while its Arab neighbours are smaller, divided into multiple states. Because of this imbalance, Gulf countries have historically depended on external powers like the United States for security. This dependence makes the region unstable, as US policies can change over time.

Historically, Iran's ambition to dominate the region has remained constant, whether under the monarchy or after the Iranian Revolution. Both regimes tried to expand influence through military power and regional involvement. Gulf countries tried to counter Iran by forming alliances like the GCC and even supporting Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, but these strategies often backfired, creating new threats.

Over time, US interventions, especially the Iraq War, unintentionally strengthened Iran's position in the region. Today, Iran has influence stretching across countries like Iraq and Lebanon through proxy groups. At the same time, Gulf countries have moved closer to Israel due to shared concerns about Iran.

Currently, both sides have conflicting demands. The US, Israel, and Gulf countries want Iran to limit its nuclear and missile programs and stop supporting proxy groups. Iran, on the other hand, wants security guarantees, removal of US military presence, and recognition of its regional role.

The core issue remains unresolved: Iran is too strong to ignore but not strong enough to dominate fully, while Gulf countries are too weak to counter it alone. As a result, the region will likely continue in a cycle of tension, where conflicts are managed temporarily rather than permanently resolved.

Key Takeaways

- **Structural Power Imbalance in Gulf**
  - Iran is large, unified, and powerful
  - Gulf Arab states are smaller and divided
  - Creates long-term regional instability
- **Dependence on External Powers**
  - Gulf countries rely on US for security
  - Makes region vulnerable to US policy shifts
  - No viable alternative security guarantor
- **Continuity of Iranian Ambitions**
  - Expansionist goals persist across regimes
  - From monarchy to Islamic Republic
  - Use of military power and regional influence
- **Failure of Regional Balancing Efforts**
  - GCC weak due to internal divisions
  - Support to Iraq backfired (Kuwait invasion)
  - Proxy strategies created unintended threats
- **Impact of US Interventions**
  - Iraq War strengthened Iran's influence

| Clear your doubts now.

Collapse of Iraqi state shifted balance
Expanded Iranian regional reach

Conflicting Strategic Goals

US/Gulf/Israel: curb Iran's nuclear & proxy power
Iran: security guarantees and regional recognition
No common ground for permanent solution

Managed Instability as Reality

Iran too strong to ignore, too weak to dominate
Gulf states too weak to counter independently
Region likely to face prolonged, managed tensions

[When the Chief Justice steps away-The Hindu Text and Context]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court of India recently saw Chief Justice Surya Kant step aside (recuse) from hearing a case related to the appointment of Election Commissioners. He said this was to avoid any **conflict of interest**, since future Chief Justices may be involved in such appointments.

Recusal is based on a basic principle of natural justice: **no one should be a judge in their own case**. Judges step aside when there is a possibility of bias or conflict. However, in India, there is **no clear law defining when judges must recuse**, so the decision is left to individual judges.

This case is important because the law being challenged—the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023—changed the selection panel by removing the Chief Justice and replacing them with a Union Minister. Earlier, the Court had itself suggested including the CJI in the panel to ensure neutrality.

The issue becomes complex because **all Supreme Court judges are potential future Chief Justices**. So, if one judge recuses due to conflict, the same logic could apply to almost all judges. In such cases, courts use the **"doctrine of necessity"**, which means judges must still hear the case because no alternative court exists.

The article argues that the Chief Justice's decision to exclude judges who may become future CJIs raises concerns. Recusal should be an **individual decision**, not something imposed on other judges. Also, there is no clear system in India to regulate or review recusal decisions.

Overall, the controversy highlights a larger institutional gap: India lacks a **codified framework for judicial recusal**, leading to inconsistency and questions about transparency in important constitutional cases.

Key Takeaways

Concept of Judicial Recusal

Based on principle: no one should judge their own case
Ensures fairness and impartiality
Linked to natural justice

Absence of Clear Legal Framework

No codified law on recusal in India
Decision left to judge's discretion
No mechanism for review

CEC Appointment Law Controversy

Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 changed selection panel
Removed CJI, added Union Minister
Raises concerns over independence of Election Commission

| Clear your doubts now.

Doctrine of Necessity

- Applied when all judges face similar conflict
- Court must still function despite conflict
- Ensures no constitutional vacuum

Issue of Collective Conflict

- All SC judges are potential future CJIs
- Conflict applies broadly, not individually
- Makes recusal complex in constitutional cases

Concerns with CJI's Direction

- Excluding future CJIs from bench may be problematic
- Recusal should be personal, not pre-decided
- Raises institutional questions

Need for Codification

- Lack of clear rules leads to inconsistency
- Need for transparency and accountability
- Strengthens judicial credibility and trust

How BioPharma SHAKTI can transform biologics with non-animal models-The Hindu Science

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Biologics are advanced medicines made from living cells, such as vaccines, insulin, and monoclonal antibodies. They are increasingly used to treat diseases like cancer, arthritis, and Alzheimer's. However, testing these drugs on animals is often unreliable because animal bodies respond differently from human bodies. This was seen in incidents like the Northwick Park Trial, where a drug appeared safe in animals but caused severe reactions in humans.

To solve this problem, scientists are now developing **non-animal methods** like organ-on-chip, organoids, and 3D bioprinting. These models are created using human cells and can better mimic how drugs behave in the human body. They are called Non-Animal Methodologies (NAMs) and are being promoted globally to improve drug safety and reduce animal testing.

Recognising the importance of biologics, the Indian government launched the Biopharma SHAKTI in the 2026 Budget. The aim is to boost domestic production of biologics and biosimilars (cheaper generic versions). NAMs can make drug development faster, cheaper, and more accurate, reducing both time and cost.

However, challenges remain. These new technologies are not yet widely used in industry due to lack of standardisation, funding, and regulatory clarity. In India, many labs are working on such innovations, but they are not translating into large-scale commercial use.

There are also regulatory and market challenges. Biosimilars require approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, and guidelines are still evolving. Issues like patent evergreening (extending drug patents) also delay the entry of cheaper alternatives.

Overall, Biopharma SHAKTI has the potential to transform India's pharmaceutical sector by promoting advanced technologies and reducing dependence on animal testing, but success will depend on better policy support, investment, and regulatory reforms.

Key Takeaways

Rise of Biologics

- Includes vaccines, insulin, monoclonal antibodies
- Used for chronic and complex diseases

| Clear your doubts now.

Growing importance in global healthcare

Limitations of Animal Testing

Animal models may not mimic human biology accurately
Risk of failure in clinical trials
Example: Northwick Park Trial

Non-Animal Methodologies (NAMs)

Includes organ-on-chip, organoids, 3D bioprinting
Based on human cells → more accurate results
Reduces need for animal testing

Biopharma SHAKTI Initiative

Biopharma SHAKTI launched in Budget 2026
Promotes biologics and biosimilars
Provides funding (~₹10,000 crore)

Economic and Efficiency Benefits

Reduces drug development cost (10–26%)
Shortens development time
Encourages innovation and startups

Challenges in India

Lack of industry adoption of NAMs
Limited funding, infrastructure, standardisation
Weak industry-academia linkage

Regulatory and Market Issues

Approval needed from Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation
Patent evergreening delays biosimilars
Need for clear and updated guidelines

26th March 2026

[Pakistan's mediator pitch comes with challenges-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Context: Amid rising tensions in West Asia, Pakistan is trying to act as a **mediator** between United States and Iran.

Why Pakistan?

Pakistan maintains:
Close ties with the US (especially Donald Trump)
Proximity and engagement with Iran
Strong influence of military leadership like Asim Munir

Current Developments:

Pakistan conveyed a US peace proposal to Iran (rejected)
Offered to host direct talks
Engaged in back-channel diplomacy

What's Different Now?

Conflict is more intense and region-wide
Pakistan's civilian government is weak
Army dominates foreign policy

Key Challenge:

Pakistan must balance between:
Iran (neighbor)
Saudi Arabia (economic lifeline)
US (strategic partner)

| Clear your doubts now.

India's Position:

India is:

- Monitoring Pakistan's rising diplomatic role
- Trying to rebalance ties with Iran
- Concerned about Pakistan's global visibility

Conclusion:

Pakistan has gained short-term diplomatic importance, but long-term success is uncertain due to conflicting pressures.

Key Takeaways

- **Pakistan as Mediator**
  - Acting as a bridge between US and Iran
  - Leveraging military-led diplomacy
- **Strategic Positioning**
  - Strong ties with both US and Iran
  - Army chief playing key diplomatic role
- **Historical Precedent**
  - Role in US–China rapprochement
  - Mediation in Iran–Saudi and Taliban–US talks
- **Changing Geopolitical Context**
  - More volatile West Asia conflict
  - Military dominance in Pakistan's decision-making
- **Structural Constraints**
  - Economic dependence on Saudi Arabia
  - Defence commitments restrict neutrality
- **Risks in Balancing Act**
  - Possibility of being forced to take sides
  - Loss of credibility as mediator
- **Implications for India**
  - Pakistan gaining diplomatic leverage
  - India recalibrating its Iran policy

[How a new Bill could ensure dominance of IPS officers in CAPFs-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Internal security

Easy Explanation

The Union government has introduced the **Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026** to control recruitment and leadership in forces like the Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force. The key aim is to **retain IPS officers (Indian Police Service)** in top positions through deputation.

This comes after a 2025 ruling by the Supreme Court of India, which asked the government to reduce IPS dominance because it was blocking promotions of CAPF officers. However, the new Bill tries to override this by giving the Centre power to decide recruitment and ensure IPS presence in senior roles.

The government argues IPS officers improve coordination between Centre and states. But CAPF officers oppose it, saying they handle ground operations yet face **poor career growth and fewer leadership opportunities**. The issue reflects a tension between **administrative efficiency vs fairness to cadre officers**.

Key Takeaways

- **Objective of the Bill**

| Clear your doubts now.

Retain IPS dominance in CAPF leadership
Provide a uniform legal framework

Judicial vs Executive Clash
Supreme Court wanted reduced deputation
Government moving to override

Centralised Control
Centre gets power over recruitment and service rules

Fixed Deputation Quotas
Majority senior posts reserved for IPS officers

Career Stagnation Issue
CAPF officers face limited promotions

Operational vs Leadership Gap
CAPF officers handle field duties
IPS officers occupy top posts

Larger Governance Debate
Balance between efficiency, federal coordination, and fairness

[‘Lebanese govt would like Hezbollah disarmed,but lacks resources to do so’-The Indian Express Explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The conflict between Israel and Lebanon has escalated, mainly due to tensions with Hezbollah. Israel is attacking Lebanon, especially the southern region near the Litani River, to create a **buffer zone** against Hezbollah attacks.

Although Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel, Israel’s response has been **much larger and more destructive**, causing heavy civilian casualties, destruction of cities like Beirut, and massive displacement. The situation has become a **humanitarian crisis**, with over a million people displaced.

A key issue is that past agreements like United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 required Hezbollah to disarm, but this was never implemented. The Lebanese government wants to disarm Hezbollah but **lacks military strength, resources, and international support**.

The crisis is worsening because Lebanon is already economically weak and hosting many refugees. If Israel launches a ground invasion, the situation could become **catastrophic**, making international intervention crucial.

Key Takeaways

Cause of Conflict
Israel targeting Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon
Aim to create a security buffer zone

Disproportionate Response
Israel’s retaliation far exceeds Hezbollah attacks
Heavy civilian casualties and infrastructure damage

Failure of Past Agreements
UN Resolution 1701 not implemented
Hezbollah not disarmed

Lebanon’s Weak State Capacity
Government lacks resources to control Hezbollah
Limited military capability

Humanitarian Crisis
Large-scale displacement and refugee burden
Collapse of basic services

| Clear your doubts now.

- **Hezbollah's Dual Role**
  - Militant group + political actor in Lebanon
  - Makes disarmament difficult
- **Global & India's Role**
  - Need for international intervention
  - India can play role via diplomacy and UN missions

[60.06 lakh voters under cloud:The questions around West Bengal SIR-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

Around **60 lakh voters in West Bengal** are facing uncertainty before the Assembly elections because their names are marked as **"under adjudication"**, meaning they are on the voter list but **cannot vote yet**.

This issue arose during a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** conducted by the Election Commission of India to clean electoral rolls. Many voters were flagged due to **data mismatches or discrepancies**. Unlike other states, where final voter lists were published clearly, West Bengal still has unresolved cases.

The Supreme Court of India intervened and ordered judicial officers to review these cases. While some names are being cleared through supplementary lists, the EC has **not disclosed how many voters are cleared, deleted, or still pending**, creating confusion.

With elections approaching and deadlines for corrections closing soon, many voters may **lose their chance to vote**, raising concerns about transparency and electoral fairness.

Key Takeaways

- **Scale of the Issue**
  - Around 60 lakh voters marked "under adjudication"
  - Cannot vote despite being on rolls
- **Cause: SIR Process**
  - Data mismatches during voter list revision
  - Unique complications in West Bengal
- **Lack of Transparency**
  - EC has not shared clear numbers of additions/deletions
  - Creates confusion for voters and parties
- **Judicial Intervention**
  - Supreme Court ordered review by judicial officers
  - Supplementary lists being released
- **Time Constraint**
  - Deadlines for appeals are very close
  - Risk of exclusion from voting
- **Political Concerns**
  - Allegations of wrongful marking of voters
  - Trust deficit in electoral process
- **Democratic Implication**
  - Raises concerns over voting rights and fairness
  - Highlights need for transparent electoral management

[At BRICS,India's Iran challenge is navigation,not resolution-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

International relations

| Clear your doubts now.

Easy Explanation

India's upcoming role in **BRICS** comes at a time when global tensions are high, especially due to the ongoing crisis involving Iran, United States, and Israel. Iran, now part of the expanded BRICS group, is indirectly in conflict with the US and Israel, which creates a difficult situation for India.

India follows a policy of **strategic autonomy**, meaning it maintains relations with multiple countries—even those that are rivals. For example, India has strong ties with the US, defence cooperation with Israel, energy and connectivity interests with Iran, and economic relations with Gulf countries. This flexible approach works well in normal times but becomes challenging during conflicts, as India must avoid taking sides.

BRICS itself is not a military or political alliance but a **loose grouping of diverse countries**. Its members have different interests and do not act as a united bloc during crises. This is clearly visible in the Iran situation, where each country is responding based on its own national interests rather than a common BRICS position.

For India, the challenge is not to solve the Iran crisis but to **carefully navigate it**. It must protect its interests like energy security (especially through the Strait of Hormuz), maintain diplomatic balance, and avoid damaging relations with any major partner. Hence, India is likely to focus on **dialogue, de-escalation, and balance**, rather than aligning strongly with any one side.

Key Takeaways

- **Context of Crisis**
  - Iran crisis coincides with India's BRICS presidency
  - Raises geopolitical pressure on India
- **Strategic Autonomy of India**
  - Maintains ties with US, Israel, Iran, and Gulf
  - Focus on flexibility, not fixed alliances
- **Nature of BRICS**
  - Not a unified geopolitical bloc
  - More of an economic and coordination platform
- **Fragmented Multipolar World**
  - Countries act based on national interests
  - No collective response even within BRICS
- **India's Core Concerns**
  - Energy security and maritime routes
  - Stability in Gulf region
- **Diplomatic Challenge**
  - Balancing competing partnerships
  - Avoiding direct alignment in conflicts
- **Key Insight**
  - India's role is to "navigate" tensions, not resolve them
  - Flexibility is the core of modern diplomacy

[In LdF's change of heart on Sabarimala, a lesson for religious reform-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Kerala government led by the **LDF (Left Democratic Front)** has recently changed its stance on the Sabarimala Temple issue. Earlier, it supported the 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court of India, which allowed women of all ages to enter the temple. Now, it has told the Court that **traditional customs should be respected**, effectively supporting the earlier restriction on women below 50.

| Clear your doubts now.

This issue highlights a deeper conflict between **constitutional values (like equality)** and **religious traditions**. The 2018 judgment focused on gender equality, but many devotees felt that the restriction was not about discrimination—it was linked to the belief that Lord Ayyappa is a **celibate deity**, and the practice is part of that faith.

The earlier attempt by the government to strictly enforce the Court's order led to **public protests and social tension in Kerala**. Many people felt that the state was interfering in religious matters without understanding their beliefs. This shows that **top-down reforms imposed by courts or governments may not work** if society is not ready to accept them.

The key lesson is that **religious reform should ideally come from within the community**, through dialogue and gradual change, rather than being imposed externally. In a democracy, laws must also consider **people's beliefs and social acceptance**, otherwise they can create resentment instead of reform.

Key Takeaways

- **LDF's Policy Shift**
  - From supporting women's entry to backing traditional customs
  - Reflects political and social pressure
- **Core Conflict**
  - Clash between constitutional equality and religious faith
  - Both are important democratic values
- **Limits of Judicial Reform**
  - Courts may lack understanding of lived religious practices
  - Legal decisions may not ensure social acceptance
- **Faith vs Rationality Debate**
  - Practices rooted in belief (like celibacy of deity)
  - Cannot always be judged by modern logic
- **Failure of Top-Down Approach**
  - Forced implementation led to protests and unrest
  - Shows limits of state-led reform
- **Need for Community-Led Reform**
  - Change should come through dialogue within society
  - Ensures legitimacy and acceptance
- **Democratic Lesson**
  - Laws must align with social conscience
  - Balance needed between reform and tradition

[A police force more sensitive to Northeast-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

Sociology

Easy Explanation

The Union government has asked cities in the National Capital Region to appoint **nodal police officers** to deal with racism faced by people from the Northeast. This step recognises that **discrimination is still common**, even in big cities like Delhi.

People from Northeast states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Tripura often face problems like racial slurs, housing discrimination, workplace bias, and sometimes even violence. Recent incidents show that this is not just occasional but a **systemic issue**.

Although such mechanisms already exist—for example, special units in Delhi Police—they have not been very effective. Many victims are unaware of these systems, and there is **low trust between the police and Northeast communities**.

| Clear your doubts now.

The new proposal can help, but only if it is supported by **real changes**, such as better awareness, police sensitisation, faster action, and accountability. Otherwise, it may remain only a symbolic step.

The issue has been highlighted before as well. After the killing of Nido Taniam in 2014, the Bezbaruah Committee recommended several reforms, many of which are still not fully implemented. This shows the need for **serious and sustained action**, not just policy announcements.

Key Takeaways

- **Recognition of Racism**
  - Government acknowledges discrimination against Northeast citizens
  - Seen even in urban, cosmopolitan areas
- **Nature of Discrimination**
  - Includes slurs, housing bias, exclusion, and violence
  - Reflects systemic social prejudice
- **Existing Mechanisms Weak**
  - Nodal officers and police units already exist
  - Limited awareness and effectiveness
- **Trust Deficit Issue**
  - Northeast communities lack confidence in police
  - Reduces reporting of crimes
- **Need for Police Sensitisation**
  - Training required to handle diversity and racial issues
  - Improve responsiveness and empathy
- **Legal and Institutional Gaps**
  - Calls for stricter laws and time-bound action
  - Past recommendations not fully implemented
- **Way Forward**
  - Combine policy with awareness, accountability, and outreach
  - Ensure real impact, not just symbolic measures

What is at stake at the WTO's MC14?-The Hindu Text and Context

International relations

Easy Explanation

The World Trade Organization's **14th Ministerial Conference (MC14)** is a major global meeting where countries decide the future of international trade rules. It is happening at a time when **global trade cooperation is weakening** and countries—especially the United States and China—are increasingly competing and acting unilaterally.

The biggest concern is that the US has been **bypassing WTO rules** by imposing tariffs and weakening the dispute settlement system (by blocking appointments to the Appellate Body). This has reduced the effectiveness of the WTO, pushing countries to rely more on **free trade agreements instead of global rules**.

At MC14, key debates include whether to allow **plurilateral agreements** (agreements among some countries only), whether to continue the **e-commerce tariff ban**, and whether developing countries like India should retain special treatment benefits. There is also a strong demand to **restore the dispute settlement system**.

For India, the challenge is to **protect developing country interests** while also adapting to changing trade realities. The outcome of MC14 will decide whether global trade remains cooperative (multilateral) or shifts toward **power-based, fragmented systems**.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

- **MC14's Importance**
  - WTO's top decision-making forum
  - Will shape future global trade rules
- **Crisis in Multilateralism**
  - Rising US–China rivalry
  - Shift from cooperation to unilateral actions
- **US Role in WTO Weakening**
  - Tariff wars violate WTO principles (MFN)
  - Dispute system paralysed
- **Plurilateral Agreements Debate**
  - Seen as flexible solution by many countries
  - India fears fragmentation of global system
- **E-commerce Moratorium Issue**
  - No tariffs on digital trade since 1998
  - Developing countries worry about revenue loss
- **Special & Differential Treatment (SDT)**
  - Benefits for developing countries under threat
  - US wants to restrict it
- **India's Strategic Role**
  - Should lead developing world
  - Balance between reform and protection of interests

Why is Chennai's microplastic problem bigger than it looks?-The Hindu Text and Context

Environment

Easy Explanation

A recent study on Chennai's beaches found that **microplastics are present in relatively low quantities**, but this does not mean the problem is small. Most of these particles are **nylon fibres**, which are actually **more harmful than many other plastics**.

The key issue is that traditional studies focus only on how much plastic is present. But this research shows that **type, size, and shape of plastics matter more**. Even small amounts of harmful microplastics can cause serious long-term damage to marine ecosystems.

These microplastics are entering the sea mainly due to **human activities** like fishing (nets, ropes), washing synthetic clothes, tourism, and urban waste. Once in the ocean, they are eaten by small marine organisms and **enter the food chain**, eventually affecting humans through seafood.

Right now, the situation is **not yet severe**, which means timely action—like better waste management and awareness—can still prevent a bigger environmental crisis.

Key Takeaways

- **Low Quantity ≠ Low Risk**
  - Even fewer microplastics can be highly dangerous
  - Nylon fibres are especially harmful
- **Nature of Microplastics Matters**
  - Type, size, and shape more important than count
  - Fibres cause higher ecological damage
- **Marine Ecosystem Impact**

| Clear your doubts now.

- Ingested by worms, crabs, plankton
- Causes injury, toxicity, and habitat disruption

Food Chain Contamination

- Microplastics enter seafood
- Long-term effects on human health

Human Sources

- Fishing gear, synthetic clothes, tourism
- Sewage and urban runoff major contributors

Hidden Environmental Threat

- Alters seabed ecosystems and microbes
- Can travel long distances (transboundary issue)

Scope for Prevention

- Problem still manageable
- Needs policy action, waste management, awareness

[What is mineral water and how does it naturally contain dissolved minerals?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Geography

Easy Explanation

Mineral water is water that naturally contains dissolved minerals such as calcium, magnesium, sodium, and bicarbonates. It is obtained from **underground sources** like springs and aquifers, where it remains protected from pollution and retains its natural chemical composition.

The formation of mineral water is a **slow geological process**. When rainwater or snow melts, it seeps deep into the ground and travels through different layers of rocks such as limestone, sandstone, granite, or basalt. As the water moves through these layers, it **dissolves small amounts of minerals from the rocks**. This process can take **years, decades, or even centuries**, gradually enriching the water.

Over time, due to **underground pressure**, this mineral-rich water either rises back to the surface as natural springs or is stored in underground reservoirs. When extracted, it is usually only filtered or sterilised, but its **natural mineral content is not altered**.

This is what makes mineral water different from regular drinking water. In many cases, packaged drinking water is purified and then minerals may be added artificially for taste. In contrast, mineral water gets its composition **entirely from natural geological interactions**, which also give it a distinct taste and properties.

Key Takeaways

Natural Origin

- Mineral water comes from underground sources like springs and aquifers
- It is naturally protected from contamination

Formation Process

- Rainwater seeps into the ground and travels through rock layers
- Minerals dissolve into water over long periods

Role of Rocks

- Different rocks (limestone, granite, basalt) add different minerals
- This determines the taste and composition of the water

No Artificial Enrichment

- Minerals are not added manually
- Water retains its original natural composition

Stable Mineral Content

- Mineral levels remain consistent over time

| Clear your doubts now.

This is a key requirement for it to be classified as mineral water

Difference from Other Waters

Tap water is treated and disinfected

Packaged water may be purified and re-mineralised artificially

Health and Chemical Properties

Contains useful minerals like calcium and magnesium

Affects taste, hardness, and interaction with the human body

UPSC Value Addition Box – Microplastics

Microplastics = plastic particles **<5 mm (primary + secondary types)**
Key idea: **"Invisible pollution, irreversible impact"**
Nylon fibres (dominant in Chennai study) = **synthetic polymer with high persistence**
Major sources: **synthetic textiles, fishing gear, urban runoff, sewage discharge**
1 laundry cycle → releases **thousands of microfibres into water systems**
Key line: *"What we throw away never disappears—it fragments and returns through food."*
Prelims trap: Microplastics are not only marine → also found in **soil, air, drinking water**
Linked conventions/issues: **Marine pollution (SDG 14 – Life Below Water)**

27th March 2026

India's new climate targets are modest but significant-The Indian Express Explained Page

Environment

Easy Explanation

What has India announced?

India has set its **2035 climate targets** under the Paris Agreement (NDCs).

60% electricity capacity from non-fossil fuels
47% reduction in emissions intensity (from 2005 levels)
Creation of carbon sinks through forests
These are **slightly higher than 2030 targets**.

Why are the targets modest?

India is already on track to meet its 2030 goals early
It could have aimed higher (experts suggest more scope)
Hence, targets are **safe and achievable**

Why are they still important?

Global climate action is slowing, especially due to changes in the United States
India is continuing its clean energy path
Shows responsibility as a major developing country

What is the issue of climate finance?

Developing countries need funds for climate action

At COP29, only $300 billion/year was promised
Demand was $1.3 trillion/year
This gap limits higher ambition

What is India's overall strategy?

Balance development with climate goals
Maintain flexibility in commitments
Focus on both mitigation and adaptation

Key Takeaways

Gradual Increase in Targets
2035 goals slightly higher than 2030
Focus on steady progress
Push for Clean Energy
60% non-fossil electricity capacity
Strengthening renewable sector
Lower Emissions Intensity
47% reduction target
Cleaner economic growth
Forest-Based Carbon Sink
Large-scale CO_2 absorption through forests
Nature-based solution
Strong Global Signal
India remains committed amid global slowdown
Builds climate leadership image
Finance Limits Ambition
Inadequate global funding
Key constraint for developing countries
Balanced Climate Strategy
Aligns climate action with development
Retains policy flexibility

[New I-T Rules:Simpler processes,higher deductions for the salaried-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

What has changed?
India has introduced **new Income-tax Rules, 2026** under the updated tax system.

Focus on **simplifying tax filing and compliance**
Reduction in number of forms and procedures
Changes in deductions and disclosures for salaried people

What are the key procedural changes?

One **unified form** replaces multiple TDS forms
Filing will be done using **PAN instead of TAN**
Form 130 replaces Form 16 for salary details
Salary, perks, and deductions are digitally linked

| Clear your doubts now.

What benefits for salaried employees?

Higher allowances and exemptions
Free meals up to ₹200 exempt from tax
Increased education and hostel allowances
HRA expanded to more cities like Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad

What are the new PAN and transaction rules?

PAN required for:
    Cash transactions ≥ ₹10 lakh/year
    Property transactions above ₹20 lakh
    Vehicle purchase above ₹5 lakh
Helps in **tracking high-value transactions**

Old vs New Tax Regime – what to choose?

New regime:
    Lower tax rates, simple structure
    Better for income up to ~₹15 lakh
Old regime:
    More deductions (HRA, 80C, home loan)
    Better for high-income taxpayers with investments

What are the concerns?

More documentation (especially for HRA claims)
Quick implementation timeline
Confusion in choosing the right regime

Key Takeaways

Simplified Tax System
    Fewer forms and unified processes
    Easier compliance for taxpayers
Digital and PAN-Based System
    Shift from TAN to PAN
    Better integration of tax data
Relief for Salaried Class
    Higher deductions and exemptions
    Expanded HRA and allowances
Stronger Monitoring Mechanism
    Lower thresholds for reporting transactions
    Increased transparency
New Regime Advantage
    Lower tax rates and simplicity
    Ideal for lower/middle income groups
Old Regime Still Useful
    Beneficial for those claiming deductions
    Useful for tax planning
Implementation Challenges
    Increased scrutiny and compliance requirements
    Need for careful regime selection

| Clear your doubts now.

[As war drags on,RBI may have to choose between for ex reserves and rupee value-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

The Reserve Bank of India states that India's forex reserves are comfortable (~$710 billion), but the rupee is continuously weakening due to foreign investor outflows, rising oil import bills, and global uncertainties. Forex reserves include foreign currency assets, gold, SDRs, and IMF reserves, but in practice, only foreign currency assets are actively used to defend the rupee. The RBI intervenes by selling dollars in the spot market (which reduces reserves and tightens liquidity) and in the forward market (which delays impact but creates future obligations). Despite large interventions, the rupee has continued to fall, showing that market pressures are strong. This creates a dilemma: either use reserves to stabilize the rupee or conserve reserves and allow depreciation. With persistent global pressures like high oil prices and geopolitical tensions, the RBI may eventually allow a gradual weakening of the rupee to preserve reserves for more severe crises.

Key Takeaways

- **Strong but Misleading Reserves**
  - Headline forex reserves appear high
  - Effective usable reserves are lower after adjustments
- **Rupee Under Pressure**
  - Due to capital outflows and global uncertainty
  - Continuous depreciation trend
- **Dual Intervention Strategy**
  - Spot market: immediate but costly
  - Forward market: delayed impact but future risk
- **Policy Trade-off**
  - RBI must choose between saving reserves or stabilising rupee
  - Cannot fully achieve both
- **Global Factors Dominate**
  - Oil prices and geopolitical tensions
  - External factors beyond RBI control
- **Limits of Intervention**
  - Even heavy dollar selling cannot fully stop depreciation
  - Market forces remain stronger
- **Likely Controlled Depreciation**
  - RBI may allow gradual weakening of rupee
  - To preserve reserves for bigger shocks

[Why YouTube, Meta were held guilty in tech addiction trial-The Indian Express Explained Page]

governance

Easy Explanation

A US jury found Meta and YouTube guilty of designing **addictive platforms that harmed a young user's mental health**. Instead of blaming harmful content, the case focused on **platform design**—features like endless scrolling, algorithm-driven feeds, and notifications that keep users hooked like "digital casinos." The court ruled that these companies were negligent because they knowingly created systems that encourage excessive use, especially among children, and failed to warn users about risks. Importantly, the case avoided protection under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act by arguing that the harm came from the **product design itself**, not user content. The jury

concluded that these design choices were a **"substantial factor"** in causing harm like anxiety and depression, and even found "malice" (knowing risk but ignoring it), awarding damages to the victim.

Key Takeaways

- **Shift from Content to Design Liability**
  - Case focused on platform design, not user-generated content
  - Bypassed legal immunity under Section 230
- **Addictive Design Features Highlighted**
  - Infinite scroll, algorithms, notifications
  - Compared to "slot machines" creating dopamine addiction
- **Negligence Proven in Court**
  - Companies failed duty of care
  - Design directly contributed to user harm
- **Mental Health Impact Recognised**
  - Linked to anxiety, depression, body image issues
  - Especially harmful for children and teenagers
- **'Substantial Factor' Principle Applied**
  - Platforms need not be sole cause of harm
  - Only a meaningful contributing factor
- **Finding of Malice is Significant**
  - Companies knew risks but ignored them
  - Raises severity of legal responsibility
- **Precedent for Future Cases**
  - Landmark judgment for tech regulation
  - May trigger more lawsuits globally

[West Asia war is a warning. It's also a window to securing our energy-The Indian Express explained Page]

International relations

Easy Explanation

The ongoing tensions in West Asia highlight India's deep **energy vulnerability**, as it imports over 85% of its crude oil. Any conflict in this region leads to rising oil prices, inflation, and economic stress. However, this crisis is also an opportunity for India to **reduce dependence on imports and strengthen energy security**. India can do this by rapidly expanding renewable energy, improving electricity grids and storage, promoting electric cooking and transport, scaling nuclear power, securing critical minerals, and becoming a global hub for clean energy manufacturing. In short, the crisis is a reminder that India must shift from dependence on fossil fuels to a **self-reliant, diversified energy system**.

Key Takeaways

- **Energy Insecurity is Structural**
  - India imports ~85% of crude oil
  - Vulnerable to global conflicts and price shocks
- **West Asia Crisis as Trigger**
  - Raises oil prices and inflation
  - Creates pressure on fiscal and current account
- **Need for Renewable Expansion**
  - Current targets insufficient
  - Requires large-scale solar and wind growth
- **Grid and Storage Crucial**
  - Transmission gaps causing stranded capacity
  - Battery and pumped storage essential

| Clear your doubts now.

- **Shift in Consumption Patterns**
  - Electric cooking and EVs reduce oil dependence
  - Long-term demand transformation strategy
- **Strategic Role of Nuclear & Minerals**
  - Nuclear ensures stable base load power
  - Critical minerals key for energy transition
- **Energy Transition as Opportunity**
  - India can become clean energy manufacturing hub
  - Reduce vulnerability and enhance global position

[What is driving the fall in gold prices?-The Hindu Text and Context]

Economy

Easy Explanation

Gold prices are falling even during global tensions because the usual conditions that make gold attractive have changed. Rising oil prices have increased inflation fears, leading investors to expect **higher interest rates for longer**. This makes assets like bonds more attractive since they give returns, while gold does not. At the same time, the **US dollar has strengthened**, making gold costlier and reducing demand globally. Investors are also selling gold to cover losses in falling stock markets and to book profits after earlier price increases. So, instead of acting as a safe haven, gold is losing demand due to strong dollar, high interest rate expectations, and liquidity pressures.

Key Takeaways

- **Higher Interest Rate Expectations**
  - Investors expect rates to remain high
  - Gold becomes less attractive as it gives no returns
- **Strengthening US Dollar**
  - Makes gold expensive globally
  - Reduces demand
- **Shift to Safer Yielding Assets**
  - Investors prefer bonds and dollar assets
  - Gold loses appeal temporarily
- **Oil Price Shock Effect**
  - War increased oil prices → inflation fears
  - Delays expected rate cuts
- **Profit Booking Trend**
  - Investors selling after previous price rise
  - Adds to price decline
- **Liquidity Crunch in Markets**
  - Losses in equities → selling gold to cover
  - Downward pressure increases
- **Short-Term Correction**
  - Fall is temporary, not structural
  - Long-term demand remains strong

[Why do we need a living will?-The Hindu Science]

Polity

Easy Explanation

| Clear your doubts now.

A living will is a legal document that allows a person to clearly state their medical treatment preferences in case they become unable to communicate in the future. Life is unpredictable—people may suffer accidents, strokes, or terminal illnesses where they cannot express their wishes. In such situations, difficult decisions about life-support treatments like ventilators, feeding tubes, or CPR are often left to family members and doctors, leading to confusion, emotional stress, and conflict. A living will removes this uncertainty by ensuring that treatment decisions reflect the patient's own wishes. It is especially important in cases of **terminal or irreversible conditions**, where aggressive medical treatment may only prolong suffering without improving quality of life. Instead, it allows a shift towards **dignified and peaceful end-of-life care (palliative care)**. It also reduces unnecessary medical expenses and prevents situations where patients spend their final days in ICU with invasive support systems they may not have wanted. Importantly, a living will does not affect treatment for normal or recoverable illnesses—it only applies in extreme medical conditions. Recognised legally in India after the Common Cause vs Union of India, it upholds the principle of **patient autonomy**, giving individuals control over their own end-of-life decisions.

Key Takeaways

- **Ensures Patient Autonomy**
  - Allows individuals to decide their treatment preferences
  - Prevents others from making unwanted decisions
- **Avoids Family Conflict and Stress**
  - Reduces emotional burden on relatives
  - Prevents disagreements during critical situations
- **Prevents Unnecessary Suffering**
  - Avoids prolonged ICU care in irreversible conditions
  - Promotes dignity in death
- **Clarity in Medical Decisions**
  - Guides doctors clearly on what to do
  - Avoids confusion in emergency situations
- **Limited to Terminal Conditions**
  - Applies only when illness is irreversible
  - Does not affect routine treatments
- **Reduces Financial Burden**
  - Avoids costly, futile treatments
  - Helps rational healthcare spending
- **Legally Recognised in India**
  - Valid after Supreme Court judgement (2018)
  - Simplified process for making one

28th March 2026

[How a perfect storm has dragged down gold prices-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

Gold is usually a **safe-haven asset**—it rises during war, crisis, or uncertainty.

But this time, despite war in West Asia and rising tensions, **gold prices fell sharply (~15%)**.

This happened because **multiple economic forces worked together against gold**, creating a "perfect storm".

War leads to oil price rise

| Clear your doubts now.

Conflict disrupted oil supply (e.g., Strait of Hormuz)
Crude oil prices surged above $100/barrel

Oil rise leads to inflation

Higher energy costs increased overall prices
PMI data showed fastest rise in input costs in months

Inflation keeps interest rates high

US Federal Reserve delayed rate cuts
Markets even started expecting possible rate hikes

High interest rates reduce gold's appeal

Gold does not give interest (non-yielding asset)
Investors shifted towards bonds for better returns

Strong dollar reduces gold demand

US dollar strengthened significantly
Gold became expensive globally (since priced in dollars)

Profit booking after previous rally

Gold had already risen sharply earlier
Investors sold to lock in profits

Final Understanding
Even though war normally pushes gold prices up,
high inflation + high interest rates + strong dollar dominated → gold prices fell

Key Takeaways

- **Safe-haven paradox**
  - Gold fell despite geopolitical tensions
  - Shows dominance of macroeconomic factors
- **Oil-inflation linkage**
  - War → oil shock → inflation rise
  - Energy prices influence global inflation
- **Interest rate impact**
  - Higher rates reduce demand for gold
  - Investors prefer interest-bearing assets
- **Dollar strength effect**
  - Strong dollar makes gold costly worldwide
  - Reduces global demand
- **Oil-shock paradox concept**
  - Same crisis both supports and weakens gold
  - Conflicting forces cancel impact
- **Historical trend pattern**
  - Initial rise followed by decline seen earlier too
  - Example: Ukraine war phase
- **Role of investor behaviour**
  - Profit booking after strong rally
  - Market psychology influences prices

| Clear your doubts now.

[US to India:Economic winners and losers of the conflict-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

The US–Israel vs Iran conflict has **reshaped the global economy**, creating **winners and losers across countries**.

The main reason is:
war → oil prices rise → inflation rises → currencies fluctuate → growth changes

Different countries are affected differently based on **energy dependence, trade links, and economic structure**.

Energy shock impacts economies differently

- Oil prices surged due to supply disruption
- Energy-importing countries suffer more
- Energy-producing countries gain

US emerges as a relative winner

- World's largest oil producer → benefits from high prices
- Domestic energy production increases GDP
- Growth slowdown becomes smaller than expected

Europe and UK are major losers

- Highly dependent on energy imports
- Already weak growth → further slowdown
- Eurozone growth falls significantly

India faces moderate impact

- Heavy oil import dependence
- Rupee depreciated sharply (~4% in a month)
- Inflation expected to rise to ~5%

Russia and China less affected (or benefit)

- Russia gains from higher energy exports
- China relatively insulated due to diversified trade

Inflation rises globally

- Energy costs push up prices everywhere
- Most countries see inflation increase by >1%

Global growth appears stable but hides shifts

- Overall global GDP looks "resilient"
- But internally, major redistribution of growth happening

Final Understanding
The conflict has **redistributed economic gains**, where

- **Energy producers (like US, Russia) gain**

| Clear your doubts now.

Energy importers (like India, EU) face inflation & slowdown

Key Takeaways

- **Energy geopolitics matters**
  - Oil supply disruptions shape global economy
  - Energy dependence decides impact
- **US economic advantage**
  - Gains from higher oil production
  - Growth slowdown cushioned
- **Europe as biggest loser**
  - Energy vulnerability + weak economy
  - Faces sharper slowdown
- **India's dual challenge**
  - Rising inflation + currency depreciation
  - Macroeconomic pressure increases
- **Russia's strategic gain**
  - Higher oil prices boost revenues
  - War indirectly benefits exporters
- **Inflation as immediate effect**
  - First impact of war is price rise globally
  - Affects both developed and developing economies
- **Hidden global shifts**
  - Stable global GDP hides unequal impacts
  - Redistribution of economic power underway

[On climate change,India has a good story to tell-The Indian Express The Ideas Page]

Environment

Easy Explanation

India has presented its **new climate targets (NDCs for 2030–2035)** under the Paris Agreement, and despite global setbacks, it has a **credible and strong climate performance**.

The key idea:
India is balancing climate action with development and energy needs—better than many developed countries.

India improving emission intensity targets

Target: 47% reduction in emissions intensity by 2035
Already achieved ~36% reduction
Likely to exceed target due to efficiency gains

Strong progress in renewable energy

Non-fossil fuel capacity already at 52.5% (above 2030 target)
New target: 60% by 2035
Shows rapid transition towards clean energy

Carbon sink expansion through forests

Target: 3.5–4 billion tonnes CO_2 absorption
Progress already significant (~2.3 billion tonnes)
Concern: plantation vs natural forests

| Clear your doubts now.

Focus on adaptation, not just mitigation

Climate change effects already unavoidable
Heat Action Plans, glacier monitoring, coastal protection emphasized
Regional cooperation is necessary

Energy transition with multiple pathways

Green hydrogen mission for future clean energy
Nuclear energy expansion (target: 100 GW by 2047)
Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) to play key role

India's energy poverty challenge

Per capita electricity: 1,460 kWh vs world average 3,800 kWh
Needs growth along with sustainability

Global inequality in climate responsibility

Developed countries failing climate finance commitments
Burden shifting to developing nations
India still performing responsibly despite constraints

Final Understanding
India has a **"good story"** because it is
achieving climate targets + expanding clean energy + managing development needs,
while many developed countries are retreating from commitments.

Key Takeaways

- **India's credible climate leadership**
  - Meeting and exceeding NDC targets
  - Strong policy framework in place
- **Emission intensity reduction success**
  - Significant reduction already achieved
  - Further cuts becoming harder but still progressing
- **Renewable energy momentum**
  - Targets already surpassed ahead of time
  - Clean energy transition accelerating
- **Adaptation as key priority**
  - Recognises unavoidable climate impacts
  - Focus on heat, glaciers, and coastal risks
- **Diverse energy strategy**
  - Hydrogen + nuclear + renewables
  - Multi-pronged approach to energy security
- **Energy poverty constraint**
  - Development needs limit rapid transition
  - Balancing growth with sustainability
- **Climate justice dimension**
  - Developed nations underperforming
  - India acting responsibly despite limited resources

[Beyond the rhetoric of the north-south divide-The Hindu Text and Context]

| Clear your doubts now.

Easy Explanation

The article argues that India's debate on the **North–South divide** should move beyond politics and rhetoric and focus on **real structural issues**.

The key idea:
India is not just divided between North and South—there are deeper economic, political, and social imbalances that need practical solutions.

Two unequal Indias emerging

Southern states: higher income, better health, education
Northern "Hindi heartland": lower income, higher population
Gap has widened into a structural divide

Economic power vs political power mismatch

South generates more economic output
North has more population → more political representation
Creates tension in federal balance

Delimitation may worsen divide

Seats in Parliament likely to increase for populous northern states
Southern states may lose relative voice
Raises concerns of fairness

Risk of 'productive minority vs dominant majority' conflict

South seen as subsidising poorer northern states
Historical examples (USSR, Yugoslavia) show such imbalance is risky

South also has internal problems

High inequality despite growth
Wealth concentrated in cities and elites
Social issues (caste, gender inequality) persist

Migration not solving the divide

Workers move from North to South
But political influence remains with northern states
Creates "internal outsiders"

Need for balanced solution

Idea of "digressive proportionality" (balanced representation)
Focus on inclusive growth, not just regional blame

Final Understanding
The real issue is not just North vs South, but
how to balance economic contribution, political representation, and social justice to maintain national unity.

Key Takeaways

Structural regional divide

| Clear your doubts now.

- South vs North gap is deep and persistent
- Not just temporary economic difference

Economic–political imbalance
- Wealth creation and political power are misaligned
- Creates federal tensions

Delimitation challenge
- Population-based representation may disadvantage the South
- Raises questions of fairness

Risk to national unity
- Productive minority vs dominant majority conflict
- Historical parallels show potential instability

South's internal weaknesses
- Inequality and social issues remain
- Growth not inclusive

Migration limits solution
- Movement of people not translating into political balance
- Social integration issues persist

Need for cooperative federalism
- Balanced representation (like digressive proportionality)
- Focus on inclusive and equitable development

30th March 2026

[For India,LPG supply a bigger worry than LNG-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Economy

Easy Explanation

India's energy supply has been affected due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for imports from West Asia. While both LPG and LNG are impacted, LPG is a bigger concern because India depends heavily on imports for it. Nearly 54% of LPG supply is disrupted, and since LPG is the primary cooking fuel for crores of households, ensuring its availability becomes a top priority. To manage this, the government is reducing supply to industries so that households continue to receive uninterrupted cooking fuel.

LNG supplies are also affected, with around 30% disruption. However, LNG is used more in industries, transport (as CNG), and piped gas (PNG), which allows the government to manage its distribution more flexibly. Priority is being given to essential segments like households using PNG and public transport. Additionally, people are being encouraged to shift from LPG to PNG wherever infrastructure is available.

LPG and LNG differ in their nature and usage. LPG is mainly a mix of propane and butane and is supplied in cylinders, making it easy to store and transport, especially for cooking. LNG, on the other hand, is primarily methane that is converted into liquid form at extremely low temperatures for transportation and requires specialized infrastructure like cryogenic tanks and pipelines.

LPG becomes more critical during crises because of its reach and direct use. It does not depend on pipelines and can reach even remote and rural areas. A large section of the population relies directly on LPG for daily cooking needs, making it difficult to replace quickly.

PNG offers a long-term alternative in urban areas. Once infrastructure is in place, it provides continuous supply like electricity, removes the need for cylinder booking, and is safer since it disperses quickly in case of leakage.

Key Takeaways

| Clear your doubts now.

- **Strategic chokepoint vulnerability**
  - Strait of Hormuz disruption impacts India's energy security
  - Heavy dependence on West Asia routes
- **LPG dependency is critical**
  - Around 60% import dependence
  - About 54% supply disrupted
- **Household energy security priority**
  - Government prioritizing cooking fuel supply
  - Industrial supply reduced
- **LNG impact is manageable**
  - Around 30% disruption
  - Flexible allocation across sectors
- **Structural difference LPG vs LNG**
  - LPG is portable and cylinder-based
  - LNG depends on pipelines and infrastructure
- **Policy push towards PNG**
  - Shift from LPG to PNG in urban areas
  - Reduces import dependence
- **Energy security lesson for India**
  - Need diversification of energy sources
  - Strengthen domestic production and infrastructure

[What Iran's drone blitz means for the future of warfare-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

Iran's use of low-cost drones (like the Shahed) shows a major shift in warfare, where cheap and mass-produced technology can challenge highly advanced and expensive military systems. Countries in West Asia invested heavily in top-class fighter jets and missile defence systems, but these are proving inefficient against swarms of small drones that are difficult to detect and intercept.

The biggest change is the cost imbalance in modern warfare. A single drone may cost only $20,000–50,000, but intercepting it can require missiles worth hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. Even deploying fighter jets like F-16s is extremely expensive per hour. This creates a situation where defending against cheap attacks becomes economically unsustainable over time.

Drones are also easy to scale and replace. Iran has focused on indigenous production and innovation, allowing it to manufacture large numbers of drones quickly. Even if drones are destroyed, they can be replaced cheaply, unlike fighter jets or missile systems which take years and huge investments to build.

Traditional air defence systems are under stress. Advanced systems like Patriot and THAAD are very costly and limited in number. Using such expensive interceptors against cheap drones drains resources quickly, and replenishing these systems takes years, making them less effective in prolonged conflicts.

This has pushed countries to adopt low-cost counter-drone solutions. For example, Ukraine and others are using cheaper interceptor drones, sound-detection systems, and anti-drone technologies that are far more cost-effective. This indicates that future warfare will increasingly rely on innovation and affordability rather than just high-end weapons.

However, drones have not fully replaced traditional military power. Fighter jets and manned aircraft are still essential for heavy attacks and large payload missions. Drones are more effective for targeting soft targets, surveillance, and harassment strategies rather than decisive battlefield dominance.

| Clear your doubts now.

Key Takeaways

- **Shift to low-cost warfare**
  - Cheap drones challenging expensive military systems
  - Cost-effectiveness becoming central
- **Economic asymmetry in conflict**
  - Cheap attack vs expensive defence
  - Unsustainable defence expenditure
- **Mass production advantage**
  - Drones can be produced and replaced quickly
  - Indigenous innovation is key
- **Limits of advanced defence systems**
  - Patriot/THAAD costly and limited
  - Stock replenishment takes time
- **Rise of counter-drone technologies**
  - Use of low-cost interceptors and detection systems
  - Innovation over traditional firepower
- **Hybrid nature of modern warfare**
  - Drones complement, not replace aircraft
  - Different roles for different systems
- **Implications for India and global security**
  - Need for integrated air defence + drone systems
  - Focus on indigenous, cost-effective solutions

[Artemis II:NASA's Moon missions could lay ground for deeper space exploration-The Indian Express Explained Page]

Science and technology

Easy Explanation

NASA's Artemis programme marks a shift from short visits to long-term presence on the Moon. Earlier missions like Apollo were mainly about demonstrating technological capability—landing humans and returning safely. Now, the focus is different: NASA wants to build a permanent human presence on the Moon, enabling astronauts to stay for longer durations and conduct continuous research.

The Artemis II mission is an important step in this plan. It will take astronauts around the Moon (not landing yet), marking the return of humans to the Moon's vicinity after more than 50 years. This mission will test systems needed for future human landings and deeper space exploration.

The broader goal is to use the Moon as a stepping stone for deeper space missions. Unlike earlier efforts, current missions aim to create infrastructure—like habitats, fuel systems, and logistics chains—so that the Moon can act as a base for future missions to Mars and beyond.

NASA plans to build a permanent lunar base similar to the International Space Station (ISS). Just like the ISS enabled continuous human presence in low Earth orbit, the Moon base would allow regular missions, scientific experiments, and long-term habitation. However, building this will require multiple missions carrying humans, robots, and equipment over many years.

This new phase of lunar exploration is gradual and sustainable. After restarting Moon exploration in the 2000s with orbiters, NASA is now moving step-by-step—from uncrewed missions (Artemis I) to crewed flybys (Artemis II), and eventually to human landings and permanent bases.

| Clear your doubts now.

There is also a strong push for international and private participation. Unlike the Cold War era, where space exploration was dominated by the US and USSR, today multiple players like India, China, Japan, and private companies are involved. This makes space exploration more competitive as well as collaborative.

Future missions may also use advanced technologies like nuclear propulsion. NASA's plans for nuclear-powered spacecraft could make long-distance missions (like to Mars) more efficient, reducing travel time and increasing mission capability.

Key Takeaways

- **Shift from exploration to habitation**
  - Focus now is on long-term human presence
  - "Stay" on the Moon, not just visit
- **Artemis II as a crucial milestone**
  - First crewed mission around Moon after decades
  - Prepares for future landing missions
- **Moon as a gateway to deep space**
  - Acts as a base for Mars and beyond
  - Enables long-term exploration strategy
- **Permanent lunar base vision**
  - Similar to ISS model
  - Continuous missions and experiments
- **Phased and sustainable approach**
  - Step-by-step progression (orbiter → crewed → base)
  - Avoids mistakes of Apollo-era discontinuity
- **Multipolar space race**
  - India, China, Japan emerging players
  - Collaboration + competition
- **Technological innovations ahead**
  - Nuclear propulsion and advanced systems
  - Greater efficiency in deep space missions

[Gopinathan's stalled resignation from IAS: What service rules say-The Indian Express Explained page]

Governance

Easy Explanation

The issue revolves around an IAS officer, Kannan Gopinathan, whose resignation has not been accepted even after several years. He resigned in 2019 protesting restrictions in Jammu & Kashmir, but since the government has not formally accepted his resignation, he is still technically considered a government servant. This creates a problem because government servants are not allowed to participate in politics, which is why he cannot contest elections.

Under service rules, IAS officers must remain politically neutral. The All India Services (Conduct) Rules clearly state that officers cannot join political parties or take part in political activities while in service. Since his resignation is pending, his status remains unclear, putting him in a legal and administrative "limbo."

The resignation process involves both state and central authorities. An IAS officer submits resignation to the state (or relevant authority if on central deputation). The state checks for pending dues or disciplinary cases and then forwards it to the Union government. The final decision is taken at the central level—specifically by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), under the Prime Minister.

A resignation can be rejected under certain conditions. If there are pending vigilance cases, corruption charges, or financial dues, the resignation may not be accepted. Otherwise, generally, resignations are allowed.

| Clear your doubts now.

There is no fixed time limit for accepting an IAS resignation. This is the core issue in this case. Although a 1988 guideline says unwilling officers should not be retained, the absence of a strict timeline allows delays, leading to situations like this.

Such long delays are unusual and rare. Government sources themselves say there is no clear precedent for such a prolonged delay, as most IAS resignations are processed within a reasonable time.

The case highlights tensions between individual freedom and service rules. While officers have the right to resign and pursue other careers, including politics, the system ensures neutrality and discipline while they are in service. Delays in resignation acceptance can restrict these freedoms in practice.

Key Takeaways

- **Political neutrality of civil servants**
  - IAS officers cannot join politics while in service
  - Must uphold constitutional neutrality
- **Resignation process is multi-layered**
  - State → Central government → DoPT approval
  - Final authority lies with the Centre
- **No fixed timeline for acceptance**
  - Creates scope for delays
  - Leads to administrative uncertainty
- **Grounds for rejection exist**
  - Pending vigilance cases or dues
  - Otherwise resignation is usually accepted
- **Case shows administrative limbo**
  - Officer neither fully in service nor out
  - Restricts career and political participation
- **Rare and unprecedented delay**
  - Most resignations processed quickly
  - This case stands out
- **Wider governance issue**
  - Balancing discipline vs individual freedom
  - Need for clearer timelines and transparency

[On Maharashtra's anti-conversion Bill-The Hindu Text and Context]

Polity

Easy Explanation

The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 aims to regulate religious conversions and prevent forced or fraudulent conversions. It prohibits conversion through force, coercion, allurement, misrepresentation, or undue influence. At the same time, it allows voluntary conversion but introduces strict procedures to ensure transparency.

The Bill introduces a detailed procedure for conversion, including prior notice. A person intending to convert must give a 60-day advance declaration to authorities and also submit a post-conversion declaration. This effectively brings the State into the process of personal religious decisions.

It also expands who can file complaints and increases state intervention. Not only the individual, but also their family members (parents, siblings, relatives) can lodge complaints. Police are required to register cases, which increases the scope for external interference in personal matters.

| Clear your doubts now.

The Bill has strict penalties for violations. Unlawful conversion can lead to imprisonment up to 7–10 years and heavy fines. Offences are cognisable and non-bailable. Harsher punishments apply if the person converted is a minor, woman, or belongs to SC/ST categories.

It also links conversion with marriage. Marriages done solely for conversion can be declared void, and specific rules are laid down for children's religion, custody, and maintenance. This connects personal laws with criminal law provisions.

The Bill has raised concerns about fundamental rights and personal liberty. Critics argue that the 60-day notice requirement and police involvement may violate the right to privacy, freedom of religion, and choice in marriage. There are fears of misuse against interfaith couples and minority communities.

The government defends the Bill on grounds of public order and social harmony. It argues that religious freedom is not absolute and that increasing cases of forced conversions justify such regulation to maintain law and order.

Key Takeaways

- **Objective of the Bill**
  - Prevent forced and fraudulent conversions
  - Protect "freedom of religion"
- **Procedural regulation of conversion**
  - 60-day prior notice + post-declaration
  - State oversight in personal decisions
- **Expanded scope of complaints**
  - Family members can file cases
  - Police must act mandatorily
- **Strict penal provisions**
  - Up to 10 years imprisonment
  - Non-bailable offences
- **Marriage-conversion linkage**
  - Marriages for conversion can be void
  - Legal implications for children and custody
- **Concerns over rights and misuse**
  - Possible violation of privacy and liberty
  - Risk to interfaith marriages
- **State's justification**
  - Maintains public order and social harmony
  - Claims rising cases of forced conversions

[Pak. as U.S. mediator with Iran recalls Nixon's China outreach-The Hindu Text and Context]

International relations

Easy Explanation

Pakistan is emerging as a mediator between the U.S. and Iran due to its strategic positioning and recent diplomatic ties. The U.S. leadership has developed close relations with Pakistan's military and political leadership, and Islamabad has taken steps (like cooperation on regional issues and economic offers) that make it a useful intermediary. For Iran, Pakistan is acceptable because it does not recognise Israel and maintains relatively balanced ties in the region.

This situation resembles a Cold War-era strategy used by the U.S. with China. In the early 1970s, the U.S. could not directly engage with China, so it used Pakistan as a secret communication channel. Pakistan facilitated backchannel diplomacy between U.S. President Richard Nixon and Chinese leadership, eventually leading to the historic opening of U.S.-China relations.

| Clear your doubts now.

The key idea is "backchannel diplomacy." Instead of direct talks, countries use a trusted third party to communicate secretly. In the Nixon-China case, Pakistan helped arrange Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China, which later led to Nixon's landmark 1972 visit—often called a turning point in global politics.

Today, a similar logic is at play with Iran. Direct U.S.-Iran engagement is difficult due to tensions, so Pakistan acts as a bridge. Its geographic proximity, historical ties, and diplomatic positioning make it suitable for facilitating negotiations or ceasefire proposals.

However, such diplomacy can have unintended consequences. The Nixon-China outreach came at a cost for South Asia—particularly during the 1971 Bangladesh crisis, when the U.S. overlooked Pakistan's actions due to its strategic priorities. This shows that backchannel diplomacy may sideline ethical concerns in favour of geopolitical goals.

Pakistan has played similar mediator roles in the past as well. It has represented Iran's interests in Washington for decades and has also mediated between the U.S. and Taliban during the Afghanistan conflict. This strengthens its credibility as a diplomatic intermediary.

The success of this mediation depends on Iran's willingness to engage. While the U.S. may push proposals through Pakistan, the final outcome depends on whether Iran agrees to negotiations amid ongoing tensions and mistrust.

Key Takeaways

- **Pakistan as strategic mediator**
  - Acts as bridge between U.S. and Iran
  - Acceptable to both sides
- **Historical parallel with Cold War**
  - Similar to Nixon's China outreach
  - Pakistan used as backchannel
- **Concept of backchannel diplomacy**
  - Indirect, secret negotiations
  - Avoids formal diplomatic barriers
- **Geopolitical advantages of Pakistan**
  - Regional proximity to Iran
  - Balanced diplomatic relations
- **Risks of such diplomacy**
  - Strategic interests may override ethics
  - Example: 1971 Bangladesh crisis
- **Pakistan's past mediation roles**
  - Iran interests in U.S.
  - Talks with Taliban
- **Uncertain outcome**
  - Depends on Iran's response
  - High mistrust remains in region

[Secretive jungle cats need habitats outside protected areas: study-The Hindu Science]

Environment

Easy Explanation

Jungle cats, despite being widespread and listed as "least concern," are actually facing declining populations. This creates a misconception that they are safe, but in reality, they are understudied and receive far less conservation attention compared to big cats like tigers and leopards.

| Clear your doubts now.

A major finding of the study is that jungle cats largely live outside protected areas. They prefer open habitats like grasslands, wetlands, and agro-pastoral (farm-based) landscapes rather than dense forests. This means conservation efforts focused only on national parks and sanctuaries are not enough to protect them.

Human pressure is the biggest factor affecting their survival. Jungle cats can tolerate some level of human presence, but they avoid highly urbanised or densely populated areas. With increasing urbanisation and land-use change, their habitats are shrinking and becoming fragmented.

The study estimates India's jungle cat population at over 3 lakh. This is based on a large dataset including camera traps, radio-collared animals, and modelling techniques. States like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha have some of the highest populations.

These cats actually play an important ecological role in agricultural landscapes. They help control rodent populations, indirectly protecting crops. This shows that wildlife conservation is not just about forests but also about farmlands and open ecosystems.

However, living outside protected areas exposes them to multiple threats. These include habitat fragmentation, road accidents, poaching, and attacks or competition from stray dogs. There is also a potential risk of interbreeding with domestic cats, which could affect their genetic purity.

The study highlights the need to rethink conservation policy. Instead of focusing only on protected areas, India needs policies that recognise the ecological importance of open landscapes and integrate wildlife conservation with development planning, such as creating wildlife corridors even in non-forest areas.

Key Takeaways

- **Misleading conservation status**
  - Listed as "least concern" but populations declining
  - Understudied compared to big cats
- **Beyond protected areas**
  - Mostly found in open and agro-pastoral landscapes
  - Conservation focus needs expansion
- **Impact of human pressure**
  - Avoid dense urban areas
  - Habitat loss due to development
- **Population estimate insight**
  - Over 3 lakh individuals in India
  - High presence in MP, Rajasthan, Odisha
- **Ecological importance in agriculture**
  - Control rodent population
  - Support farming ecosystems
- **Multiple emerging threats**
  - Habitat fragmentation, roads, poaching
  - Stray dogs and possible hybridisation
- **Policy implication for India**
  - Need to protect open ecosystems
  - Integrate conservation with development planning

| Clear your doubts now.