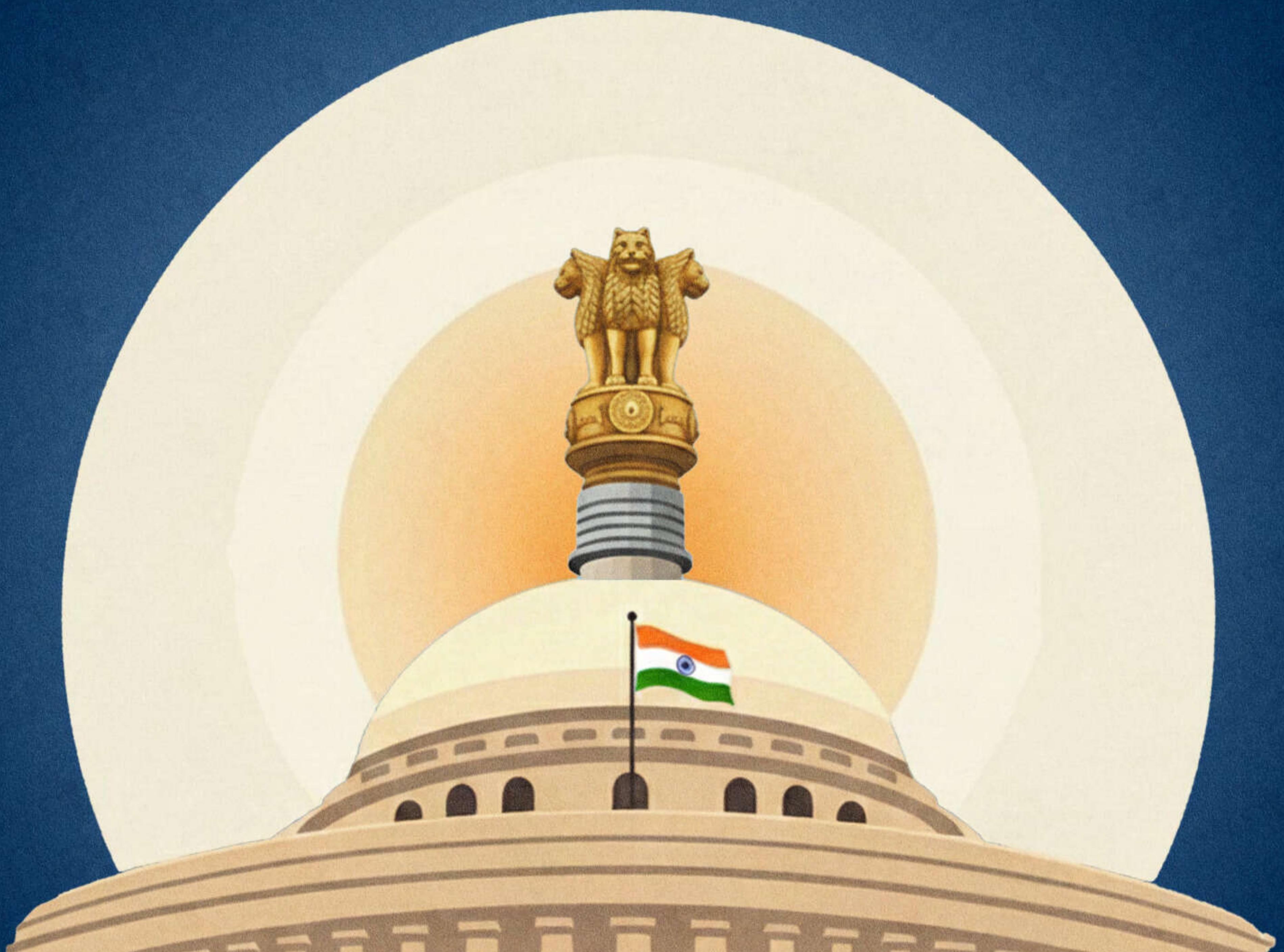


**2nd  
ANNIVERSARY  
ISSUE**

# **UPSC ESSENTIALS**

*September 2025 Issue*



## LETTER TO ASPIRANTS

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep." — Robert Frost

### Dear Aspirants,

Two years ago, *The Indian Express* launched this *UPSC Essentials* magazine with a clear and sincere goal: to support you through the demanding journey of preparing for one of the toughest exams in the country. We knew it wouldn't be easy, but we also ensured that you are not walking alone.

Since then, we have covered a wide range of topics, curated to meet the evolving needs of this exam. From analytical cover stories and expert contributions to focused sections on ethics, essays, current affairs pointers, and quizzes, our aim has always been to assist you at every stage — Prelims, Mains, and the Interview.

In this special anniversary edition issue, we present an exclusive interview with Dr Sanjeev Chopra, former director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), along with insights that may help you find more clarity.

This magazine has always aimed to be more than a collection of facts. At times a mentor, at times a quiet companion, and often a reminder that you are capable of more than you think.

On this anniversary, we also thank you for including us in your preparation. For every page you have read, every doubt you have raised, and every idea you have shared — we are truly grateful. Through it all, what has truly inspired us is your consistency, and that perseverance is what defines the UPSC journey more than any magazine or material ever could.

As we enter a new year of publishing, we remain committed to continuing to make complex topics clearer, current affairs more relevant, and your preparation just a little less overwhelming.

Your journey to serve begins with the courage to prepare. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of yours. Please share your thoughts with me at [manas.srivastava@indianexpress.com](mailto:manas.srivastava@indianexpress.com).

*Enjoy reading,*

*Manas Srivastava*

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UPSC ESSENTIALS 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Special Interview

# ‘Civil servants are context specialists. We connect the dots,’ says Sanjeev Chopra, former director of LBSNAA

In a candid conversation on the second anniversary of UPSC Essentials magazine, Dr Sanjeev Chopra, veteran IAS officer and former director of LBSNAA, shares his insights on civil services, the spirit behind initiatives like Pratibha Setu, and the urgent need for ‘Plan B’ to become ‘Plan A’ for UPSC aspirants.

Written by Manas Srivastava

As UPSC Essentials magazine marks two years of adding value to the journey of civil services aspirants, we bring you a special conversation with Dr. Sanjeev Chopra — a veteran civil servant whose career spans policy-making, training, and reform. He is a 1985-batch IAS officer and former Director of the prestigious Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie.

A distinguished figure in Indian public administration, Dr Chopra offers an unflinching look at the evolving demands of civil services, the importance of initiatives like *Pratibha Setu*, and why every aspirant must consider professional stability before chasing the dream of a career in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). In this exclusive interview, he speaks about optimism, reform, and the need to understand not just policies, but the context that drives them.

**The UPSC has recently introduced the Pratibha Setu feature, aimed at opening up new opportunities for civil services aspirants who reach the final interview stage but do not make it to the final merit list. What is your opinion about the initiative?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** I believe *Pratibha Setu* is a very positive step. In my opinion, all those who clear the UPSC Civil Services Mains examination are at par in terms of merit and capability. In fact, even those who clear the Prelims should not be considered any less. If private sector organisations and PSUs can absorb candidates from the pool of UPSC aspirants, it will be mutually beneficial.

“

*Civil Servants are not domain specialists. We are context specialists. We understand the ecosystem and connect the dots.*

- Sanjeev Chopra



This initiative acknowledges the years of hard work and preparation these candidates invest, ensuring that their efforts do not go in vain. I would even go a step further and suggest that the essence of Pratibha Setu should be extended to other examinations, like the UGC-NET (University Grants Commission–National Eligibility Test). Those who qualify UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) Mains are undoubtedly capable of qualifying NET as well.

**There are often debates about reducing the age limit or the number of attempts for candidates appearing for the UPSC CSE. Currently, a general category candidate can attempt the exam up to six times till the age of 32. What do you think?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** I have suggested earlier too that Prelims should be limited to two attempts (for general category candidates and specify corresponding limits for other categories based on the applicable criteria), but each Prelims qualification should be valid for two Mains attempts. This would mean that if a candidate clears Prelims in the first year, they can appear for Mains the following year without writing the Prelims again. Essentially, this gives four opportunities for Mains while reducing the repeated stress of Prelims.

This model would not only lessen the pressure but also allow candidates to focus more deeply on Mains preparation. After four such chances, if one doesn't qualify, it is perhaps a signal to explore other avenues that may align better with their strengths and aspirations.

**Given that only 1 in 1,000 candidates successfully clears the UPSC CSE each year, do you believe aspirants should consider having an alternative career option or a 'Plan B' while preparing for the exam?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** It is absolutely essential. In fact, I often say Plan B should actually be Plan A. Given the intense competition and limited vacancies, aspirants must first become self-sufficient by pursuing a professional degree, gaining employment, and achieving financial independence. Only then should they consider preparing for the UPSC.

This approach removes the guilt or emotional burden of depending on family finances and helps build real-world skills. It also provides a practical backup in case the examination journey doesn't materialise as hoped.

**How have the challenges for civil servants evolved, and what do you see as the next major area of focus for the administrative machinery?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** Challenges are an inherent part of the system, and they tend to evolve every five years. After Independence, civil servants faced the monumental task of nation-building, which included integrating princely states, establishing democratic institutions, and addressing widespread poverty and illiteracy. In the 1970s, structural reforms such as the separation of executive and judicial powers significantly redefined administrative roles.

“

*Each UPSC CSE Prelims qualification should be valid for two UPSC Mains attempts.*

*- Sanjeev Chopra*

“

*It's essential— Plan B should really be Plan A. With intense competition and few vacancies, aspirants should first gain a professional degree, secure a job, and become financially independent before preparing for the UPSC.*

*- Sanjeev Chopra*

Every major reform, from the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to the implementation of RTI (Right to Information Act) and MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), brought with it a new set of challenges in implementation. Change is a constant in governance, and the nature of challenges continues to evolve alongside it.

Today, for instance, while we have largely addressed the issues of *roti* (food) and *kapda* (clothing), the focus has now shifted to *makaan* (housing), especially in both rural and urban contexts. The next major administrative challenge will likely be ensuring access to affordable and sustainable housing for all.

### So do civil servants need new skill sets to meet emerging challenges?

**Sanjeev Chopra:** Administrators must be able to synthesise inputs from various sources and formulate policies aligned with the political leadership's vision. Think of an editor in a newsroom — not an expert in every subject, but skilled at producing a quality product using diverse inputs. That is how a civil servant should operate.

We are not domain specialists. We are context specialists. We understand the ecosystem and connect the dots. For example, the agriculture secretary may not be a crop expert, but must understand the agricultural context to ensure effective implementation of policies.

Execution of a scheme like the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana might sound simple on paper, but understanding who needs it, ensuring budget availability, plugging leakages, and ensuring last-mile delivery requires the nuanced skill set of a seasoned civil servant.

“

Civil servants are not celebrities or filmstars. Cracking an exam doesn't make one a public figure. A few interviews after selection are fine, but cultivating a celebrity image can be harmful — especially for the individual.

- *Sanjeev Chopra*



### How does one stay optimistic despite the challenges and occasional disillusionment with the system?

**Sanjeev Chopra:** Optimism is essential — for personal growth and national progress. Every country has problems; none is “problem-proof”. But problems exist only until solutions are found. Our role as civil servants is to identify these issues, devise solutions, and assess whether we are progressing or repeating mistakes.

Have I been frustrated by situations? Yes. In a 36-year career, it is natural to face setbacks. But I have never been disillusioned with the system itself. During tough times, I have found solace in reading, engaging in philosophy, and maintaining personal interests. These help restore perspective and motivation.

**Recently, the LBSNAA in Mussoorie, which is the training institution for higher civil services in India, issued guidelines for recruits, advising them to be mindful of social media. What do you have to say about this?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** I fully support the guidelines. Civil servants are not celebrities or film stars. Cracking an examination does not make one a public figure. A few interviews after selection are fine, but cultivating a celebrity image can be harmful, especially for the individual.

Positive attention is often followed by scrutiny. I advise young officers to refrain from overusing social media for self-promotion. Having an official Twitter handle as a district magistrate to share updates or emergency information is different. Social media by civil servants must be used to benefit the institution, not the individual.

### **How much autonomy and discretion do civil servants have in decision-making?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** It depends on the context. As a district magistrate, you enjoy considerable functional freedom. However, the extent of autonomy often correlates with your competence and how effectively you present your case.

If you are clear, well-informed, and grounded in the Constitution and the law, then in nine out of 10 cases, you can bring the political leadership onto the same page. Your responsibility is to ensure that political directives are feasible, legally sound, financially viable, and ready for implementation, especially when viewed through the lens of judicial scrutiny.

However, discretion in administration, if left unchecked, can become problematic. It may lead to arbitrariness, bias, and even corruption. While some level of discretion is necessary to deal with complex situations, it should not become the norm. Administrative decisions must be guided by transparency and fairness.

### **What reforms do you think are still needed in the bureaucracy?**

**Sanjeev Chopra:** Reforms are ongoing, but certain areas need more focus.

- **Training and Posting Linkage:** The correlation between training and field postings needs to be stronger.
- **Exposure to Diversity:** Every officer should be posted at least once in the Northeast or Jammu and Kashmir. Without such exposure, an officer's understanding of India remains incomplete. Similarly, officers from remote cadres should have the opportunity to serve in more urbanised, industrial states.
- **Lateral Exposure:** By the time an officer becomes a joint secretary, they should be allowed to opt for ministries that align with their interests and expertise. This would enhance productivity and job satisfaction.



UPSC ESSENTIALS 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Article

# Voices from UPSC World: What Bureaucrats, Achievers & Aspirants tell us about service and struggle

*In this second anniversary edition of UPSC Essentials, we bring together voices that shape the UPSC journey — from seasoned civil servants sharing hard-earned insights, to aspirants opening up about their struggles, hopes, suggestions for reforms and unshakable spirit. Their words offer not just advice, but perspective, and a reminder that this journey is as much about growth as it is about goals.*

## What diplomatic expulsion means — explained by the first Indian Head of Mission ever expelled by any country, for UPSC aspirants.

The Fiji chapter in my diplomatic career was unique. I was expelled from Fiji after I continued there without India recognizing the military regime for more than two years.

India imposed trade sanctions against Fiji and even got Fiji expelled from the Commonwealth. Staying as an ambassador on the Fiji land was objectionable right from the beginning, but since most of the population was supportive of my intentions and actions to restore democracy in Fiji, my presence and activities were tolerated by the military government. But when they wanted to enforce a new constitution, they found that my presence there and the existence of the mission was against their interest.

This was the first case of a formal expulsion of an Indian Head of Mission in our country's history.



**Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan,  
Indian Foreign Services (1967).**

*He was expelled from Fiji in 1989 after he continued there as an ambassador without India recognizing the military regime for more than two years.*

## A Diplomat's advice to aspirants eyeing the Indian Foreign Services



**T.C.A. Raghavan,**  
**Former Indian High Commissioner  
to Pakistan**

India has a huge talent pool for the IFS. After a tough exam, we get high-quality candidates. You don't need an international relations background — what matters is genuine curiosity about the world's cultures, economies, and histories. Knowledge gaps can be filled in training; interest must come from within.

People often question the small number of IFS seats. The number of seats matches India's global role. Expanding too fast risks stagnation. Quality over quantity is crucial. Communication skills are essential and must be constantly refined.

Aspirants must read widely, stay curious, and engage with the world. Newspapers and broad reading matter more than just syllabus books or notes. True preparation is about independent thinking and real-world awareness.

## Why values and ethics matter in Civil Services

Often, in a country like India, poor people feel frightened to talk to doctors, teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats, or even strangers. That hesitation and fear in communication have always been observed and remain vivid in public perception. Here, the value of empathy can bring the needed light of humanity, which is expected from those in power—officers who are diligent and astute.

Objectivity, non-partisanship, and empathy are always needed in a democracy like India, where there is a huge gap in the purchasing power of the poor and the rich. Such values are relevant not only at the macro behavioral level but also at the micro, interpersonal level. Practicing these values consistently helps shape healthier personalities and minimizes internal contradictions like ego and inferiority/superiority complexes—especially within the services such as IAS, IPS, IFS, and State administrations.



**Nanditesh Nilay,**  
**Ethics expert**  
**Author of Being good, Kyu  
and Ethikos**

**'My UPSC success story is her story too'****Manu Garg, AIR 91, UPSC CSE 2024****(Visually impaired since Class 8  
and Vandana Jain (Mother)**

I lost my vision in Class 8 due to a rare genetic condition. It was a time of emotional and physical transition. But my classmates, teachers, and even society stood by me. I never felt out of place. That support inspired me to choose a career where I could give back.

But behind everything I've achieved stands one person — my mother, Vandana Jain. She's a homemaker, a single parent, and the reason I am where I am today.

She read every single textbook and notes aloud to me, and ensured I lacked nothing in my preparation. When I got into Hindu College, she didn't think twice and left everything to move to Delhi for me. She left no stone unturned so I could achieve my goal. If I can do even 10 per cent of what she has done for me, I'll consider my life a success.

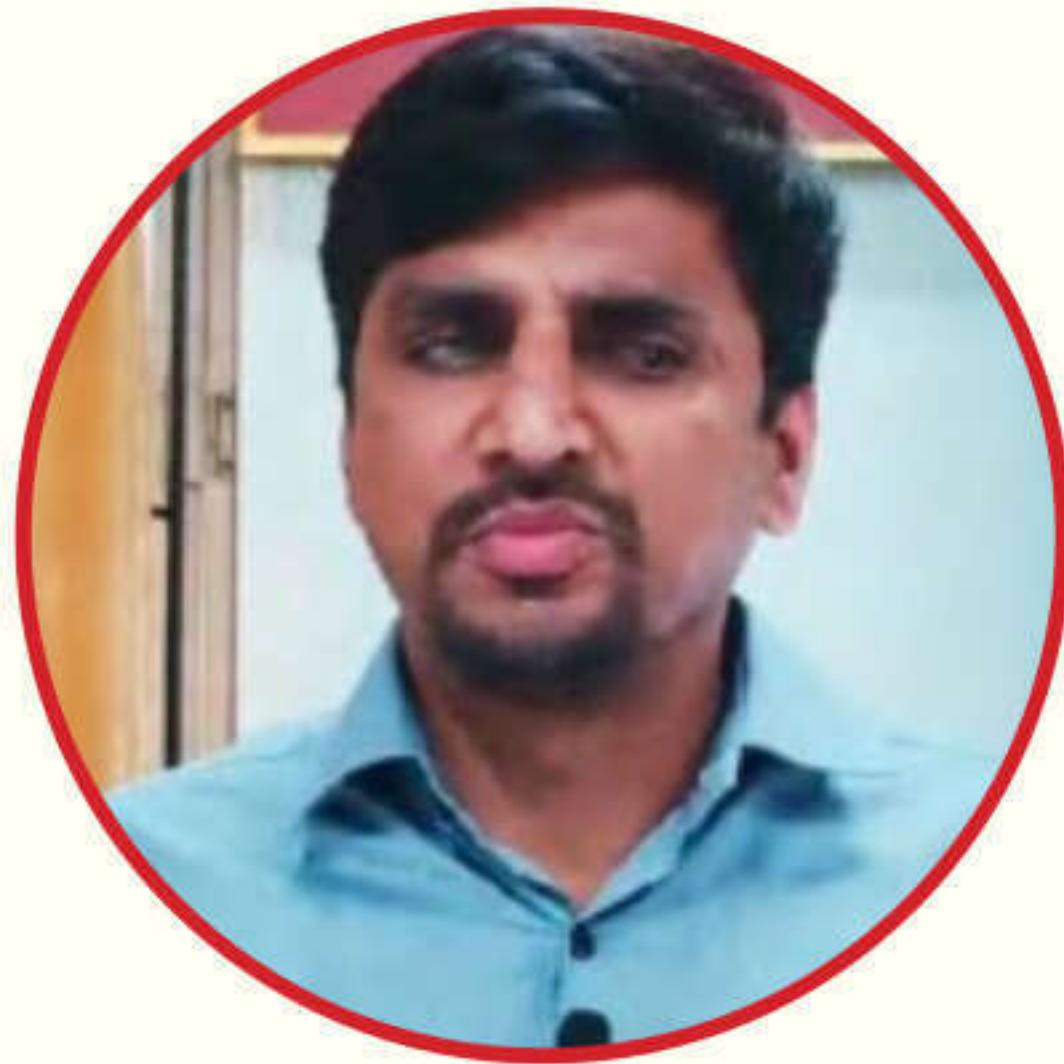
This isn't just my result; my story is her story too.

**Safeguard UPSC integrity from the start**

It's unfortunate, but some civil servants show signs of compromise even at the entry stage, and the problem only deepens over time.

While I trust the UPSC exam's integrity, the issue of forged documents, especially in categories like EWS and PwD, needs urgent scrutiny. Without strict verification, the credibility of the system is at risk. A fair process must exist not just in principle, but in practice.

**IPS Ashok Kumar,  
Former DGP Uttarakhand**



**Satender Singh, Commissioner, Mahe Municipality, Puducherry**

**Qualified the UPSC CSE four times, most recently in 2024. He has been visually impaired since childhood.**

### Does becoming a Civil Servant end the struggle? Not always.

Clearing the exam again has become one of my motivations to prove myself. They call it the toughest exam, and I have cleared it four times.

There are disabled civil servants who've outperformed their non-disabled peers, and yet, stereotypes persist. This shows how the everyday struggle doesn't end even after joining the civil services or holding high office. Today, I have greater access to resources, influence, and awareness to help improve conditions, but these aren't battles that can be won once and for all.

Being a civil servant doesn't free me from the biases linked to visual impairment. It's not like poverty where climbing the ladder might mean escape. My struggle is constant: every day, every hour, every minute, I have to prove myself.

No, the challenges haven't disappeared, but I believe long-term change lies in equalising capabilities — that's the real solution.

### The other side of UPSC: What about those who almost made it?

Not every UPSC aspirant makes it — even those who clear Mains may fall just short of the final list. These are some of the most hardworking, intelligent, and resilient individuals, yet there's space for only a few hundred. The rest must face a quiet, painful reality: "To come so close, only to start again from scratch."

This is the untold story, rarely seen on social media, of those who prepare day and night, often in cramped libraries in Old Rajinder Nagar, driven by hope and grit. When results are out, many face a deep inner trauma. But after a period of silence and healing, most rise again — stoic, steadfast, and ready to try once more. This is the brutal beauty of the UPSC journey.



**Ravi Kapoor, Ex-IRS**

**Ankit Singh Chauhan, New Delhi**

**Former aspirant and now faculty at a UPSC coaching institute**

### Why does UPSC need to be more transparent?

UPSC, a constitutional body, needs greater transparency. Preliminary marks are revealed only after the final results, leaving aspirants unsure about their performance. Official answer keys, question cancellations, and evaluation processes lack clear explanations. Incidents where some selected candidates used alleged forged documents have raised concerns about fairness. Could increased openness help build more trust in this vital institution?

### UPSC prep tests perseverance — even near a border during Operation Sindoor

“After six attempts and one interview, my UPSC journey has been anything but easy. There were moments when giving up felt easier than moving forward. But I kept learning – about patience, resilience, and the power of persistence.

I was living in Sri Ganganagar during my exam prep, a district just 25 kilometers from the border. Preparing for the exam from a border area during Operation Sindoor made things even harder, but it also gave me a deeper understanding of duty and determination.

When it comes to exams, one may not always get the desired outcome. But it's not just about results. It is about grit, growth, and moving forward with purpose. The journey continues, and so do I.”

**Chinmay Surolia, Jaipur, Rajasthan**

**Former aspirant and Graduate of RGNUL, Punjab; now practicing law at the High Court and Tribunals in Rajasthan. He was in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan during exam prep**



**Sairam B Kalal, Belgaum, Karnataka**

**UPSC Aspirant, Graduate from  
Delhi University**

### Why a ‘Plan B’ matters even with full dedication to UPSC prep

Even as I prepare for this exam with full dedication, I strongly feel the need to have a backup plan and to keep upskilling myself. The UPSC CSE isn’t just about hard work, success also hinges on factors beyond our control: whether the board’s questions align with your preparation, scaling in optional subjects, limited vacancies, category-based reservation and other factors.

When equally capable candidates miss out due to narrow rank margins, the exam’s unpredictability becomes clear. That’s why having a Plan B isn’t a lack of focus, it’s a practical necessity.

### A Woman’s UPSC Journey: Strength Beyond Success

Pursuing the UPSC has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. As a woman, this journey hasn’t been about clearing exams alone, it has been a test of resilience, discipline, and inner strength. I have also faced the societal pressures that come with being a woman striving for something unconventional. Questions like “When will you settle down?” or “Why delay marriage for a career?” followed me everywhere.

The pressure wasn’t just external; it weighed on me internally as well. At times, I felt guilty for missing special moments, anxious about my future, and uncertain about whether my dreams were worth the struggle. But through every doubt and every setback, I learned something invaluable: perseverance is built from within.

Though I have yet to achieve the success I aim for, I am proud of how far I have come. Each failed attempt has taught me patience, discipline, and courage. I have learned that the journey itself shapes you in ways success alone cannot. This journey is not just about passing an exam, it’s about proving to myself that dreams are worth chasing, no matter how difficult the path.

“They speak of toppers, marks, and ranks, but never of the quiet thanks We owe ourselves for walking far, even when we don’t reach the star.”



**Rasmita Parusupalli,  
Ahmedabad, Gujarat**

**UPSC aspirant, Post Graduate  
from Indira Gandhi National  
Open University**

## UPSC and Me: Holding on when giving up feels easier

My UPSC journey began in 2023 after completing my Master's, driven by a desire to serve my home state, Assam. Studying was never the problem — I've always enjoyed it.

The real challenge came after classes ended: staying consistent and disciplined without relying solely on motivation. Back in school and college, I thrived on academic validation and positive feedback from teachers and professors. Now, I have to be my own support system.

On some days, I think about giving up and returning to my natal village in Nalbari, Assam, to live a slow, peaceful life. Those days are the hardest, because slow living seems blissful. But I pull myself up, remind myself of my dreams, my potential, and the fact that my destiny is mine to be written.



**Tridisha Thakuria, Guwahati, Assam**

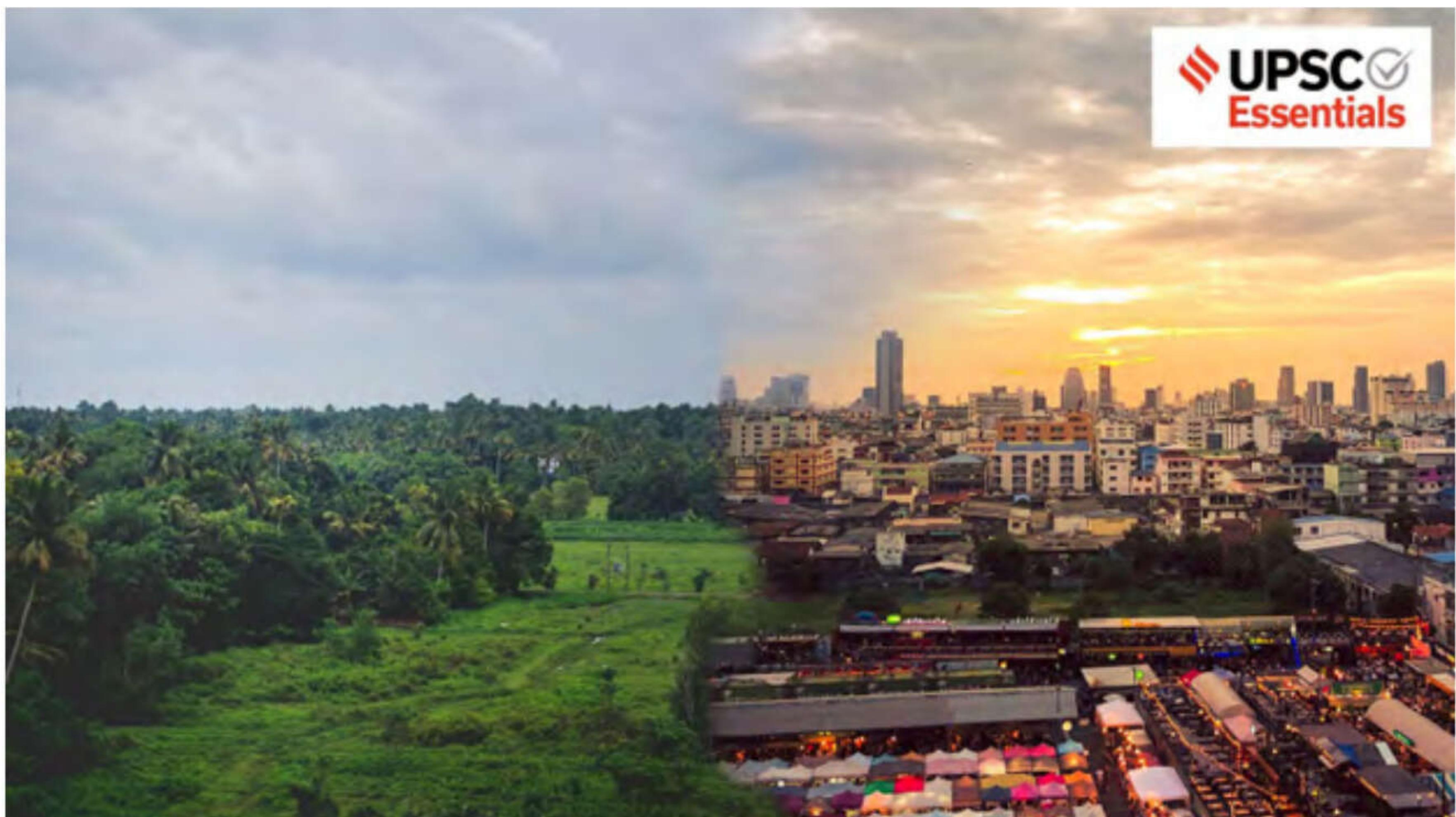
**Aspirant, Post-Graduate from Delhi University**



## SPOTLIGHT STORY

# Smart Cities and Smart Villages : Key highlights on the road to inclusive development

Written by **Roshni Yadav**



*The Smart Cities Mission was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 25, 2015. (Image: Abhishek Mitra)*

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) released the Smart City Index 2025, in which Swiss cities dominate. Indian cities also continue to be part of the global smart city movement, but they remain outside the top 20. In this context, it becomes important to not only know the key highlights but also learn about India's Smart City Mission and go beyond it to understand how smart and intelligent villages can contribute to rural development.

**(Relevance:** UPSC Mains Syllabus: General Studies-I, II: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation. Previously, UPSC has asked questions on how smart cities in India address the issues of urban poverty and distributive justice. This year also in the Mains general studies paper II, a question appeared on the 'Smart City Programme'.)

## What are the key highlights of Smart City Index 2025?

The International Institute for Management Development (IMD) recently released the Smart City Index 2025. IMD defines a smart city as “an urban setting that applies technology to enhance the benefits and mitigate the drawbacks of urbanisation for its citizens.”

The ranking evaluates cities on five parameters: health and safety, mobility, activities, opportunities, and governance. This year Zurich retains its No. 1 spot in the ranking, while Geneva climbs to third and Lausanne ranks 10th, reflecting Switzerland’s strong urban planning and citizen-centric infrastructure.

IMD Top 5 Smart Cities in the World 2025				
Smart City Rank 2025	City	Country	Smart City Rank 2024	Change
1	Zurich	Switzerland	1	—
2	Oslo	Norway	2	—
3	Geneva	Switzerland	4	▲ 1
4	Dubai	UAE	12	▲ 8
5	Abu Dhabi	UAE	10	▲ 5

Source: IMD Smart City Index 2025

Six new entrants joined the global rankings this year: AlUla (Saudi Arabia), Astana (Kazakhstan), Caracas (Venezuela), Kuwait City (Kuwait), Manama (Bahrain), and San Juan (Puerto Rico).

## Where do Indian cities rank in the Smart City Index 2025?

Indian cities continue to be part of the global smart city movement, but they remain outside the top 20. While progress has been made in infrastructure, digital adoption, and citizen services, challenges in governance, mobility, and human development still place them lower in the global hierarchy.

City	Smart City Rank 2025
Delhi	104
Mumbai	106
Hyderabad	109
Bengaluru	110

Source: IMD Smart City Index 2025

After knowing the highlights of the smart cities ranking and the Indian cities' rank in it, let's learn about one of the most important government programmes for the development of smart cities—the Smart Cities Mission.

## What is the Smart Cities Mission and its objectives?

The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 25, 2015. The main objective of the Mission is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and a clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions'.

The aim of the mission is to drive economic growth and improve quality of life through sustainable and inclusive development by the creation of replicable models which act as lighthouses to other aspiring cities.

When the mission was launched, cities across the country were asked to submit proposals for projects to improve municipal services and to make their jurisdictions more liveable. Between January 2016 and June 2018, the Ministry selected 100 cities for the Mission over five rounds.

Notably, the Mission is operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. According to the Smart Cities official website, "There is no standard definition or template of a smart city. In the context of our country, the six fundamental principles on which the concept of Smart Cities is based are:

- Communities at the core of planning and implementation
- Ability to generate greater outcomes with the use of fewer resources
- Corporative & Competitive Federalism – Cities selected through competition; flexibility to implement projects
- Innovating methods; integrated and sustainable solutions
- Technology as a means, not the goal – Careful selection of technology, relevant to the context of cities
- Convergence – Sectorial and Financial Convergence

Among strategic components of the mission is 'area-based development', which includes city improvement (retrofitting), city renewal (redevelopment) and city extension (greenfield development), plus a pan-city initiative in which 'smart solutions' are applied covering larger parts of the city. Key focus areas of the scheme include construction of walkways, pedestrian crossings, cycling tracks, efficient waste-management systems, integrated traffic management and assessment.

In 2021, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs decided to push the deadline for all 100 cities to June 2023. The deadline was further pushed to June 30, 2024, and then to March 31, 2025.

The SCM has completed a decade, achieving significant infrastructure and technological advancements. As per the Smart Cities Mission dashboard, the cities have completed 7,626 projects, 95 per cent of the total 8,063 projects, with 437 projects (5% of total projects) worth Rs 10,795 crore still ongoing (as of June 27, 2025).

*After understanding the Smart Cities Mission and its present status, a natural question arises — what about our villages? Can they also transform into 'Smart and Intelligent Villages'? Let's understand.*

## What is the idea of a “Smart and Intelligent Village”?

Recently, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced the setting up of India's first “Smart and Intelligent Village” in Nagpur district. Satnavari is located 31 km from Nagpur city.

A “Smart Intelligent Village” is envisaged as representing a model of rural development that uses digital technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and seamless connectivity to improve everyday living in India's villages.

Notably, the “smart and intelligent village” project was proposed by the Voice of Indian Communication Technology Enterprises (VoICE), a consortium of major Indian players in the telecom sector, whose representatives met the Chief Minister on June 19 this year. The pilot project was completed by Independence Day and formally launched on August 24.

According to Rakesh Kumar Bhatnagar, director general of VoICE, a Smart Intelligent Village is one where technology brings ease to rural life, with villagers using digital and AI solutions for farming, cultivation, and other daily activities.

***Having understood the concept of a ‘smart and intelligent village’, it becomes important to examine its practical application. Let’s understand it through the case study of Satnavari.***

## How does the case of Satnavari illustrate the potential of smart villages in rural development in India?

Satnavari has been set up as India's first “Smart and Intelligent Village” in the Nagpur district. It is equipped with technologies ranging from smart farming and telemedicine to AI-powered water monitoring and digital classrooms.

Ankita Deskar of The Indian Express explains some of the smart interventions at Satnavari that can present the model for other villages and rural development are:



Maharashtra CM Fadnavis at the inauguration and stone plaque unveiling of 'India's first Smart and Intelligent Village' in Satnavari, Nagpur. (Photo: X/CMOMaharashtra)

- **AGRICULTURE:** Smart agriculture uses IoT sensors to monitor soil and crop conditions in real time, helping farmers save 25%-40% water, cut the costs of fertilisers by 30%, detect pests early, and increase yields by up to 25%. The use of automated irrigation and AI tools reduces waste and guides crop planning.

A mobile phone application helps in climate-smart agriculture, using natural farming practices and the use of digital, verifiable data.

- **FISHERIES:** Sensors track the water quality in ponds, measuring oxygen, pH, temperature, etc., and alerts are sent to farmers in real time. These interventions reduce fish mortality, cut operational costs, and boost yields by 20%-30%.

- **USE OF DRONES IN FARMING:**

Drones equipped with GPS and sensors spray fertilisers based on soil mapping, ensuring precise application and reducing the use of chemicals by 20%-30%, and lowering the environmental impact.

Drones equipped with cameras and sprayers also detect pests using imaging and AI and then apply pesticides precisely. This reduces overuse of pesticides by up to 50%, lowers health risks for farmers, and improves overall crop health.



*Drones have the potential to revolutionise pesticide and fertiliser application.  
(Wikimedia Commons)*

- **SAFETY & CONVENIENCE:**

Smart streetlights in the village use IoT-enabled LEDs that adjust brightness based on motion, time, or ambient light, which can be controlled remotely through a mobile app. They cut energy use by 50%-70%, improve safety in public spaces, and bring down maintenance costs.

IoT-linked CCTV cameras and drones monitor farms, assets, and public spaces in real time, and AI is used to detect intrusions or crop damage.

- **DRINKING WATER:**

An AI-powered system monitors drinking water supply and quality in real time, ensuring the supply of the mandated volume of 55 litres of water per capita per day.

- **HEALTHCARE:**

Comprehensive rural healthcare in the village offers on-the-spot testing for more than 120 health parameters, from blood and cardiac checks to cancer and TB screening, with results available within minutes in certain cases.

With the use of teleconsultations, telemedicine, and digital records, this enables early detection of disease, reduces treatment costs, and brings urban-grade care to remote communities. ASHA workers are supported with instant results and guided follow-ups.

- **EDUCATION:**

Online education in the village uses e-learning platforms over a dedicated Wi-Fi network, with smart classrooms and the use of apps like Zoom for interactive sessions. Wi-Fi hotspots at the Gram Panchayat offer BharatNet connectivity with speeds up to 100 Mbps for free.

- **SECURITY:**

The village has a public protection and emergency system in which security staff can use handheld devices with push-to-talk communication. A central control centre tracks their location in real time for quick coordination.

Villagers can request help through a mobile app or a physical help phone at the Panchayat office. Alerts and announcements can be broadcast on loudspeakers, and the system is integrated with communication channels of the police, NDRC, and SDRF to ensure faster emergency responses.

- **WASTE MANAGEMENT:**

A smart waste management system uses IoT-enabled bins and tracking tools to ensure the safe collection and disposal of garbage and prevent harmful chemicals such as lead, mercury, and cadmium from polluting soil and water. The waste management system uses data analytics to plan better long-term waste strategies.

- **FIRE CONTROL:** Automatic fire extinguishers have been installed in schools and public areas. The extinguishers are activated within 10-15 seconds of contact with flames. In fields or remote areas, drones can carry and drop these extinguishers directly onto the fire.

A Central Network Management Control System (C-NOC) monitors all devices in the Smart Intelligent Village, tracks their uptime and availability, and instantly flags problems to the right vendors for quick fixes. This ensures smooth functioning of services and maximises their uptime.

The planned and strategic use of technology can not only make villages ‘smart’ but also aim for meaningful improvements in various aspects of life, striving toward the goal of inclusive development in India. The above case study of Satnavari is an example of this. As Mahatma Gandhi wrote in Hind Swaraj, “***India is not Calcutta and Bombay; India lives in her seven hundred thousand villages.***”

### Post Read Questions

#### Prelims

(1) Consider the following statements:

1. The Smart Cities Mission was launched on June 25, 2015.
2. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
3. Area-based development is the strategic component of the mission.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only One
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

(2) India’s first “Smart and Intelligent Village” has been set up in:

- (a) Satara
- (b) Satnavari
- (c) Nashik
- (d) Gadchiroli

(3) Consider the following statements with respect to Smart City Index 2025:

- (a) It is released by the World Economic Forum.
- (b) This year Zurich retains the No. 1 spot in the ranking.
- (c) No Indian city features among the top 20 in the rankings.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only One
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

#### Mains

1. How does smart city in India, address the issues of urban poverty and distributive justice? (UPSC CSE 2025)
2. With a brief background of the quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the ‘Smart City Programme.’ (UPSC CSE 2016)

### Prelims Answer Key

**1. (c) 2. (b) 3. (b)**

(Sources: smartcities.gov.in, What is the Smart Intelligent Village Project in Maharashtra? (IE), Top 10 ‘smart’ cities in the world 2025: Where do Indian cities rank? (IE), The Smart Cities Mission: With deadline looming, a status check (IE)

# EXPRESS EDGE

## History

# Stories of India's freedom struggle through Tagore, Premchand and Manto

On 79th Independence Day, we explore how fiction offers a kaleidoscopic portrait of India's freedom struggle - from Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* to Munshi Premchand's *Karmabhumi* to Saadat Hasan Manto's *Tamasha* and *1919 ki ek Baat* and more.

Written by **Mohammad Asim Siddiqui**



India's freedom struggle through the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchand, Raja Rao, Saadat Hasan Manto, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, and Attia Hosain. (Image credit: Sumanta Tosh)

The glorious chapter of India's freedom struggle has inspired many novelists and short story writers to produce works of great merit in both English and other Indian languages. Important episodes of the freedom movement appear in these novels and stories. Novelists like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas have also conceived characters in terms of Gandhian beliefs and ideals.

Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* (1916), translated into English as *Home and the World*, engages creatively with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandmath* (1882). Tagore's novel is critical of the western idea of nationalism, advanced by a character called Sandip. Set against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, the novel

presents a nuanced view of the movement through Nikhilesh's and Sandip's different perspectives.

Sandip, shown to be a hypocrite, preaches the idea of Swadeshi to his followers but possesses a shelf of Western medicines. Nikhilesh, on the other hand, has a more balanced view of the Swadeshi movement. Following the spirit of the movement, he writes with a quill and uses home-made furniture, but he also understands the need of poor hawkers and shopkeepers to sell foreign clothes and goods for their living.

## Premchand's writings for freedom and harmony

Premchand's many writings demonstrate his patriotism, his anti-colonial stance, his commitment to communal harmony, and his love of Gandhian philosophy. His first collection of stories in Urdu, *Soz-e Watan* (1908), published under the pen name 'Nawab Rai', was considered seditious by the British government and banned.

His novel *Karmabhumi* (1932), set in the 1930s, explores the role of the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence in achieving social justice for the poor and the marginalised sections of society. Amarkant, the main character of the novel who represents Gandhi's idea of non-violence and his commitment to social justice, helps the Dalit villagers to fight for their rights and enter temples. Initially unable to understand Amarkant's ideology, his wife, Sukhada, later joins the movement. The novel also shows villagers' protests against unjust land taxes.

Premchand's story "Samar Yatra", written in the context of Gandhiji's Satyagraha and Dandi March, shows the impact of the movement on a village and the enthusiasm of ordinary villagers to welcome the Satyagrahis and their cause. The story also presents an old and ailing woman, Nohari, who welcomes the freedom fighters, overcoming her physical limitations.

Premchand also wrote the play *Karbala* (1924) to bridge the growing differences between Hindus and Muslims. An important feature of this play is the inclusion of many Hindu characters fighting for the Prophet's grandson Hussain in the Battle of *Karbala* and sacrificing their lives for a righteous cause. In the play, Premchand presents a Hindu village in Saudi Arabia with a temple where Sahas Rai and his brothers perform a *havan*. Hussain, the protagonist of the play, and his companions praise the Hindu brothers, their religion, their country of origin and their ideals.

## Gandhian ideas in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Raja Rao's famous novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is as much known for his use of de-anglicised English as for his treatment of many Gandhian ideas in the novel. Set in a remote village in South India, the novel depicts the impact of Gandhi's non-violent struggle against British rule and his fight for social reform, including the eradication of untouchability.

The figure of Gandhi in the novel possesses divine powers and is believed to alleviate the suffering of the people. Moorthy, the main character of the novel, is the Gandhi of the village and feels greatly inspired by his ideas and personality after having a vision of him: "There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all."

Jayaramachar, a Harikatha performer in the novel, also talks about Gandhi's spiritual values, his social reforms, and his commitment to communal harmony: "Fight, says he, but harm no soul. Love all, says he, Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment and attachment hides the face of Truth." Though *Kanthapura* is imbued with Gandhian ideology, an alternative view of Nehru's socialism can also be felt towards the end of the novel.

## Manto's 1919 ki ek baat and Abbas's Inquilab

Among the stories exploring events of the freedom movement, Saadat Hasan Manto's "Naya Qanoon", "1919 ki ek Baat" and "Tamasha" stand out as iconic stories. "Naya Qanoon" indirectly refers to the Government of India Act 1935. It presents an interesting character called Mangu, a coachman who hates Englishmen and is considered very wise and knowledgeable in his circle. The story shows his high expectations of the new law and his hope for a change. However, his expectations are belied as his social and political position remains the same after the new law.

"Tamasha" and "1919 ki ek Baat" were written against the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy. "Tamasha" is narrated from the point of view of a child and shows the brutal nature of a king, who symbolises British rule in the story. "1919 ke ek Baat", which was written in 1951, shows how Thaila, a person of seemingly questionable character and conduct, sacrifices his life for the country and achieves heroism in his death. Exposing the bloodthirsty nature of the British power, the story presents Gen. Dyer as the villain and Gandhi as a virtuous figure. Critic Alok Bhalla observes that for Manto, "1919 signifies the loss of the legitimacy of British rule".

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955), promoted as the first great novel of the Indian revolution in its 1958 edition, portrays an important phase of India's fight against British colonialism. Also published in Urdu (1975), it depicts the landmark events such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Bardoli Satyagraha in Gujarat, Dandi March and Civil- Disobedience movement, Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Round Table Conference. The novel also presents major leaders and freedom fighters like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Ali Brothers, Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhagat Singh.

Spanning the life of its main protagonist Anwar from the age of eight to adulthood, the novel shows how his personality is shaped by the political events and the spirit of the freedom struggle.

## From Inquilab Zindabad to Partition

A major part of Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), set in Lucknow of the 1930s, shows the interpersonal relationships of characters unfolding in an India witnessing major political transformation. Narrated by Laila, an educated girl from a *taluqdar* family, most of the characters in the novel also belong to an aristocratic set-up who gradually discover their political leanings.

With the change in the political climate, the warm conversation of characters has been replaced by acrimonious discussions. Among Laila's group of friends, Nita is a loyalist, Nadira is closer to the Muslim League's ideology, Joan, an Anglo-Indian, has divided loyalties, and Romana, given to fashion and idle talk, is not interested in any political ideology.

The novel depicts a demonstration of students chanting the slogans 'Inquilab Zindabad', 'British Raj Murdabad' and 'Azadi ki Jai'. Laila's cousin Asad, a nationalist and a believer in Gandhi's non-violence, participates in this demonstration and is injured by police's lathis. A contrast in attitudes towards the freedom struggle emerges when Laila calls the students' march a movement, while her uncle Hamid, a *taluqdar* of Awadh and a British loyalist, dismisses it as "a demonstration of irresponsible hooliganism".

The last part of the novel also presents the division within families after Partition. Laila's cousin Kemal, who is committed to nationalist ideology, chooses to remain in India after Partition. His younger brother Saleem, given to propounding all kinds of grand theories, moves to Pakistan. Asad's younger brother Zahid, a Muslim League sympathiser, is killed during the Partition violence.

An ironic view of the leaders of the freedom movement is presented by Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). In the novel, he transposes the story of the *Mahabharata* into the twentieth century and visualizes many well-known political figures as characters of the epic. In his creative retelling, Bhishma is recast as Mahatma Gandhi, Dhritarashtra as Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandu as Subhas Chandra Bose, Gandhari as Kamala Nehru, Vidura as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Dronacharya as Jayaprakash Narayan.

### Post read questions

1. In what ways do Munshi Premchand's writings demonstrate his patriotism, his anti-colonial stance, his commitment to communal harmony, and his love of Gandhian philosophy? Illustrate your answer with examples.
2. How Raja Rao in his famous novel *Kanthapura* depicts the impact of Gandhi's non-violent struggle against British rule and his fight for social reform, including the eradication of untouchability.
3. How does Saadat Hasan Manto's *Naya Qanoon* critique the promises and failures of colonial legal reforms?
4. Do you think literature offers not just a kaleidoscopic portrait of India's freedom struggle, but also a critical insight into it? Support your answer with examples.

(*Mohammad Asim Siddiqui is a Professor in the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University.*)

# Revisiting the legacy of Swadeshi movement amid Trump's tariff tirade

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swadeshi call harks back to the Swadeshi movement of 1905-1911. But what were the main reasons behind the emergence of the Swadeshi movement, and how did it evolve into the broader call for Swaraj?

Written by **Dileep P Chandran**

Amid US President Donald Trump's tariff tirade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a renewed push for 'Swadeshi', emphasising that every party, leader and citizen must work to promote indigenous goods if "we want India to become the third-largest economy".

The Prime Minister's Swadeshi call, rooted in the legacy of the national movement, harks back to the Swadeshi movement of 1905-1911. Born out of the anti-partition protests in Bengal in British India, the Swadeshi movement put economic pressure on England by boycotting British goods and promoting Swadeshi goods.



*Khadi, for Mahatma Gandhi, was a symbol of the people of India reclaiming their resources and using these to produce their needs locally. (Wikimedia Commons)*

## When partition unified a nation

On July 19, 1905, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, announced the division of Bengal into two provinces – East Bengal and Assam (predominately Muslim) and the western province called Bengal (primarily Hindus).

Lord Curzon's decision (first announced in December 1903) can be traced back to his conflict with the nationalist intelligentsia that began with his unpopular reforms in the Calcutta Corporation in 1899, followed by the amendments in the University Act of 1904 and the Official Secrets Act of 1904.

While apologists of Curzon's regime claimed that the partition of Bengal aimed at administrative convenience, nationalist leaders called it a deliberate divide and rule policy. The political motive behind the bifurcation was to encourage Hindu-Muslim tensions and divide nationalist leaders of East and West Bengal, thereby weakening the growing opposition against the British rule in the province. It was evident in the words of Curzon:

**"Calcutta is the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated throughout the whole of Bengal and indeed the whole of India."**

Nationalists, irrespective of their political affiliations, viewed partition as a blow to national unity and pride. The widespread protest in response to this unpopular strategy paved the way for a new phase in the Indian national movement.

## From constructive Swadeshi to revolutionary politics

The failure of moderates' 'mendicant policies' (appealing to the British through prayers and petitions) to counter Curzon's repressive reforms led to the search for a new technique to demand revocation of the Bengal partition. The idea of boycotting British goods was first proposed in Krishnakumar Mitra's weekly *Sanjivani* on July 13, 1905, and later adopted by nationalist leaders at a public meeting in Calcutta Town Hall on August 7, 1905.

The movement began on partition day, October 16, with expressing mourning through the exchange of coloured wrist threads (rakhi bandhan), symbolising unity and brotherhood. The Swadeshi public also welcomed the emergence of Samitis or national volunteer organisations engaged in philanthropic work during famines and epidemics. These *Samitis* trained volunteers in social work, organised indigenous arbitration courts and schools, and spread the message of Swadeshi during festivals.

When the abrogation of the partition began to seem like a distant dream, the strategy of constructive Swadeshi – through the promotion of indigenous industries, national schools, and village organisations – was deemed insufficient.

Therefore, militant leaders like Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal expanded the Swadeshi agenda and called for the boycott of British goods, educational institutions, courts, renunciation of titles, and relinquishment of government services. During this phase, Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab, under the leadership of the Lal-Bal-Pal triumvirate (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal), emerged as epicentres of revolutionary politics.

## Revival of indigenous economy

The Swadeshi movement, which challenged the monopoly of the colonial economy, also contributed to the revival of the indigenous economy. For Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the movement was a revolt against the state of dependence in all branches of national life. Surendranath Banerjee described it as a "protectionist movement".

The boycott initially achieved some success – imports of British goods began to decline, while labour strikes against the derogatory working conditions resulted in industrial unrest in the colonial economy. The formation of labour unions, beginning with the Printers' Union, formed on October 21, 1905, further exposed labour exploitation under colonial rule.

The movement encouraged Indian industries and revived sectors like handloom, silk-weaving, and other indigenous artisan crafts. National banks and insurance companies were opened with Indian capital. As the movement spread to Madras, V O Chidambaram mooted a Swadeshi shipping venture to challenge the British monopoly in navigation and maritime trade. He registered the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (SSNC) as a joint stock company in 1906.

There was also a surge in the national education movement. For instance, the Dawn Society founded by Satish Chandra Mukherjee initiated the National Council of Education on November 5, 1905. The call for national education also promoted technical training in the vernacular language. However, national education, with limited job prospects, and indigenous industries, facing capital shortages, struggled to sustain in the long-run.

## How Swadeshi grew into demand for Swaraj

Contrary to the expectation of the colonial administration that the protests against the partition would fade away soon, the Swadeshi movement expanded into a broader struggle for Swaraj, attracting young, educated youth. For the first time in the history of India, the movement attracted women, workers, peasants, and the marginalised to nationalist ideas. The period also witnessed the rapid growth of the vernacular press with a nationalistic tone.

Young nationalists in Bengal viewed the partition as a ‘national insult’. They were not satisfied with the mere call for self-reliance, like Rabindranath Tagore’s concept of *atmashakti* (self-strengthening), and appealed for revolutionary politics. Publications like Bipin Chandra Pal’s *New India*, Aurobindo Ghosh’s *Bande Mataram*, Brahmobandhab Upadhyay’s *Sandhya* and *Yugantar* called for a struggle for *Swaraj*, dismissing the peaceful movement of self-reliance as inadequate.

Political revolutionism soon spread to other provinces like Punjab, Maharashtra, and Madras, and provoked repressions by the colonial government. For instance, Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh were deported to Mandalay in 1907 following unrest in Punjab. Similarly, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his associates like Khaparde and Munje extended the boycott and passive resistance in Maharashtra through radical journalism, especially using Tilak’s newspapers *Kesari* and *Mahratta*, and religio-political festivals like the Shivaji festival, culminating in the deportation of Tilak.

The Swadeshi era also witnessed a sudden growth of revolutionary groups and extremist activities. Individual revolutionaries began targeting oppressive British officials, as seen in the Muzaffarpur bomb attack in April 1908 by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, killing Pringle Kennedy’s wife and daughter, and the Barrah dacoity in June 1908 by Pulin Das of the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti.

## Lessons from the Swadeshi movement

Notably, the idea of Swadeshi can be traced back to M. G. Ranade’s lecture series of 1872, where he argued that goods produced in one’s own country should be preferred, regardless of the level of satisfaction they provide. Proponents of constructive Swadeshi, like Rabindranath Tagore, emphasised self-help (*atma-shakti*), and called for the revival of traditional Hindu samaj (community) to engage in constructive work at the village level.

The Swadeshi movement (1905-1911) laid the groundwork for many strategies adopted during the Gandhian phase of the national movement. Later, Mahatma Gandhi extended the idea of Swadeshi into the spiritual realm by linking it to a moral duty. He wrote, “I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they may be found wanting.”

However, there emerged differences among the leaders of the Swadeshi movement mainly at two levels. First, they could not agree over the political methods and goals, and resulted in the split between the moderates and extremists within the Indian National Congress at the Surat session in 1907. Second, there was a controversy associated with combining religious revivalism with political methods. The fusion of nationalism with Hindu symbols alienated minority communities from the national movement.

The colonial administration exploited these tensions and deliberately fostered communal divisions, as seen in the formation of the Muslim League in 1906 and the introduction of separate electorates for Muslims in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.

To sum up, the Swadeshi movement succeeded in mobilising the masses into nationalist politics and uniting diverse political forces but extremist tendencies that deviated from the declared goal could not be contained. The history of the national movement suggests that emotional responses to powerful forces need to be accompanied by adequate capital,

inclusive participation, and well-defined strategies to achieve long-term success.

## Post read questions

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a renewed push for ‘Swadeshi’. How do you see it harking back to the Swadeshi movement of 1905-1911?
2. On July 19, 1905, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, announced the division of Bengal into two provinces. What were the major factors behind this decision?
3. How did political agitation in response to the partition of Bengal paved the way for a new phase in the Indian national movement?
4. Compare the Swadeshi Movement with later Gandhian movements in terms of methods and mass participation.
5. For Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the Swadeshi movement was a revolt against the state of dependence in all branches of national life while Surendranath Banerjee described it as a “protectionist movement”. Comment.

## Reading recommendations

Bipan Chandra, *Modern India* (2001)

Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India* (1885-1947)

Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (1903-1908)

*(Dileep P Chandran is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science in P M Government College, Chalakudy, Kerala.)*

# Was Hiroshima a show of strength meant to shape future order?

August 6 marks the 80th anniversary of the US atomic bombing of Japan during WWII. But even eight decades later, Hiroshima is not just about the past. It continues to shape how we think about the future – about war, peace, and power.

Written by Ajay Darshan Behera

Every year on August 6, people across the world remember Hiroshima. Ceremonies are held and flowers are laid. The day passes with speeches, moments of silence, and renewed calls for a world without nuclear weapons. But beneath these rituals lies a deeper discomfort that many prefer not to talk about. Hiroshima was not only a tragedy. It was also a turning point. It showed what power looks like when it is stripped of all limits.



An American B-29 bomber named Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. (Source: Reuters)

The bombing of Hiroshima, followed by Nagasaki three days later, ended the Second World War. But it also marked the start of a new way of thinking about war, peace, and the use of force. Since that week in August 1945, the world has not been the same. Many say the nuclear age brought stability. Others believe it created a world living on the edge.

Eighty years have passed. But the questions that the bombings raised have not disappeared. Were they necessary to end the war? Was it a military decision or a political one? What did Hiroshima and Nagasaki really mean for the future of international politics? These are not just moral questions. They are political ones.

## Why was the bomb dropped?

Much has been written about whether the bombings were necessary. At the time, American leaders said they were needed to force Japan to surrender. Without them, they argued, the war would have dragged on. A land invasion of Japan would have cost thousands of lives. The bomb, they said, saved more lives than it took.

But others have questioned this view. Some Japanese cities had already been destroyed by firebombing. Japan's military position was weak. Its navy and air force had been largely wiped out. And some in Japan's leadership were already discussing ways to end the war.

So why was the bomb used? One reason lies outside the battlefield. In 1945, the United States was already thinking ahead to the post-war world. The Soviet Union was both an ally and a rival. Dropping the bomb showed not just

Japan, but the world, what the United States was capable of. It was a show of strength meant to shape the future order. Power was not only used to end the war. It was used to define who would lead in the years that followed.

**Is war a tool for deterrence?****01**

From the realist perspective in international relations, war is not only about defeating the enemy. It is also a way to send signals of strength. This idea forms the basis of deterrence.

**What is “nuclear apartheid”?****02**

Critics argue that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has allowed a small group of countries to decide who can possess the bomb and who cannot. This unequal treatment prompted many to call the current arrangement “nuclear apartheid”.

**What is constructivist thinking?****03**

Constructivism tells us that power in international politics does not operate only through weapons, armies, and threats. It also works through ideas – how states understand themselves and others, and what they believe to be right or necessary.

From a realist perspective, war is not only about defeating the enemy. It is also a way to send signals of strength. This idea forms the basis of deterrence. The logic is straightforward. If you have the power to destroy your enemy, they will hesitate to attack. If both sides could destroy each other, neither would risk starting a war. This logic of mutual destruction held for a time. But this kind of peace was built on fear. It depended on leaders always acting rationally. It left little room for error.

This thinking shaped the Cold War, drove the nuclear arms race, and continues to influence how countries think about nuclear weapons today. But deterrence comes at a cost. It relies on the threat of mass destruction. It demands that states be willing to kill millions to avoid war. Some realists accept this as necessary. Others see it as morally bankrupt. Yet it still defines the logic of nuclear policy.

**A divided nuclear order**

In the decades after Hiroshima, the nuclear order took shape. The United States, Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China became the five officially recognised nuclear powers. Others like India, Pakistan, and North Korea built their arsenals outside this system. Israel is widely believed to have nuclear weapons, though it has never officially confirmed this.

Liberal thinkers argue that rules, institutions, and cooperation can limit the use of force. In the post-war years, efforts were made to build such a system. The United Nations was established, and treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) were introduced to regulate nuclear weapons. Signed in 1968, the NPT sought to manage the growing divide between the nuclear and non-nuclear states.

Under the treaty, countries that already had nuclear weapons were expected to disarm gradually. In return, others

would refrain from developing them. The treaty also promised access to peaceful nuclear technology. But critics argue that the NPT has preserved the status quo. It has allowed a small group of countries to decide who can possess the bomb and who cannot.

These arrangements, though, have helped prevent the usage of nuclear weapons again. But the system is full of contradictions. The promise of disarmament was never fully kept. The nuclear powers did not make serious efforts to disarm. Instead, they upgraded their arsenals with more precise warheads, faster missiles, and better control systems.

At the same time, countries without nuclear weapons were expected to follow rules made by those who already have them. If they resisted, they faced diplomatic pressure, sanctions, or even threats of war. Some were accused of violating the rules even when no evidence existed. The system was never based on fairness. This unequal treatment is why many call the current arrangement “nuclear apartheid”. It requires the world to accept an unequal system, where a few countries are allowed to have nuclear weapons, while others are not.

Powerful states claim their weapons are safe because they are in “responsible hands”. But what makes one country more responsible than another? Who decides that? For many in the Global South, these are not new questions. They have watched Western powers expand and modernise their arsenals while warning others not to build theirs. They have seen how treaties are used to restrict some, while others operate with few constraints. The message is clear – the rules are not the same for everyone.

## Politics of identity and memory

Understanding Hiroshima requires more than looking at military strategy. It also requires asking how identity and perception shape the choices states make. This is where constructivist thinking becomes useful. Constructivism tells us that power in international politics does not operate only through weapons, armies, and threats. It also works through ideas – how states understand themselves, how they view others, and what they believe to be right or necessary.

This perspective helps us ask a deeper question: why was it possible to bomb Hiroshima? One reason may be that in American wartime propaganda, Japan was often portrayed as alien, cruel, and even less than human. Within such a framing, the bombing could be presented as a necessary act. Scholars have pointed out that this way of thinking drew on older colonial ideas, where the East was imagined as fundamentally different and dangerous – a mindset shaped by what Edward Said called “Orientalism”.

Why was the same decision not made about the other enemy, Germany? We cannot be sure of the answer. But the question itself tells us something important. In international politics, decisions are not made in a vacuum. They are filtered through narratives of civilisation and of “us” and “them”.

Constructivist thinking helps us see that war is not only a clash of interests. It is also a clash of identities. Who is seen as threatening? Who is seen as civilised? Who is seen as worthy of protection, and whose suffering can be more easily ignored? These ideas influence not just military choices but also how events are remembered later.

This is why memory itself becomes political. In Japan, Hiroshima is remembered as an act of cruelty and trauma. In many parts of the world, it is seen as the tragic cost of ending the war. In US policy circles, it is often defended as a strategic necessity. The same event carries different meanings in different places because memory is shaped by identity, power, and politics.

## What Hiroshima means today

Even eight decades later, Hiroshima is not just about the past. It continues to shape how we think about the future – about war, peace, and power. The world is more connected now. But it is also more divided. The world today feels increasingly unstable. Old rivalries are resurfacing. New technologies are making weapons faster, more precise, and harder to defend against. Some countries have openly threatened to use tactical nuclear weapons in regional conflicts.

The idea that nuclear weapons must never be used again – the so-called norm of non-use – is under growing strain. Hiroshima was meant to stand as a permanent warning. But the question now is whether that warning still matters.

The strategic community often talks about how the world avoided nuclear war during the Cold War. But avoiding disaster is not the same as building peace. The fact that nuclear bombs have not been used again does not mean the world is safe. It only means we have been lucky. We are often told that nuclear weapons have kept the peace. But this peace is built on fear, not trust. And peace built on fear is always fragile. Lasting peace cannot be negotiated by force; it has to be built on trust and a commitment to shared security.

We cannot undo what happened in August 1945. But we can choose how to remember it. Not as a triumph of science or strategy, but as a reminder of how easy it is to cross a line – and how hard it is to come back once we do.

## Post read questions

1. In many parts of the world, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is seen as the tragic cost of ending the war. However, in US policy circles, it is often defended as a strategic necessity. Comment.
2. Liberal thinkers argue that rules, institutions, and cooperation can limit the use of force. Discuss the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) from the perspective of Liberal Institutionalism.
3. Constructivism argues that power in international politics also works through ideas – how states understand themselves, how they view others, and what they believe to be right or necessary. How do you think constructivist thinking explains the bombing of Hiroshima?
4. Do you think that the bombing of Hiroshima also marked the start of a new way of thinking about war, peace, and the use of force?

*(The author is a Professor at MMAJ Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.)*

## Society

# How the idea of marriage has evolved over time

The idea of marriage in its dominant, modern form is seen as a product of economic and legal conditions. But how do values such as gender equality, personal liberty, and dignity inform the ongoing debate about marriage?

Written by **Rituparna Patgiri**

In a society like India, the debate around marriage has been evolving around values such as gender equality, personal liberty, and dignity, alongside issues like dowry-related deaths. Moreover, the recent news of two brothers marrying the same woman from the Hatti community in the Trans-Giri region of Sirmaur district in Himachal Pradesh has renewed scholarly interest in marriage.



The idea of marriage in its dominant, modern, monogamous and patrilineal form is a product of economic and legal conditions. Historically, other forms of marriage have also existed in different parts of the world. Let's understand the idea of marriage socially and legally.

### Marriage and kinship

Marriage is seen as the foundation of the family by bringing two people together socially and legally. It is also a key site where gender roles are clearly determined. In Indian society, men have traditionally been seen as hierarchically superior in the kinship system. Therefore, within marriage as well, the husband is granted rights, while the wife has to fulfil duties. The layers of gender inequality embedded in marriage are evident from popularly used proverbs such as *ladkiya paraya dhan hain* (girls are someone else's property), etc.

In patrilineal societies, there is an inherent understanding that a woman's 'real' home is that of her husband. In Hinduism, marriage has been seen as a sacrament – a lifelong union. Islamic law (*sharia*), however, recognises divorce and maintenance as marriage is seen as a contract.

During the colonial period, marriage amongst Hindus was codified. The British granted maintenance to Hindu wives under section 488 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898. In the post-independent period, the Hindu

Marriage Act, 1955, legalised divorce for Hindus.

Under Section 13 of the Act, the grounds for divorce include: “voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse”; “cruelty”; desertion “for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition”; “ceas(ing) to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion”; and being “incurably of unsound mind”.

However, according to the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, cruelty was a condition to petition for judicial separation. It was after an amendment in 1976 that this basis became available for seeking both divorce and judicial separation.

## Mental cruelty as ground for divorce

The Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, 1976 introduced the ground of ‘divorce by mutual consent’. This changed the way divorce began to be seen not just as a fault of one party but as a mutual choice. Gradually, grounds such as irretrievable breakdown of marriage and cruelty have also been added. There is now a more constitutional interpretation of the Hindu Marriage Act in terms of values such as gender equality, personal liberty, and dignity.

For instance, in the Amardeep Singh versus Harveen Kaur case in 2017, the Supreme Court held that the six-month waiting period under Section 13B(2) of the Hindu Marriage Act is not mandatory. It can be waived by the family court if both parties have been living separately for more than the statutory period and all efforts at mediation and reconciliation have failed. It made fast-track divorce possible.

Similarly, divorce on grounds of mental cruelty has been granted to both parties by different courts. For instance, the Madhya Pradesh High Court granted divorce to the wife in the Bhuribai versus Bheem Singh case (2025) as the husband forced her to discontinue her studies. Similarly, the Odisha High Court in a 2025 judgement granted the husband divorce after the court found the wife’s remarks towards his physical deformity amounted to mental cruelty.

However, the interpretation of cruelty is dependent on the court, often impacting how justice in cases of marital violence is delivered. The burden of proof lies on the party claiming cruelty, which requires credible evidence, and therefore is difficult to prove. The Delhi High Court, for instance, in 2024, ruled that asking a husband to live separately from his family amounts to cruelty by his wife. It also stated that in a marriage, the husband expecting his wife to do household chores cannot be termed as cruelty.

Although there have been amendments to the grounds of divorce, one cannot conclusively argue that laws and their interpretations are entirely gender-just.

## Gap between social practices and legal provisions

The legal understanding of divorce is rooted in constitutional values. But the social implications continue to remain different. While divorce is legally permissible, it is not socially encouraged. Women, particularly, are advised to ‘adjust’ and ‘adapt’. While women’s rights activists have sought legal intervention in issues of marital justice, the same has been discouraged by religious groups. They see the growing involvement of law in personal matters as a threat to their autonomy.

The Shah Bano case of 1985 illustrates the juxtaposition between constitutional values and personal laws. It also sparked a debate on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and women’s rights in India as the Supreme Court ruled in Shah Bano’s favour, stating that section 125 (maintenance of wives, children and parents) overrides personal law. The Court ordered the husband to provide her maintenance beyond the *iddat* period, which was seen as a violation of Muslim

personal law by religious groups, primarily led by men.

Questions of gender justice have also shaped Hindu marriage acts. Apart from the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 played a significant role in reshaping inheritance laws. While the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 gave daughters a right to inherit their father's property, the 2005 amendment granted them equal coparcenary rights in ancestral property by birth, just like sons.

But it is often found that women rarely exercise their legal rights. It is because most families view them as temporary members who will be married off and live in their husband's homes. This is particularly true when they have brothers. Even if they ask for their property rights, they are denied. The dowry that they are given at the time of marriage is seen as their rightful share.

This chasm between the social practices and the legal provisions has been extensively studied by scholars such as Bina Agarwal and Prem Chowdhry. Women are seen as caught in kinship roles – expected to fulfil the role of wives and daughter-in-law and that of sister/daughter. Although these legislations are decades old now, their implementation continues to remain sketchy.

### Post read questions

- 1. Do you think marriage as a sacrament is losing its value in modern India?**
- 2. The institution of marriage reinforces gender inequality in patrilineal societies. Do you agree?**
- 3. What changes did the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 bring for women's inheritance rights?**
- 4. Studies by some scholars found that in relation to women's rights in marriages, there is a gap between the social practices and the legal provisions. Why?**

*(Rituparna Patgiri is an Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati. In the second part of this article, the author will examine the legal framework around marriage.)*

# Building cities that embrace migrants

Despite being indispensable to the urban economy, why do migrants remain absent from urban planning, governance, and policy agendas? Why is transforming cities into inclusive and democratic spaces a critical need of our time?

Written by **Kuldeepsingh Rajput**

Indian cities have become powerful magnets, pulling in millions of internal migrants each year in search of livelihoods, opportunities, and a better life. The International Labour Organisation (2024) states that the rate of urbanisation in India is set to rise significantly in the coming years, which will, in turn, trigger migration.

Migration is expected to contribute to a 40 per cent urbanisation rate by 2030, resulting in an urban population of around 607 million.

*The Migration in India* (2020-2021) report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation estimates that migrants make up almost one-third of India's total population and account for 34.6 per cent of the country's urban residents.

Migrant workers are vital contributors to the overall economy and have particularly become indispensable to the urban economy, which is emerging as a key driver of growth. They form the backbone of multiple sectors, including construction, plantations, mines, manufacturing, hospitality, transport, domestic work, and the rapidly expanding gig and platform-based urban economy.

Despite their essential contribution, migrants are mainly absent from urban planning, governance, and policy agendas and consequently remain critically marginalised in destination cities. Migrants are indispensable for the urban economy, but their invisibility raises serious concerns.

## Invisible migrants in global cities

Sociologist Saskia Sassen, in her book *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991), argues that such indispensable labour is often 'made invisible' in dominant narratives of global urbanism. Her popular concept 'global city' helps to understand how the low-cost, flexible labour supports high-profit sectors without being integrated into urban governance. Cities can thrive on migrant and informal labour while simultaneously denying their visibility, rights, or recognition – a paradox prevalent in the Indian urban experience today.



*By 2030, migration is expected to contribute to a 40 percent urbanisation rate, resulting in an urban population of around 607 million. (Representational image)*

Sassen explains that this invisibility is not accidental but built into how global cities function. The COVID-19 pandemic and the exodus of migrants starkly exposed these systemic vulnerabilities among migrants, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive and responsive urban governance for migrants and other urban poor.

However, as the world settles into the so-called ‘new normal’, there is a growing risk that the lessons learned during the crisis will be neglected. In this context, the government’s draft National Migration Policy (2021) for the meaningful inclusion of migrant workers is significant. However, even after four years, it has yet to be implemented. This policy gap is also apparent in the Smart City Mission (SCM).

### What is the concept of ‘global city’?

01

The concept of ‘global city’ features in sociologist Saskia Sassen’s book *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991), referring to cities that serve as key nodes in the global economic system. These cities often rely on low-cost, flexible labour without integrating them into urban governance.

02

### Who coined the term ‘epistemic violence’ and what does it mean?

Gayatri Spivak’s concept of ‘epistemic violence’, rooted in postcolonial critique (epistemic is sometimes used to mean ‘of or relating to knowledge’), shows how violence operates at the level of knowledge production and representation, often marginalising or erasing the voice of colonised or subaltern peoples.

03

### What is ‘symbolic violence’ and how does it work?

Pierre Bourdieu first defined the concept of symbolic violence to describe a form of domination that occurs through social norms and institutional practices, often leading to marginalisation and discrimination in an almost accepted manner.

## Why ‘smart’ cities need to be ‘inclusive’

The SCM was launched in June 2015 to transform 100 cities by focussing on infrastructure expansion and IT-driven ‘smart’ solutions such as digitalisation and surveillance to improve the quality of life. According to the Press Information Bureau (June 2025), 94 per cent of the total 8,067 projects under the SCM have been completed, with 1.64 lakh crore investment.

During the past decade, a substantial portion of its funding has gone towards physical infrastructure and spatial redesign, such as metros, flyovers, expressways, and luxury complexes. While these projects may reshape the urban skyline and advance an aesthetic vision of urbanism, they simultaneously create exclusive spaces that marginalise urban groups like migrants.

Scholars have argued that initiatives under the SCM often prioritise middle-class and elite concerns, while sidelining the everyday struggles of the urban poor, especially migrants and informal workers. As a result, cities may have become technologically ‘smart’, but they often fail to become socially just and inclusive.

## Marginalisation made acceptable

The SCM can also be examined by analysing the underlying assumptions behind the development of the very idea of a smart city. Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'epistemic violence', rooted in postcolonial critique (epistemic is sometimes used to mean 'of or relating to knowledge or epistemology'), offers a useful lens to understand how power operates through the knowledge system.

The construction and legitimisation of a selective vision of the smart city that is efficient, smart, and technologically advanced is deeply embedded in urban policy discourse. It shapes how urban planners, government functionaries, and SCM-related corporate bodies perceive the city and define its 'rightful' inhabitants. In turn, the SCM's knowledge model has also shaped exclusionary ideas and power structures that legitimise and normalise the invisibility of migrants, informal labour, and the urban poor in the city development plan.

This dynamic resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence', a neglect or marginalisation disguised as normalcy and appropriateness. Bourdieu argues that, unlike physical violence, symbolic violence is exercised through culture, norms, and institutions. It operates by making inequality and marginalisation seem natural, justified, or inevitable, so that even the oppressed may come to accept their position as legitimate.

When migrant workers are excluded from urban social security, voting rights, education, or public services, it is not seen as violence, but as a regular bureaucratic oversight or administrative inevitability.

## Definition of urban citizenship

The exclusionary knowledge systems that shape urban development and governance promote a narrow definition of urban citizenship, which keeps migrants on the margins of the city. The identity of migrants in cities is deeply rooted in factors such as class, regional identity, and patterns of consumption.

As Amita Baviskar highlights in her book *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi* (2020) how existing class and caste hierarchies profoundly shape the idea of who 'belongs' to the city. In her analysis, the urban space is not neutral or equally accessible; it is structured by social power.

The dominant urban imagination, largely influenced by the middle- and upper-classes, often views migrants and informal labour as 'outsiders' or 'encroachers' rather than rightful urban citizens. For example, slums are seen not just as poor housing but also as symbols of disorder, while street vendors and waste-pickers are treated as a nuisance despite their essential roles in the urban economy.

Migrant workers are thus tolerated as labour but denied recognition as citizens. This exclusionary framing apparently contributes to policies focused on 'beautification', 'slum clearance', and 'world-class infrastructure', which often displace rather than include the urban poor.

## Building inclusive cities

R. B. Bhagat, in his article 'Migration, Gender and Right to the City' (2017) published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, rightly points out that migrants are not a homogeneous group; some, such as migrant women, are more vulnerable. They face compounded disadvantages both as women and as migrants.

In cities lacking an inclusive framework, migrant women encounter a range of challenges, including wage disparities, digital divide, data exclusion, and sexual abuse. A truly inclusive city would recognise migrants as stakeholders, ensure participatory urban planning, and protect their social and cultural rights. Migrants leave behind their rural roots

and often families in search of livelihood and hope but they are rarely embraced in urban settings. Consequently, they remain in-between and face a dilemma of ‘identity crisis’, often manifesting as mental distress.

The SCM has completed a decade, achieving significant infrastructure and technological advancements. Now is a crucial moment to make cities equitable and inclusive to uphold the principle of social justice. Safeguarding the rights of migrants in destination cities demands a paradigm shift – from exclusionary, class-focused urban governance to one that embraces mobility, diversity, and the everyday realities of the working poor. Transforming cities into inclusive and democratic spaces is a critical need of our time.

### Post read questions

1. **How does rapid urbanisation in India both enable and constrain the livelihoods of migrants? Do you think that migration-driven urban growth challenges existing models of urban governance?**
2. **In what ways are migrant workers rendered “invisible” in urban policy discourse, despite their indispensable role in the economy?**
3. **How do concepts like epistemic violence (Spivak) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) help us understand the systematic marginalisation of migrants?**
4. **To what extent has the Smart Cities Mission privileged middle-class and elite concerns at the expense of migrants and informal workers?**
5. **What policy frameworks could reimagine migrants not just as labourers but as stakeholders in urban development?**

*(Dr. Kuldeepsingh Rajput is a Post-doctoral Fellow and heads the RUBAL Foundation.)*

## Environment & Ecology

# India's integrated approach to wetland sustainability

At Ramsar CoP15, India introduced a resolution on 'Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles for the Wise Use of Wetlands'. But in what ways, the integration of legal enforcement, behavioural change, and waste governance can help India achieve its commitment and serve as a model for sustainable ecological stewardship.

Written by **Renuka**

Wetlands are one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet. They are the transitional ecosystems between terrestrial and aquatic environments, characterised by the presence of water—either permanently or seasonally, that supports diverse plant and animal life. They are rich in biodiversity and play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance.

However, wetlands across the world are facing severe threats due to issues like urban encroachment, pollution and climate change. At the Ramsar 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15) to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), held at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, India introduced and secured the adoption of a resolution on Promoting Sustainable lifestyles for the wise use of wetlands.

The resolution highlights the need for integrating behavioural change and sustainable consumption patterns into wetland conservation strategies. It also aligns with Mission Life (Lifestyle for Environment), launched by India at UNFCCC COP 26, which encourages India to adopt pro-planet practices.



*Resolution adopted at Ramsar CoP15, focuses on the role of Individual and societal choices in conserving wetlands. (Photo: X/@byadavbjp)*

### Significance of wetlands and major threats

Although wetlands constitute only around 6 per cent of the Earth's Land surface, they provide habitat and breeding grounds for nearly 40 per cent of all plant and animal species. They also provide natural protection to nearly 60 per cent of the global population living along coastlines by mitigating the impact of storm surges, hurricanes and tsunamis. Wetland also provides provisions to human beings, such as food and fodder, mainly rice and fish, and it also supports livelihoods through fisheries, agriculture and eco-tourism.

In addition, wetlands play a vital role in delivering environmental and climate services. Acting as natural sponges, they absorb excess rainfall, thereby reducing the risk of floods. As effective carbon sinks, wetlands store carbon in both soil and biomass. Beyond this, they are often called the 'kidney of the landscape' due to their ability to filter pollutants, purify water and maintain water quality.

Despite their significance, wetlands are also one of the earth's most threatened ecosystems. From 1970-2020, more than 35 per cent of the world's wetlands have vanished due to various reasons. Land conversion for agriculture, urbanisation and infrastructure development are the leading reasons behind declining wetland areas. Also, industrial and domestic waste pollute water bodies, and unsustainable farming practices disrupt hydrology. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency of extreme events. In view of such challenges, an international legal framework was outlined.

## Global legal framework: Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention was adopted in 1971 in the city of Ramsar in Iran and came into force in 1975. It was the first intergovernmental agreement focused exclusively on a specific ecosystem, i.e. wetlands. The convention provides a comprehensive definition of 'wetland' encompassing marshes, fens, peatlands and water bodies and includes natural, artificial, permanent and temporary wetlands. It rests on the three main pillars: conservation of wetlands of international importance, promotion of the wise use of all wetlands within a country's territory and international co-operation on shared wetland systems and migratory species.

The central principle of the convention is "wise use" of the wetlands, which means "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development".

The convention has 172 parties, and the Parties need to designate wetlands having ecological, botanical, zoological, limnological or hydrological significance for inclusion in 'the list of wetlands of International importance'. There are 2,544 wetlands designated under the list. The convention also requires contracting parties to consult and co-operate in managing transboundary wetlands and shared water systems. It further calls for the coordination of policies and regulations to conserve wetlands and their dependent biodiversity.

## Ramsar CoP15: Renewed commitments

The representatives of the government of each of the contracting parties meet every three years (CoP). The theme of the CoP 15 was "Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future", which emphasises the important role wetlands play in sustaining ecological health, biodiversity, and climate resilience. One of the main objectives was to develop closer co-operation with other international environmental agreements, stronger institutions, wider partnership and adequate financial support. It adopted the 5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands with a timeline of 2025-2034. The vision of the plan is: A world living in harmony with nature where wetlands are valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, supporting a healthy planet and delivering benefits for all people.

At Ramsar CoP15, India introduced a resolution on 'Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles for the Wise Use of Wetlands' which was formally adopted on July 30, 2025. The resolution focuses on the role of individual and societal choices in conserving wetlands and aligns with global frameworks. It calls for voluntary integration of sustainable lifestyle practices into wetland management through education, awareness, collaboration and investment.

## Wetland conservation in India

India is one of the countries with the highest number of wetlands. It has 1309 wetlands covering 16.9 million hectares of area, out of which 91 are listed under the Ramsar Convention. At least 6 per cent of the Indian population is directly dependent upon wetlands for its livelihood. Recognising the significance of wetlands, India has undertaken several initiatives for their conservation and management.

Wetland rules, 2017 (which replaced the Wetland rules, 2010) are notified under the Environment Protection Act. The rules restrict activities such as conversion of wetlands for non-wetland purposes, industrial encroachment, dumping and discharge of waste, construction and poaching. To ensure the implementation of the rules, the National Wetland

Committee and the State Wetland Authorities were established.

On the policy front, the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems has been implemented by the government for the conservation and management of wetlands and lakes. Also in 2023, the Save Wetland campaign was launched under the Mission Sahbhagita to make wetland conservation a people's movement. It considers the wetland as 'Amrit Darohar' and works on four pillars: Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA).

However, wetlands in India are also facing rapid decline and degradation due to multiple factors. Among all the factors, agriculture remains the foremost reason behind the loss of wetlands. Followed by urbanisation and industries. In states like Punjab and Kerala, conversion of wetlands for agriculture and urban construction. In coastal states, unsustainable aquaculture, particularly shrimp farming, and overfishing have degraded many wetlands. Also, urban pollution has severely affected wetlands such as Bellandur Lake in Bengaluru and Loktak Lake in Manipur. The wetlands in the Himalayan states are under threat due to unregulated urbanisation, unsustainable tourism, and climate change.

## Need for behavioural change

Protecting and conserving wetlands is crucial due to their ecological, social and economic significance. India's proactive role at Ramsar CoP15, through its resolution, reflects an effort to shift the conservation discourse from purely regulatory measures to behavioural change and community participation. However, translating this vision into reality, India needs to confront the multiple pressures that wetlands are facing.

To secure these ecosystems, the issue of encroachment and waste dumping in wetlands needs to be dealt with sternly. For this, strict enforcement of Wetland Rules, 2017 would help. Weak implementation has allowed degradation to persist despite a sound policy framework. Also, public awareness and community participation are indispensable, since local populations are both beneficiaries and guardians of wetlands. Equally important is sustained and adequate funding to support the restoration and management of wetlands.

By integrating legal enforcement with behavioural change and waste governance, India can move closer to achieving its commitment to 'wise use of wetland' and set a model for sustainable ecological stewardship.

## Post read questions

1. **What is a wetland? Explain the Ramsar concept of 'wise use' in the context of wetland conservation.**
2. **Wetlands are often called the "kidneys of the landscape". Analyse this statement in the context of their ecological, social and economic significance.**
3. **Behavioural change is as important as legal enforcement for wetland conservation. Discuss with reference to India's resolution at Ramsar CoP15.**
4. **How does Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) complement India's wetland conservation goals under the Ramsar Convention?**
5. **In what ways can wetland conservation contribute to climate resilience and disaster risk reduction in India? Illustrate with examples.**

*(Renuka is a Doctoral researcher at Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla.)*

## Economy

# What does the story of India's rural development say?

How can rural development be assessed - as a package of policies for socio-economic development in rural areas, or in terms of social indicators like access to electricity, drinking water, health, and education?

Written by **Ritwika Patgiri**

The government's decision to cap the spending under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at 60 per cent for the FY 2025-26 came even as the Ministry of Rural Development sought an increased outlay of Rs 5.23 lakh crore for the MGNREGS till 2029-30.

Data shows that India has been witnessing a decline in budget allocation for essential social sectors. For instance, the budget allocations for different programmes under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) have seen a steady decline since before 2019.

While MGNREGS has seen a minimal increase in its allocated budget, the number of families working under the scheme has come down from 7.25 crore in 2021-22 to 5.79 crore in 2024-25. With around 65 per cent of the country's population living in rural areas, alongside the ongoing rural distress, such declining welfare allocations have serious implications for rural development.

### What is rural development?

Rural development as a concept gained traction in the 1970s with renewed emphasis on rural policies and programmes. This stemmed from the failure of state-led modernisation projects and industrialisation policies that fell short of expectations. With growth concentrated in certain areas and widespread rural poverty persisting in the 1970s, it was recognised that the dispersion of basic services is central to equitable distribution of resources and poverty alleviation.



*Rural development as a concept gained traction in the 1970s with renewed emphasis on rural policies and programmes. (File Photo)*

Thus, rural development can be understood as a package of policies that aim to foster socio-economic development in rural areas. Notably, agriculture is crucial to both rural growth and development.

According to economic theories on development, agricultural development is a pre-requisite for rural industrial growth. These theories further suggest that as agriculture grows, the relative size of farms declines. Hence, a high growth agricultural sector along with a declining farm size are seen as markers of agricultural development.

Structural transformation is, thus, shaped by the movement of both output and labour away from agriculture to the modern industrial sector. In the Indian context, it is often noted that the nature of the structural transformation has been slow and has been linked to “premature” service-led growth. At the same time, the employment share of the manufacturing sector has failed to increase.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, this is primarily because of the rapid growth of the service sector, which has restrained the growth of the secondary sector. Another interesting observation about the Indian economy is that most of the service sector is led by self-employment rather than wage employment.

## Policies on rural development

Rural development policies need to be understood against this backdrop. Two important schemes – the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (later became MGNREGS) – can be discussed in this context.

The IRDP was launched in 1978-79 and implemented from 1980 until it was merged with five other rural development programmes in 1999. As a self-employment programme for poverty alleviation, the core objective of the IRDP was to enable identified rural poor families to increase their incomes and cross the poverty line through the acquisition of credit-based productive assets.

The MGNREGS, on the other hand, provides a one-off wage payment to the workers for developing infrastructure such as roads and irrigation works that can generate long-term benefits for the propertied classes.

While IRDP was focused on self-employment, MGNREGS emerged as a guarantor of 100 days of wage employment to rural individuals. MGNREGS, however, has faced an inadequate budget allocation in the last few years, even as there has been a renewed interest in policies and schemes around self-employment. Examples of some schemes and initiatives include:

- The Pradhan Mantri Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP): It offers subsidies to establish micro-enterprises.
- The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY): It facilitates self-employment through loans to micro and small businesses.
- Initiatives like the Rural Self-Employment and Training Institutes (RSETIs) and the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY): Here, the focus is on skill development and entrepreneurship training, etc.

States like Assam have also launched schemes like the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) to promote self-employment among youth through grants.

In the context of such rural policies, self-employment is perceived as dynamic and capable of generating further employment. However, the other side of the debate views India's persistent reliance on self-employment as a sign of distress, not very different from wage-employment, and an alternative in the absence of wage or other gainful employment.

## Socio-economic indicators of rural development

Rural development can also be understood in terms of social indicators like access to electricity, drinking water, health, and education. While data from the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 suggests improvement in these indicators compared to 2015-16, a deeper analysis shows a different picture.

For instance, rural health care is often marked by informal private doctors or providers, which national-level data sets often fail to capture. While numbers suggest that people in rural areas do visit doctors and seek medical care, the quality of this healthcare needs to be discussed.

Similarly, a comparative analysis of indicators for rural and urban India shows a higher prevalence of stunting among children (37.3%) in rural areas as compared to urban areas (30.1%). Children from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are more likely to be seen as disproportionately affected in these indicators.

Education presents similar challenges. The findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 reflect serious structural and quality issues in rural education. The report shows that many students in rural India are more likely to have progressed through the education system without acquiring foundational learning skills. Huge shortage of teachers and human resources further exacerbates the problems.

Moreover, PLFS data also suggests that despite the focus on skill-building and training programmes in rural India, meaningful rural employment generation has yet to materialise.

What then can be understood from India's story of rural development? While skill and entrepreneurship development are important, they cannot deliver full benefits without adequate investment in social sectors such as health, education, and nutrition. Livelihood generation needs to be aligned with a deeper understanding of the rural economy's structure.

A sustainable rural policy must integrate welfare and employment generation by strengthening budgetary support for social infrastructure. At the same time, investments in rural infrastructure can expand economic opportunities, support human development, and promote more inclusive and equitable growth.

## Post read questions

1. How did the early modernisation projects shape the rural development policies in India from the 1970s onwards?
2. Can rural development be effectively measured through social indicators such as health, education, nutrition, or through purely economic growth metrics?
3. The welfare schemes like MGNREGS and self-employment schemes like PMEGP, Mudra Yojana reflect different models of rural development. Discuss.
4. What do persistent gaps in health and education outcomes between rural and urban India reveal about the existing rural development programmes?

*(Ritwika Patgiri is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Economics, South Asian University.)*

## Energy Security

# How India's nuclear mission can be both ambitious and realistic

As India liberalises its nuclear sector, a key question is - how can public-private partnerships effectively address the institutional and financial bottlenecks in its nuclear programme?

Written by Renuka

As the world faces the accelerating threat of climate change, India stands at a crucial stage in its energy transition. With a commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and a parallel goal of net-zero electricity by 2047, the country is under growing pressure to reshape its energy mix towards cleaner and more sustainable sources. Within this transition, nuclear energy has become an inevitable option capable of offering reliable, low-carbon baseload power to complement renewable energy like solar and wind.

India's current nuclear installed capacity is 8180 MW, spread across 24 nuclear power reactors. Also, there has been more than a 70 per cent surge in India's nuclear power capacity in the last 10 years, increasing from 4,780 MW in 2013-14 to 8,180 MW at present.

However, despite more than 75 years of nuclear research and development, India's nuclear power generation remains modest, contributing only a small fraction to the country's overall energy mix. The annual electricity generation from nuclear power plants is 47,971 million units, which is not sufficient for the growing population and energy demands.

Considering this, the government has recently signalled a renewed focus on nuclear energy, aiming to triple its current nuclear power capacity by 2032. To achieve this ambitious target, the government expressed its intention to open its nuclear sector for private players.



*Opening the nuclear sector to carefully regulated private participation could offer the much-needed infusion of capital, expertise, and efficiency.*

### Beyond the state-centric nuclear framework

India's current nuclear energy model is based on the state-centric framework under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. The Act confers the central government the exclusive authority over all nuclear activities in India, and leaves no scope for private investment. The Department of Atomic Energy and Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) are largely responsible for the nuclear power generation along with Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited

(BHAVINI).

The Atomic Energy Act was amended in 2015, and the definition of “government company” was expanded. It allowed NPCIL to form joint ventures with other Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) to mobilise additional funding for the nuclear programme. But the amendment still prevents direct involvement of the private sector in the nuclear energy programmes of the country.

While this closed nuclear model has worked well on the national security front, strategic autonomy and nuclear safety, it is often argued that over time, it has emerged as a major constraint in achieving energy independence, evident in:

- The slow pace of capacity addition due to the non-involvement of the private sector.
- The lack of competition and innovation, which are key drivers of technological advancement and cost efficiency.
- Missed key opportunities in global developments such as Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and other advanced nuclear technologies due to financial and logistical constraints.

Hence, the closed nuclear model risks becoming a bottleneck in meeting India’s growing demand for clean and sustainable energy and its climate commitments.

## Involving private sector

Under the Nuclear Energy mission for Viksit Bharat, India now strives to achieve the target of 100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047. The mission is largely focused on developing Bharat SMRs, where Public-private collaboration would be crucial.

International experience underscores the value of private sector engagement in driving nuclear innovation and scale. Private companies in the US, the UK and France are pioneering advanced reactors and modular technologies. For India, liberalising the nuclear sector could accelerate progress in SMRs, thorium-based technologies and next-generation safety mechanisms.

Apart from this, private participation can bring innovation, efficiency, and global best practices, complement public institutions and enable faster, safer and sustainable expansion of nuclear capacity to meet climate and energy goals. For this, the government has expressed its intention to amend the Atomic Energy Act of 1962.

Recently, TEMA India has commissioned the first private depleted heavy water upgradation facility, seen as a ‘milestone’ in India’s nuclear self-reliance, reducing dependence on Imports. It was India’s first private sector test facility, which was unveiled by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and NPCIL. As India’s energy demand is projected to double by 2024, nuclear energy, with its high-capacity factor and minimal emissions, is poised to play a vital role in this evolving energy mix, along with solar and wind energy.

## Some concerns

Amidst this, there are several concerns that continue to hinder broader acceptance of private sector participation. Nuclear safety continues to be the foremost concern. India, being a population-dense country, the consequences of a potential accident could be devastating. Although India has a relatively safe operational record, gaps in terms of transparency, regulatory independence, and emergency preparedness have often been highlighted.

Another issue is liability. The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, places liability on the operator and also on suppliers. This provision was intended to protect and compensate victims in the event of nuclear accidents. But this

also deterred the private companies (foreign and Indian) from investing in the nuclear sector.

Public trust around the expansion and privatisation of the nuclear sector remains fragile. Accidents like the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, Chernobyl, and Fukushima continue to impact the perception of people on nuclear and industrial risks. They serve as cautionary symbols and lead to a deep mistrust towards assurances on safety and emergency preparedness, especially in relation to new technologies. All these concerns need to be addressed to open the sector for private players efficiently and to ensure the safe design and operation of nuclear facilities.

Lastly, experts underscore that to achieve 100 GWe of nuclear capacity by 2047 would require 18,000 tonnes of uranium and given the global scarcity, such a target raises serious questions about fuel supply security. For this, India needs to accelerate the shift toward closed fuel cycles and thorium-based technologies, which not only conserve uranium but also improve reactor safety.

## Need to be both ambitious and realistic

If India has to achieve its climate goal by charting its path towards a low-carbon future, nuclear power can prove to be an essential tool. It has the potential to provide reliable, large-scale, and emission-free power, which complements the expanding portfolio of renewable energy.

In this context, opening the nuclear sector to carefully regulated private participation could offer the much-needed infusion of capital, expertise, and efficiency, especially in emerging technologies like small modular reactors and thorium-based systems.

However, unlike other renewable energies, the path to harnessing nuclear energy is not easy. It carries challenges, from high-risk consequences and long-term nuclear waste. Strong regulatory oversight, public trust, and a reformed liability framework constitute the pillars of this transition. Equally important is to have specialised manpower experts.

To conclude, India's nuclear mission must be both ambitious and realistic, grounded in secure fuel supply strategies, robust safety frameworks, public engagement, and indigenous innovations. Only then can nuclear energy emerge as a strong pillar of clean, secure and inclusive energy development.

## Post read questions

1. **How has India's state-controlled nuclear energy model under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 both advanced and constrained the country's nuclear ambitions?**
2. **To what extent can public-private partnerships address the institutional and financial bottlenecks in India's nuclear programme?**
3. **What role could Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and thorium-based technologies play in making India's nuclear energy programme more viable?**
4. **How do historical disasters like Chernobyl, Fukushima, and Bhopal continue to influence public perception of nuclear safety in India?**
5. **What lessons can India draw from international experiences in liberalising the nuclear sector while balancing security and safety concerns?**

*(Renuka is a Doctoral researcher at Himachal Pradesh National law university, Shimla.)*

# UPSC FOCUS

## Issue at a Glance

# SCO Summit 2025 and India

A short video of Prime Minister Narendra Modi holding hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin recently went viral. But why is the SCO relevant in contemporary times, and what are its origins? What were the major outcomes of the latest summit? Here's everything you need to know.

Written by **Roshni Yadav**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit at Tianjin's Meijiang Convention Centre on 31st August, 2025. (PMO via PTI Photo)

### What is the issue?

In a global order that has been shaped by war and tariffs, the 25th Heads of State Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) took place at Tianjin, China. At the summit, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping indicated towards the idea of multilateralism and a multipolar world. In the backdrop of US tariffs on India over Russian oil imports and a trade deal that has hit roadblocks, knowing about the SCO and key highlights of SCO summit 2025 holds significance.

**(Relevance:** UPSC Syllabus Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Regional groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests, and important international institutions.

Previously, a significant number of questions have been asked on the bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements that involve India or affect India's interests. Questions like "India's role in mitigating SCO problems" highlight the growing importance of these groupings in the main examination. Therefore, groups and summits that have been in the news could potentially be topics for the main examination. However, the questions in this section have mainly focused on analyzing these groupings from India's perspective. Thus, covering the SCO Summit 2025 becomes important.)

### What will you learn from this article?

- 1. What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?**
- 2. How has the SCO evolved?**
- 3. How does SCO work and what are the key takeaways from the SCO Summit 2025?**
- 4. What does SCO mean for India's global and regional interests?**

## Question 1: What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation. The main objectives of the SCO are to promote good relations among member countries, strengthen mutual confidence, make collective efforts to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region, and promote effective cooperation in various fields such as trade and economy, science and technology, culture, energy, transportation, tourism, environmental protection, etc.

The organisation also aims to move towards the establishment of a new, democratic, just, and rational political and economic international order. The member countries of SCO are China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Belarus. Belarus joined SCO as the 10th member last year.

## Question 2: How has the SCO evolved?

The SCO originated from the "Shanghai Five" established in 1996, consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 into 15 independent countries, there were concerns in the region about extremist religious groups and ethnic tensions coming to the fore. To manage these issues, a grouping was created for cooperation on security matters. It was a political association based on the Agreement on Confidence-Building in the Military Field in the Border Area and the Agreement on the Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in the Border Area.

Building on this, SCO was established on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai as an international organisation and also included Uzbekistan as a sixth member. The SCO was initially focused on collaborating within Central Asia to address issues such as terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

The Charter of the SCO was signed at the St. Petersburg Summit in June 2002 and became effective on September 19, 2003. This charter outlines the organisation's objectives, principles, structure, and primary areas of activity. Additionally, in 2006, the SCO announced plans to combat international drug trafficking as a means to finance global terrorism.

In September 2003, the heads of the SCO member states signed a 20-year Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation. The programme aims to establish a free trade zone within the territory of the SCO member

countries by revitalising the process of creating a favourable environment for trade and investment.

India and Pakistan became full members of the organisation in 2017 at the meeting of the Heads of State Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Astana. In 2023, the status of a full member of the Organisation was granted to the Islamic Republic of Iran and in 2024 to Belarus.

### Question 3: How does SCO work and what are the key takeaways from the SCO Summit 2025?

The SCO's highest decision-making body is the Heads of State Council (HSC). It meets once a year to make decisions and provide instructions on all important issues regarding SCO activity. A meeting of the HSC is chaired by the head of State organising the meeting.

Besides HSC, the Heads of Government Council (HGC) meets once a year to discuss a multilateral cooperation strategy and priority directions within the organisation's framework, to address important cooperation issues in economic and other areas, and to approve the organisation's annual budget.

The organisation has two permanent bodies: the Secretariat in Beijing, China and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. The SCO Secretary-General and RATS Executive Committee Director are appointed by the HSC for a period of three years.

#### Do you Know?

*The venue of a regular meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) is generally determined in the Russian alphabetic order of names of the SCO member states. Also, Russian and Chinese are the official working languages of the SCO.*

### Key takeaways from the SCO Summit 2025

From the Tianjin Declaration to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Development Strategy until 2035, 24 documents were approved as a result of the meeting. Some of the key takeaways from Summit are:

**1. Agreement on SCO Anti-Drug Center:** Agreements were signed between SCO member states on the SCO Anti-Drug Center and on the Universal Center for Countering Challenges and Threats to the Security of SCO Member States.

**2. SCO Joint Declaration condemns Pahalgam Terrorist Attack:** SCO issued a joint declaration on September 1 that, among other things, strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam on April 22. The statement also condemned the Jaffer Express (March) and Khuzdar (May) terrorist attacks in Balochistan, Pakistan.

Notably, the explicit mention of the Pahalgam attack, in which 26 people lost their lives, is significant. Back in June, the incident had failed to find a place in the draft declaration of the SCO defence ministers' meeting in Qingdao. The statement, however, did include a reference to the hijacking of the Jaffer Express. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had refused to sign the statement, reportedly due to the omission of the Pahalgam attack.

**3. SCO Dialogue Partner Status to Lao People's Democratic Republic:** A decision was taken to grant the Lao

People's Democratic Republic the status of SCO Dialogue Partner and to grant SCO Observer status with the Commonwealth of Independent States.

**4. City of Cholpon-Ata designated “Tourist and Cultural Capital of the SCO” for 2025–2026:** In accordance with the Organization's tradition, the city of Cholpon-Ata in Kyrgyzstan was designated the “Tourist and Cultural Capital of the SCO” for 2025–2026.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping at SCO Summit (Photo: PMO)

## 5. PM Modi Proposed Civilisation

**Dialogue Forum:** PM Modi proposed the formation of a ‘Civilisation Dialogue Forum’ to enhance people-to-people ties in the SCO, stating that this would provide a global platform for the countries to share ancient civilisation, culture, traditions, and literature.

“To enhance people-to-people ties in the SCO, I propose the formation of a ‘Civilisation Dialogue Forum’. It will provide a global stage to share our ancient civilisation, culture, traditions, and literature,” he said.

**6. Xi Jinping on proposed Global Governance Initiative:** Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday (September 1) proposed the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) at the SCO plus leaders' summit as he advocated practising multilateralism.

Xi, while addressing the SCO leaders' summit, said, “I wish to propose the Global Governance Initiative (GGI). I look forward to working with all countries for a more just and equitable global governance system and advancing toward a community with a shared future for humanity.” Xi pressed his vision for a new global security and economic order that prioritises the “Global South”.

**7. SCO Chairmanship for 2025–2026 Passed to the Kyrgyz Republic:** The SCO chairmanship for 2025–2026 has been passed to the Kyrgyz Republic. The head of Kyrgyzstan named the theme of the Kyrgyz chairmanship as “25 years of the SCO: together for a stable world, development, and prosperity”.

## Express view on SCO summit: India should not overestimate possibilities with China and underestimate those with US

“India’s delicate diplomatic manoeuvre to accelerate the normalisation of relations with China — under the shadow of a trade crisis with the US — should not be misinterpreted at home and misunderstood abroad as a rupture in India’s ties with America. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s hour-long meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Tianjin on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit did not, and it could not have, overcome the structural challenges that have hobbled bilateral ties between the two Asian giants for seven decades. Nor do the current contretemps with the Trump Administration over Russian oil purchases imply a breakdown in the strategic partnership with the US that Delhi and Washington have painstakingly built over the last three decades.

It is unfortunate that the rhetoric surrounding India’s engagement with China — “partners not rivals”, Asian solidarity, Global South, strategic autonomy — continues to mask the persistent gap between Delhi’s aspiration for good

relations with Beijing and the historic inability to achieve it. Similarly, the noisy public argumentation between Delhi and Washington often overshadows the reality of shared interests with America. In a persistent paradox, Delhi's foreign policy elite has tended to overestimate the possibilities with China and underestimate those with the US.

India needs not only peaceful coexistence but also good neighbourly relations. But the effort to build such a relationship in the 1950s collapsed in the war of 1962. A renewed attempt in the late 1980s unravelled over the last decade. Military clashes in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020 exposed China's growing assertiveness on the disputed border. A recurring annual trade deficit of around \$100 billion underscores the massive imbalance in China's favour.

The PM is right to seek a peaceful border, an early resolution of the boundary dispute, and a more balanced trade relationship. But these will take time. Meanwhile, Delhi made it clear in Modi's statement to the SCO that India would not dilute its longstanding positions to placate Xi: It continues to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative, maintains reservations about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and rejects Beijing's reluctance to confront Pakistan's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism."

#### Question 4: What does SCO mean for India's global and regional interests?

SCO is one of the few international organisations which deals with security issues and primarily has Asian members. The SCO holds great significance for India and aligns with India's two important objectives- counter-terrorism and connectivity.

PM Modi in his address to SCO 2025 also said, "Over the past 24 years, the SCO has played a vital role in connecting the extended family across the Eurasian region. As an active member, India has always contributed in a constructive and positive manner. India's vision and policy towards the SCO are built on three key pillars: S — Security. C — Connectivity. O — Opportunity."

**1. Forum for Cooperation with Central Asian Countries:** The membership of SCO allows India to participate in a forum which enhances its scope of cooperation with Central Asian countries, which have not had particularly close relations with India since their formation in 1991. It also matters to maintain communication with major regional actors on common security issues. Shubhajit Roy Writes, "SCO membership also bolsters India's status as a major pan-Asian player, which is boxed in the South Asian paradigm."

**2. Countering Terrorism:** Shubhajit Roy Writes- "For India, two important objectives



are counter-terrorism and connectivity. These sit well with the SCO's main objective of working cooperatively against the "three evils". India wants access to intelligence and information from SCO's counter-terrorism body, the Tashkent-based Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS). RATS provides access to non-Pakistan-centred counter-terrorism information there."

**3. Closer Indian-Russian Cooperation:** SCO has provided Delhi with a forum to play up its proximity to Moscow. Russia supported India's full membership in the SCO during the 2016 Tashkent Summit.

**4. Balancing Chinese Dominance in the Region:** The SCO provides India with opportunities for countering the dominance of China in the region. Nirupama Subramanian Writes— "Moscow sees India's presence in the SCO as a potential countervailing force to Chinese dominance of Central Asia. It was Russia that began pushing for India's membership of the group, around the time that China's Xi Jinping launched his Belt and Road Initiative in Kazakhstan."

### Belt and Road Initiative

*China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative is a massive trade and infrastructure network that seeks to connect the country with the West in a model based on the ancient Silk Route. India does not support the BRI, and has declined to join the project. The major reason for this is that the BRI passes through Indian territory illegally held by Pakistan.*

In summary, India's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contributes to its engagement in a multilateral global framework and facilitates greater interaction with Central Asian member countries, aligning with its Connect Central Asia Policy. At the same time, some observers have described the SCO as a "diplomatic battlefield," reflecting the complexities within the organization.

### Post Read Questions

#### Prelims

(1) Consider the following: (UPSC CSE 2022)

1. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
2. Missile Technology Control Regime
3. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

**India is a member of which of the above?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

(2) Consider the following countries:

1. India
2. Mongolia
3. Russia
4. Kyrgyzstan
5. Romania

**How many of the countries given above are full-time member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?**

- (a) Only two
- (b) Only three
- (c) Only four
- (d) All five

(3) Consider the following statements:

1. India and Pakistan became full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2017.
2. Shanghai Five consisted of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

**Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Mains**

Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India? (UPSC CSE 2021)

**Prelims Answer Key**

**1. (d) 2. (b) 3. (d)**

**(Sources:** Articles from *The Indian Express* – PM Modi’s address to SCO 2025: Security, Connectivity, Opportunity, , Explained: What SCO summit means for India’s global and regional interests, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meet in Goa, Xi pushes for equal, multipolar global order as he slams Trump over tariffs, Key takeaways from PM Modi’s SCO Summit address)

## Essays Simplified

# UPSC Mains 2025 Essay Paper Analysis: Aspirants quizzed on generic quotes they know by heart but find hard to elaborate in exam pressure

War, wealth and wisdom: UPSC Mains 2025 Essay paper continued previous trends of featuring philosophical and abstract quotes. While most of the quotes were familiar, the real challenge was to elaborate on these simple ideas effectively, especially without AI support in the exam hall. Here's our review.

Written by **Manas Srivastava**

It may seem to be the easiest essay paper, but what appears simple is often hard to decode and difficult to elaborate upon. Aspirants may struggle to connect abstract wisdom to real-life struggles. That's exactly how the essay paper of UPSC Mains 2025 can be defined. The UPSC Civil Services Main Exam 2025 began with the Essay paper.

There were 8 essay topics divided into two sections, out of which candidates were asked to write on two topics in 3 hours, selecting one from each section. Candidates were expected to answer in about 1000–1200 words for each essay. The maximum marks for the essay paper are 250 (125 each).



*The UPSC Civil Services Main exam 2025 started off today with the Essay paper. Here's our analysis.*

*Here are the topics and brief analysis:*

### Section A

#### #1. Truth knows no color.

*The quote is easy; your insight shouldn't be*

Did you expect such an easy quote? UPSC chose to inaugurate this year's Mains paper with an essay on a value — one of the most important for the human race: truth. The quote is attributed to Frederick Douglass, who was an

American social reformer, abolitionist, and statesman. He was the most significant leader of the African-American civil rights movement in the 19th century. He said, “Right is of no Sex — Truth is of no Color — God is the Father of us all, and we are all brethren.” (1847) Do you know who he was? If you don’t, it’s fine. If you know him, it’s a brownie point.

But simply speaking, the quote — as it appears at face value — means that truth is universal and impartial; it is not influenced by race or color. One value leads to others: justice, fairness, impartiality, equality, and morality should not be based on race or be discriminatory of any kind.

While there is definitely ample scope to write on slavery, civil rights, discriminations of various kinds, and connect it to Gandhi’s popular concept of truth (“There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness.”), the major challenge is how to stand out. You may write about the antithesis: remember Foucault, who believed that truth is related to power structures. Or you may take us through lived experiences which suggest that although ultimate moral truths may be universal, our access to them is often filtered through the lens of discrimination. We are living in an age where every second day truth is contested, in the home, office, and society. It’s your truth vs my truth. However, it is advised not to miss the overall positive tone.

A simple quote is a confidence booster for many candidates — especially if it is also close to your Ethics paper. You must have definitely prepared essays on the theme of truth as a practice set. In previous years, questions on ‘truth’ have been asked in various forms: ‘Wisdom finds truth’ (2019), ‘Truth is lived, not taught’ (1996), ‘When money speaks, the truth is silent’ (1995), ‘Search for truth can only be a spiritual problem’ (2002). We say it’s a simple topic for a reason. Take this past year’s question based on the subject of truth and compare yourself: “Falsehood takes the place of truth when it results in unblemished common good.” — Tirukkural (2018, Ethics paper).

*Easy to write, difficult to shine? Just saying.*

## #2. The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

*Predictable quote, calls for fresh wisdom and persuasive power*

Who didn’t expect a quote on war, especially in the times we live in? Whether you prepared it as part of your ethics paper or essay, it must have brought a smile to your face for sure (not because of war, but the topic). No one expected a question asking you to justify war. So, the UPSC picked a quote that is mostly attributed to Sun Tzu (author of ‘The Art of War’) and advocates for strategic thinking, the art of persuasion, the strength of diplomacy, and the power of intellect over force.

Of course, you will support this quote—but how? Politically, philosophically, and morally? Since you may be India’s next diplomat, this is one skill that the examiners expect from you the most. Soft power is something that will definitely come to your mind. Victory without bloodshed—achieved through conversation—is the finest legacy of wise warriors. True that.

But not all conversations are pleasant, and they may not always offer solutions. A simple question that may strike your mind is: “How can world leaders employ ethical principles to resolve global conflicts and prevent wars?” The recent talks between the US and Ukrainian presidents have drawn global attention, sparking questions about whether this is the right approach for leaders to address a situation that continues to impact lives. Should leaders revisit the ethics of international relations? How should global leadership approach war or engage with opposing parties in conflicts?

Anyway, war itself doesn’t necessarily mean armed conflict. Remember: the Cold War—or in today’s times, cyber

warfare, sanctions, and economic warfare. Also, some conflicts cannot be resolved without fighting, as history tells us. In fact, excessive dependence on diplomacy or appeasement can backfire—the Munich Agreement (1938), which failed to prevent WWII, is a case in point.

But again, you know what line you have to stick to—coming from the land of Gandhi and Buddha, and as India's next finest diplomat. *Will you be able to persuade the examiner?*

### #3. Thought finds a world and creates one also.

#### *Out-of-the-box thinking, but don't over do it*

Dive deep into philosophy, but here is a word of caution: don't make things complex or boring, because this topic on 'thoughts' has the potential to ruin your flow of ideas. This simple quote is directive in nature—go with the flow. Talk about the power of ideas, human cognition, and imagination, which both discover and create reality.

Basics: Thoughts are not passive; they discover, create, and invent. Take examples from science, philosophy, art, literature, etc. A different answer script may also include examples of social movements. Remember Kant, Plato, and other philosophers.

Also, remember that not all ideas and thoughts lead to something positive and constructive—they can be destructive too. So keep a balanced view.

But thoughts are limited by reality as well, aren't they? External factors, delusions, overthinking, and over-idealizing impose constraints. Your thoughts may have wings (we hope so), but imagining flying unaided will have gravity to prevent it. Right?

Anyway, it's not the content that is the problem. The real worry is the structure of the essay and the flow of your ideas. Your fear shouldn't be the word limit, but rather the examiner losing interest. You have reached the mains level of the exam. Of course, you are wise. *But is your essay tight?*

### #4. Best lessons are learnt through bitter experiences.

#### *Can you turn this 'everyday quote' to timeless wisdom?*

How many times have you heard this quote? Every time you fall. Who better than a UPSC aspirant to write about it—but hold your feelings. This topic, like previous ones, has huge scope for citing examples from personalities, history, and philosophy. If you know quotes, poetry, and anecdotes, use them wisely.

But there is something about these quotes that may bother you. No matter how many examples you know, the theoretical part is often what you may lack. Remember, examples should support your arguments, not the other way around. So, for example, think: Why do bitter experiences teach us best? Why do they have a lasting impact? How do failures highlight weaknesses more clearly than success does? Connecting to philosophy will always give you an edge, like Buddhist philosophy: "Suffering as a path to enlightenment." Reflect on what qualities are cultivated through hardships.

But what about positive experiences? Is it only failure that has the power to impact? Learning from positive experiences, mentorship, or observation also matters. Some lessons come from inspiration, not only from suffering. At times, excessive bitterness or trauma can hinder growth if not processed well.

Caution: You don't need to make it a gloomy essay, even if the topic suggests so. Also, don't start filling pages by talking only about your personal failures and losses. *Emotions in check, clarity in command.*

## Section B

### #5. Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone.

***When the counterpoint matters as much as the quote***

How good are you with metaphors? Here's a test through this quote: Stirring muddy water only makes it more opaque. But by leaving it still, the sediment settles naturally. So, non-action clears the water.

What does "muddy water" mean here? It may represent chaos in the human mind, conflicts in personal life or the world, and emotions clouded by confusion. In this sense, our minds are like muddy water. All these situations require the virtue of stillness. So, we may deduce that clarity often comes not from action, but from non-action. Let's allow time and space to do what unnecessary effort cannot. This should remind you of patience, restraint and reflection.

But the battle doesn't end here. The real challenge is to build content.

If you've read good books or have an interest in philosophy like Taoism, writing the content is a cakewalk. Even if you don't, you can still talk about emotional and mental regulation or the power of meditation. Reflect on how emotions and thoughts settle before making decisions. Suggest how this quote holds value in emotional healing, personal relationships, leadership, and governance.

There is a counterpoint too and expressing that is a challenge as well. Not all muddy situations clear up on their own. For example, injustice or emergencies often require immediate action, don't they? Silence in the face of moral wrongs is not wisdom in any sense.

***So, ultimately, it's about knowing when to step back and when to step in. Even in choosing the topic. Did this click with you?***

### #6. The years teach much which the days never know.

***Only the brave proceed. Enter if you dare.***

A strict 'no' for a topic where elaboration is a challenge. This quote, often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, reflects on how some lessons only reveal themselves over time, beyond what can be grasped in a single day, moment, or event. So, daily experiences may be superficial but over years, those may mature into meaningful learning. Easy to decode. But how to proceed. What is the nature of daily experiences and what do we learn from them? What is the nature of time in learning? Can you think of examples? Ponder through examples of leadership and history.

Neuroscience tells that memory, emotion, and learning consolidate over time, especially through lived experience. So, Wisdom is not in the rush of days but in the silence of years. We learn through various stages of life. But can days teach too? Aren't some moments powerful and transformative?

Keep the structure tight: Interpret, analyze, illustrate and reflect. We understand that adding philosophical or psychological references for depth is not easy for everyone. But atleast avoid sounding too abstract. Can you ground this essay in relatable experiences? ***Tough, we know that. You have been warned (politely).***

## #7. It is best to see life as a journey not as a destination.

***The examiner's seen the quote—show them something they haven't seen***

Why viewing life as a journey leads to fulfillment, resilience, and personal development, whereas obsessing over destinations can create pressure, disappointment, and a shallow sense of success. Life as a journey in relationships: love grows in daily kindness, not just in reaching milestones. In careers: it's not just about promotions, but about skills developed and relationships built. Obsession with results (destination) can lead to stress, burnout, and unhappiness.

It's too simple to analyse. This is a very familiar quote, but writing an essay on it can be surprisingly tough. Here's why:

Overfamiliarity breeds generic statements. The challenge is to write something fresh, insightful, and original, not just repeat what everyone already knows. Abstract ideas are hard to organise into thoughts. How will you balance examples, logic, and philosophy? The essay demands a mature understanding of life, growth, and time.

Remember, the tone of the quote is idealistic. But a good essay should also explore counterpoints. For example: isn't the destination important in some cases? Without an antithesis, the essay will be one-sided. Such an essay will require diverse examples. So, for essays like this, depth, balance, and originality are qualities that are needed—but not easy to produce on the spot, especially under exam pressure. ***Can you think of unique angles or examples to help you avoid clichés in this essay?***

## #8. Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty.

***Heard it, loved it, now write on it!***

Socrates is back in the question paper. It's a simple quote to decode—yet again. “True happiness and fulfillment come from within, from being satisfied with what you have, rather than seeking external validation through material possessions.” Easy, isn't it?

Highly relevant in today's materialistic world, the quote offers rich ground to explore themes like minimalism vs. materialism, inner peace vs. external excess, and needs vs. wants. It will be rewarding to quote Stoicism, Buddhism, Gandhi, etc., to support your argument. In contemporary contexts, reflect on the age of consumerism, social media, fast lifestyles, mental health and burnout, the pressure to “have more,” sustainability, and simple living.

There is scope for comparative thinking too — explore different cultures, ideologies, and economic systems.

Here's a piece of advice: this essay works best when you treat contentment not as a lack of desire, but as a higher-order value—a conscious choice not to be enslaved by endless craving.

***But here's a word of caution as well: nobody likes it when you are preachy!***

Overall, it can be said that abstract ideas must be well-organized. The challenge is also how you stand out without missing the essence of the quote. Also, without an antithesis, such essays may appear one-sided. But most importantly, since there is no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool allowed in the examination hall, are you skilled enough to write a good essay under exam pressure—even if the topics seem simple? That is the point to ponder after the UPSC Mains 2025 Essay paper.

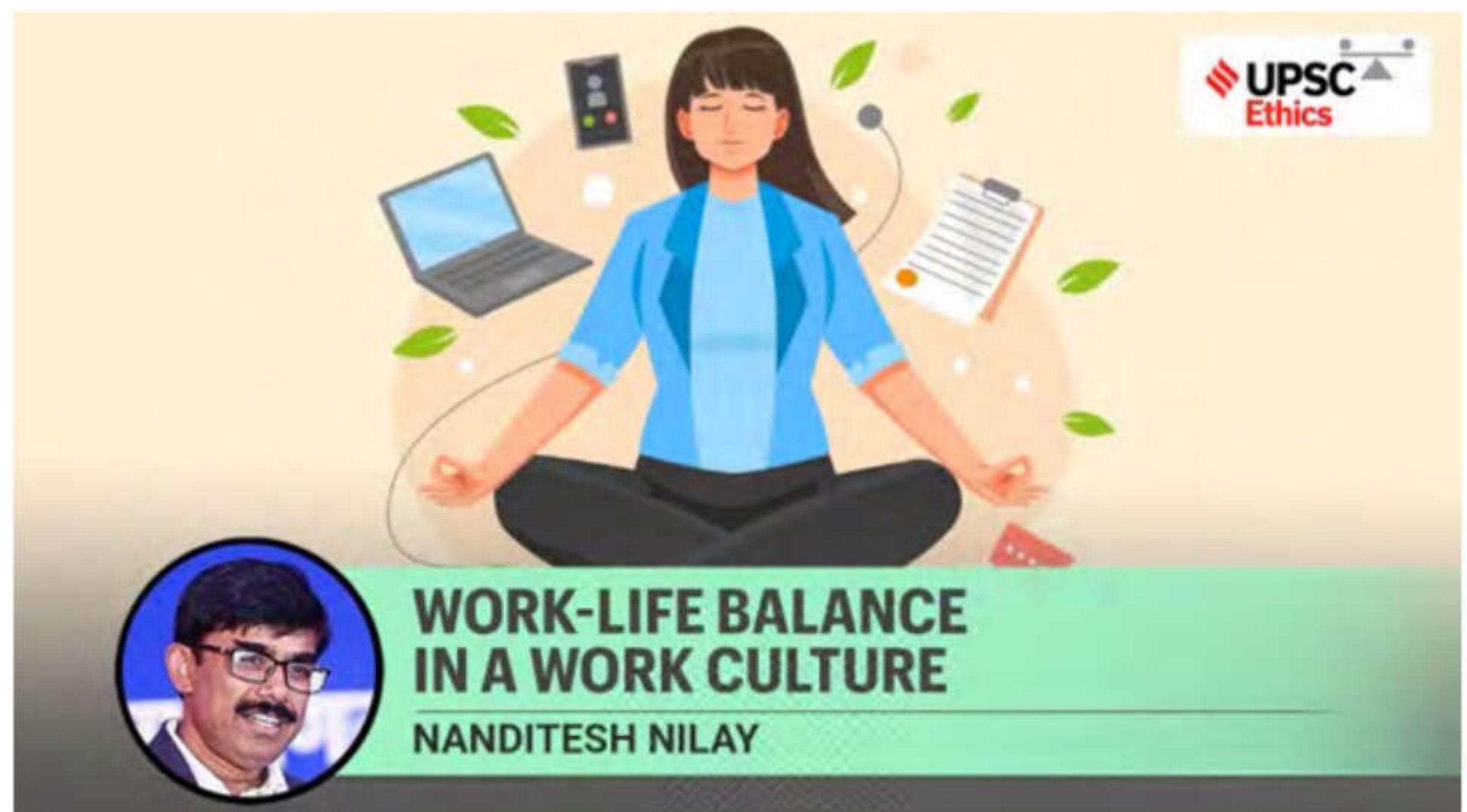
## UPSC Ethics Simplified

# Why is work-life balance vital for a healthy work culture?

UPSC Ethics Paper: Why are work-life balance and leadership's role in fostering a healthy, productive, and humane work culture essential for work ethics? Ethicist Nanditesh Nilay discusses.

Written by **Nanditesh Nilay**

Work as a duty has ethical foundations. Work is worship, and it has been taught to all of us. Lord Krishna advised Arjuna to work not for personal gain but with a sense of duty. That moral intention can be seen as both Kantian and Utilitarian. But what about the modern day work-life? It is true, and one shouldn't wait till the end of this article to accept that health, happiness, and a caring attitude towards life can keep the quality of life and productivity positive. Suicide or depression should never be the outcome of any work culture. When the news headlines reported that the Chief Manager of Bank of Baroda died by suicide, what it read in sub-texts was that an important 'balance' was missing from his life.



*Work life balance is not about time management. It is about work ethics and positive work culture.  
(Source: Freepik)*

### The 70–90 hour debate : Productivity vs. Pressure

A few months ago, when Infosys founder, Narayan Murthy talked about working seventy hours a week to fulfill the dream of a developed India, a debate erupted across the country about working hours. The chairman of Larsen & Toubro, SN Subrahmanyam, even said that if it were up to him, he would like to see his employees in the office even on Sundays—and not just for seventy hours, but for ninety hours a week.

This debate has impacted the work-life balance of every employee who leaves for the office at 8 a.m. and returns home around 8 or 9 p.m.—a twelve-hour workday. And even at home, WhatsApp and phone calls keep him connected to the office.

## Dehumanizing work: Humans are not machines

Let's self reflect through questions. In the age of AI and cut-throat competition, is man being treated as a machine? That God-like customer always demands an emotional and balanced employee — but isn't that employee also a social being? Does productivity depend only on the number of hours worked, or also on the motivation of the employee? Do organizations not play a role in the happiness or family responsibilities of their employees?

If family relationships are a source of happiness, then why is it not considered necessary for an employee to spend time with their family? Does institutional commitment or productivity depend only on the number of hours worked? Even when we advocate ethics in governance, do we realize that ethics itself requires mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical understanding, grounded in significant values? Under such work pressure, what kind of culture will be practiced?

## Work-life balance from the prism of work culture and work ethics

There can be many versions of the definition of *work-life balance*. Simply put, however, the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as the amount of time you spend doing your job compared to the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy. So, the ability to divide one's time and energy between work and other important aspects of life (family, personal life, recreation) is a step towards healthy work-life balance.

While it might not seem very important at first, work-life balance is essential for a healthy *work culture* — one built on meaningful work, open communication, and core values, and characterized by an atmosphere of respect, inclusivity, and trust between employees and management. So, healthy work culture expands the definition of work-life balance from just time management.

Traditionally, *work ethics* is defined as a set of values that guide an individual's behaviour at work. They are considered the foundation of a productive professional life, incorporating values such as responsibility, integrity, punctuality, hard work, and accountability. However, an important value that lies at the core of work ethics is respect — respect for oneself, one's time, and one's life outside of work (including health and recreation). Maintaining a balanced approach to work and personal life is a reflection of this respect.

## Quantity vs. Quality: What really matters?

The question is one of quantity vs. quality, of balance — both toward work and toward the life of the person doing that work. Is the quantity of working hours the most important factor, or should we also debate the quality of work? Do we need only a productive workforce, or a happy one as well? Can an imbalance in work-life balance endanger life itself? It is about achieving equilibrium. And in achieving so what needs to be ensured is that work demands are met without negatively affecting personal happiness, relationships, and overall health. It involves setting priorities in a manner that personal life does not become insignificant in front of professional life.

How can we forget the death of Table Space CEO Amith Banerji, who died of cardiac arrest at the age of just forty-five? In Bangalore, there have also been reports of other young founders dying prematurely.

## Learning from global experiences

Let's revisit working hours at the global level after the COVID pandemic. We find that many countries have

moved towards a four-day work week, inspired by the work-life balance experienced by employees during that time. Germany, for example, began a six-month trial of a four-day work week on February 1, 2024. They sought to understand how such a work culture makes employees happier, healthier, and more productive. Many labor unions supported the initiative. Countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, and Japan also emphasized the importance of work-life balance. Japan believes that it reduces karoshi, or “death by overwork.”

## Steve Jobs and the ethics of self-reflection

An anecdote shared by Steve Jobs in his 2005 Stanford commencement speech is worth mentioning. He quoted something he had read in his adolescence:

***If you live each day as if it were your last, you will surely be right someday.***

Jobs explained: “For the past thirty-three years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself, ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been ‘No’ for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.”

If one interprets Jobs’ quote, it emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and ethical self-awareness. It makes a strong ethical case for a value-based work culture that isn’t just about performance but also about the human behind that output.

## Stress, health, and the imbalance we ignore

A significant aspect of employees fulfilling their duties successfully involves taking care of their mental and physical health. Employees who maintain a good work-life balance are more likely to stay healthy. How does it help? This enables them to stay committed to their roles, have a clear mind, and remain enthusiastic most of the time. Why wouldn’t an employer want that? But in order to cultivate such a work culture, organizations have a moral responsibility to provide an environment that encourages a balance between life and work.

A work environment that respects employees’ need for time off is an important component of work ethic. Imbalance in work-life can lead to stress and can be fatal. Dr. Ranjan Shetty, a cardiologist at Manipal Hospital, writes in his article that imbalance in work-life is a major cause of untimely deaths. If people do not take a break from work, stress will inevitably increase.

## Motivation and Management: Theory Y in practice

Pressure at work, combined with less time to rest, may lead to dishonesty, misrepresentation of results, neglect of tasks due to fatigue, or unprecedented losses. However, maintaining a work-life balance encourages honesty and accountability among employees. Here comes the role of motivation which is an important part of employee management.

In Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, Theory Y emphasizes that if employees are properly motivated and the workplace atmosphere is positive, people will do their work happily. A point to remember: the salary and responsibilities of senior management differ significantly from those of middle and junior management. This imbalance also needs to be acknowledged.

## Leadership Matters: The bottleneck at the top

Work-life balance enables individuals to focus on their assigned job effectively without burning out. Therefore, employers must remember that for long-term efficiency, sustainability, and productivity, this crucial aspect of work ethics must be respected. As Bajaj Auto's MD Rahul Bajaj once said, "The leadership of any company needs to understand why, even after spending twelve hours a day, the desired level of productivity is not achieved." He further warned, "The bottleneck is always at the top of the bottle."

## The ethical case for work-life balance: it goes beyond just time management

In today's fast moving world, integrating work-life balance into daily practices is essential. Work-life balance must be taken seriously by both leaders and employees. It is in fact part of the basic work ethic. It goes beyond just time management. It involves valuing the humans. Efficiency, productivity, integrity, and honesty are all linked to a positive work culture that demands a work-life balance. If work becomes life (purpose), and life becomes work (family), balance can be achieved. And that balance depends on mindfulness, purpose, and principles that define both work and life.

### Post-Read Question:

#### What is the link between work-life balance and work ethics?

*(The writer is the author of 'Being Good', 'Aaiye, Insaan Banaen', 'Kyon' and 'Ethikos: Stories Searching Happiness'. He teaches courses on and offers training in ethics, values and behaviour. He has been the expert/consultant to UPSC, SAARC countries, Civil services Academy, National Centre for Good Governance, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Competition Commission of India (CCI), etc. He has PhD in two disciplines and has been a Doctoral Fellow in Gandhian Studies from ICSSR. His second PhD is from IIT Delhi on Ethical Decision Making among Indian Bureaucrats. He writes for the UPSC Ethics Simplified (concepts and caselets) fortnightly.)*

## UPSC Current Affairs Pointers

# Prelims Tidbits from the month of August

UPSC Current Affairs Pointers aim to help you consolidate your Prelims and Mains preparation. Take a quick look at key current affairs tidbits from August 4, 2025 to August 31, 2025 — curated especially for aspirants preparing for the UPSC, State PSC, and other competitive examinations.

Compiled by: **Khushboo Kumari**

### Award

#### • 2025 Ramon Magsaysay Award

— The 67th Ramon Magsaysay Awardees include **Foundation to Educate Girls Globally** from India, **Shaahina Ali** from the Maldives, for her environmental work, and **Flaviano Antonio L Villanueva** from the Philippines

— The **Foundation to Educate Girls Globally**, widely known as '**Educate Girls**', has made history as the first Indian organisation to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award, a statement from the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation (RMAF) said here.

— An official statement from the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation (RMAF) said it was honouring the group for its "commitment to addressing cultural stereotyping through the education of girls and young women, liberating them from the bondage of illiteracy and infusing them with skills, courage, and agency to achieve their full human potential."

— Past Indian recipients include former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, journalist Ravish Kumar, activist Bezwada Wilson and environmentalist Sonam Wangchuk.

— Launched in 1958, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, widely considered to be **Asia's equivalent to the Nobel Prize**, recognises outstanding leadership and communitarian contributions in Asia.

— The winners are presented with a certificate and a medallion with an embossed image of Ramon Magsaysay facing right in profile.



*Educate Girls also launched Pragati, an open-schooling programme that allows young women aged 15-29 to complete their education and avail themselves of lifelong opportunities with the initial cohort having 300 learners that has grown to over 31,500. (Image: Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation via AP)*

## Reports

(FYI: The data provided in these reports can be used to substantiate your Mains answer and create a broad understanding of the topic.)

### ● **Lancet Countdown on health and plastics**

- The Lancet Report warned of a grave threat from plastics to human and planetary health, but said the harm can be mitigated through effectively implemented policies.
- The medical journal also launched a health-focused global monitoring system on the manufacture and use of plastics, called the **Lancet Countdown on health and plastics**. This is similar to the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change it had launched to monitor the health impacts of climate change.
- Plastic is durable and persists for decades in the environment, an estimated 8 Gigatons of plastic waste – 80% of all plastic ever made – now pollutes the planet – a massive problem by any measure.
- **Plastics** contain more than 16,000 chemicals. These chemicals leak out of plastic products during use and get into people, especially children.
- It includes chemicals that are known to be human carcinogens, neurotoxicants, and endocrine disruptors, as well as many more that have never been tested for toxicity and whose dangers are still unknown.

### ● **New paper on diabetes in India in the Lancet journal**

- According to a new paper published in ‘**The Lancet Global Health**’ journal, “at least one in five people aged 45 and older had diabetes in India in 2019.
- Significantly, two out of five people with diabetes (or 40 per cent of those diagnosed) were unaware of their condition.
- 46 per cent of the people identified regained control of their blood sugar levels, 59 per cent achieved blood pressure control and six per cent took a lipid-lowering medication to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- The Lancet paper is based on the findings from the **Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI)** that surveyed nearly 60,000 adults in India aged 45 years and older between 2017 and 2019 to estimate the prevalence, awareness, treatment and control of diabetes.
- The study also provides updated evidence on the patterns of diabetes within India. States in southern India tend to have a higher rate of diabetes after adjusting for age, while others in central and northeastern India have a lower rate.

## Art and Culture

### ● **‘At Home’ invite to Independence Day guests**

- An invitation kit has been sent for this year by Rashtrapati Bhawan for the ‘At Home’ which was held on August 15 marking the 79th Independence Day.
- The invitation kits have been put together by the **National Institute of Design**, Ahmedabad, in collaboration with over 100 artisans, mostly women, from the four states.

— The invitee box is woven from sikki grass, a lesser known traditional craft from Bihar and a cloth bag with a hand-painted Madhubani tag to holds it.

— Inside the box is a bamboo frame carrying an invite and four other paintings, showcasing popular artforms from West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand, besides Bihar.

— The four paintings include **Tikuli art**, an 800-year-old folk painting style from Patna; **Pattachitra**, which is practised by the Patua community of Medinipur, Bengal; **Talapatra Chitra**, the palm leaf scrolls of Odisha; and **Paitkar painting**, an old tribal scroll tradition from Jharkhand's Amadubi village.



*The invitation kit sent to the guests. (Image source: Rashtrapati Bhavan)*

### ● **Dhirio or Dhiri**

— During a discussion in the Goa Assembly, legislators across party lines demanded the legalisation of **bull fighting** in Goa which is locally referred to as dhirio or dhiri.

— Dhiri was a “part and parcel of every Church fest” and villagers from miles around would gather to witness the popular sport in which “two thorough-bred bulls fight each other”.

— A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on May 18, 2023 upheld the amendments made by the legislatures of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka to The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, allowing bull-taming sports like jallikattu, kambala, and bullock-cart races.

— **Jallikattu** is a traditional sport practiced in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and **Kambala** is a buffalo race celebrated in Karnataka.

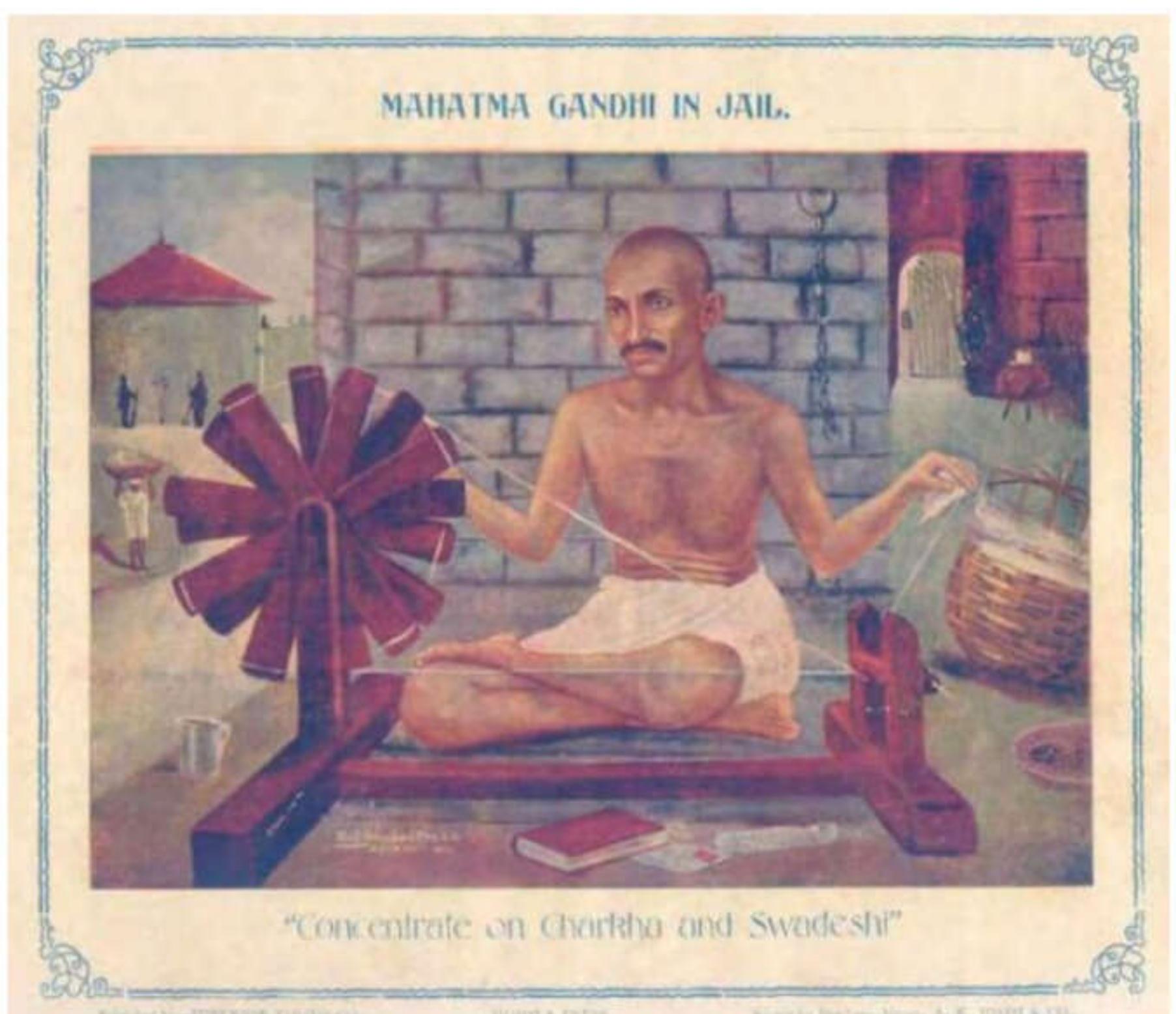
## Events

### ● **National Handloom Day**

— The observance of National Handloom Day was inaugurated on August 7, 2015, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

— This year marks the **11th anniversary** to be celebrated on **7th August 2025**, with the theme **“Weaving Innovation into Tradition.”**

— This date was chosen to commemorate the launch of the Swadeshi Movement on August 7, 1905. The Swadeshi movement was launched after Lord Curzon announced the division of Bengal into two provinces – East Bengal and Assam (predominantly Muslim), and



*August 15, 1947, the values promoted by the Swadeshi Movement were symbolically represented when Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled a hand-spun Khadi flag, marking India's independence. (Source: Wikipedia Commons)*

the western province called Bengal (primarily Hindus) on July 19, 1905.

- **August Kranti Diwas**

- August Kranti Diwas, also known as the **Quit India Movement Day**, marks the historic Quit India Movement.
- It was launched on **August 8, 1942**, calling for the immediate withdrawal of British forces from the country under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

- **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples**

- The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on **August 9 every year**. This date was adopted in December 1994 by the UN General Assembly.
- The theme of this year is “Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures”.
- UNESCO marks the celebration of the Day by sharing information on projects and activities that are relevant to the annual theme.

(Source: UNESCO)

- **World Organ Donation Day 2025**

- World Organ Donation Day is observed on **August 13** every year, and this year's theme is “Answering The Call”, as designated by the Organ Donation and Transplant Alliance.
- **Ronald Lee Herrick** was the first person to donate an organ. In 1954, he donated his kidney to his twin brother, and Dr Joseph Murray performed the successful organ transplant.
- Later, in 1990, he received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine for pioneering breakthroughs in organ transplantation.
- In India, **National Organ Day** was observed on November 27th until 2022. It was later shifted to the **3rd of August**, commemorating India's first successful deceased-donor heart transplant on August 3rd, 1994.



*India has built one of the most comprehensive and integrated organ transplant frameworks in the Global South (Source: Freepik)*

- **All India Speakers Conference**

- The All India Speakers Conference was held at the Delhi Legislative Assembly.
- The Conference is being organised to mark the centenary of **Vithalbhai Patel** becoming the first elected Indian speaker of the Central Legislative Council, equivalent of the Parliament then.

- **National Space Day 2025**

— The National Space Day is celebrated on **August 23** to mark the successful landing of the Vikram Lander from the Chandrayaan-3 mission.

— This is the 2nd National Space Day with the theme “*Aryabhatta to Gaganyaan: Ancient Wisdom to Infinite Possibilities*”.

- **E Vitara**

— On August 26, the Prime Minister inaugurated and flagged off the “e Vitara”, Maruti Suzuki’s first Made-in-India global Battery Electric Vehicle at the Suzuki Motor plant in Hansalpur, Ahmedabad.

— The **Battery Electric Vehicle** replaces the internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, with Li-ion making it fully powered by electricity. It is more efficient compared to hybrid and plug-in hybrids.

## Environment

- **Rhisotope Project**

— The University of the Witwatersrand, supported by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), formally launched the **Rhisotope Project**, an anti-poaching campaign.

— It injects radioactive isotopes into rhino horns. The method is harmless for the rhinos and allows customs agents to detect trafficked horns. Five rhinos were administered radioactive isotope injections in the **Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, South Africa**.

— According to the IAEA, **radioactive isotopes or radioisotopes** are the unstable form of an element that emit radiation to transform into a more stable form. The radiation can be traced and typically causes changes in the substance it falls upon.

— Through a non-invasive procedure, rhino horns are tagged with low doses of radioactive isotopes, allowing for their ready detection by radiation portal monitors (RPMs) already deployed at borders, ports, and airports worldwide to identify unauthorised nuclear materials.



*The injections being administered to rhinos. (IAEA photo)*

- **INS Guldar — waits to be sunk**

— INS Guldar, a **decommissioned Navy warship**, will soon be deliberately sunk — or ‘scuttled’ — to breathe new life into its metal bones, transforming it into an **artificial reef** and an underwater tourist attraction. It will be India’s first underwater museum as well.

- Though scuttled ships have been used to create artificial reefs elsewhere in the world, this is the first such attempt in India.
- Scuttling is usually a wartime tactic involving the deliberate sinking of a vessel — in case of an emergency or to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. It follows the **Archimedes principle**.
- The ageing INS Guldar, a Kumbhir-class landing ship designed for amphibious warfare and capable of beach landings, was once part of India's peacekeeping mission in Sri Lanka. Built at Poland's Gdynia Shipyard, INS Guldar was commissioned into the Indian Navy nearly four decades ago, in 1985.

### Archimedes Principle

- *In physics, the Archimedes Principle refers to the law of buoyancy (the ability or tendency of something to float in water or other fluids).*
- *According to the principle, when an object is completely or partially submerged in a fluid, whether gas or liquid, it is acted upon by an upward force (buoyancy) equal to the weight of the fluid it has displaced.*
- *The force acting downward on the object is the weight of the object. The upward force is the one given by the Archimedes Principle. The difference between the two forces is the net force acting on the object.*
- *If the buoyant force is more than the weight, the object rises; if it is less, the object sinks. If the net force is zero, the object remains in place, and neither rises nor sinks.*

- **Living lab approach**

— **Kanichar** — 60 km from Kannur — is India's first village panchayat where a **living lab approach** has been adopted for enhancing climate sensitivity and people's resilience capacity.

— Implemented by the **Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA)**, the project has one aim — making the 4,600-odd household owners in the panchayat resilient to natural disasters.

— The **living lab approach** is an ecosystem that integrates real-world settings with research and innovation to create and test solutions.



Kanichar village in Kerala's Kannur district. (Express Photo)

— First developed in the Netherlands, the approach is marked by the involvement of several stakeholders — including government, experts, private agencies and civic society — to find real-world solutions.

— This panchayat will also have an early landslide warning system installed by **IIT-Roorkee**. This is the **first time in the country** that the concept is being implemented with landslide as the focal theme.

### ● **Sperm Whale vomit**

- The Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Ahmedabad Rural Police arrested two men with 2.976 kg of illicit sperm whale vomit (ambergris), police said.
- Trade of ambergris is banned in India as the sperm whale is a **Schedule 1** species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- They are listed as **vulnerable** in the IUCN Red List.
- Ambergris, which means gray amber in French, is a waxy substance that originates from the digestive system of the protected sperm whales. This excretion is so valuable it is referred to as **floating gold**.
- It is often found floating in the sea and rarely even spotted on beaches and coastlines. It is highly prized for its scent and is used illegally in the production of perfumes.
- They are the largest of the toothed whales. They are the only whales in the world that have large enough throats to swallow a human.
- They are named after the waxy substance—**spermaceti**—found in their heads. The spermaceti is an oil sac that helps the whales focus sound.

### ● **Tiger corridors**

- Recently, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has limited the number of tiger corridors, primarily, to only 32 “least cost pathways” identified in 2014.
- Now, the benchmark primarily consists of the “least cost pathways” identified in its 2014 report and the ones recorded by tiger reserves in their individual TCPs.
- **Tiger corridors** are vital wildlife pathways that connect tiger habitats, enabling animal movement, gene flow, and long-term survival.
- There were benchmarks that were applied in determining a corridor:
  - \* Protected Areas occupied by tigers,
  - \* Least cost pathways identified in 2014,
  - \* Corridors marked in Tiger Conservation Plans (TCPs) of each reserve,
  - \* Corridors identified by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) — “Tiger corridors of eastern Vidarbha landscape” — in 2016,
  - \* Corridors identified by WII — “Telemetry based tiger corridors of Vidarbha” landscape” — in 2021, and
  - \* Distribution of tigers based on quadrennial all-India Tiger Estimations (AITEs).
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a **statutory body** under the Ministry of Environment,

Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.

### ● Orange Shark

- A rare, vividly orange nurse shark has been discovered off the coast of Costa Rica, baffling scientists and prompting renewed interest in marine pigmentation anomalies.
- This peculiar colouration is due to **xanthism**—also known as xanthochroism—a rare condition of pigmentation.
- Xanthism causes excessive yellow or golden hues due to a **lack of red pigmentation**. It has never been documented before in cartilaginous fish, the group of species that includes sharks, rays, and skates, in the Caribbean.
- In addition to its golden-orange skin, the nurse shark also showed signs of **albinism**, particularly a pair of striking white eyes.
- The origin of the pigmentation is still uncertain. While xanthism is often the result of a genetic mutation, environmental factors such as diet could also play a role.



A rare orange nurse shark with signs of xanthism and albinism has been found off Costa Rica's coast (Source: X/Past To Future)

### ● Blue Dragons

- Several beaches in Spain were closed earlier this month after a tiny species of sea slug began to wash ashore in droves. These were **blue dragons**—barely four centimetres long but capable of delivering one of the most ferocious stings in the animal world.
- Blue dragons (*Glaucus atlanticus*) are a small type of sea slug that live on the ocean surface, drifting with the currents.
- While other sea slugs live on the seabed, blue dragons float upside down, like when we float on our backs. They can do so by swallowing and maintaining an air bubble in the stomach.
- Blue dragons have another unique trait. They **feed on jellyfish** and venomous siphonophores such as the Portuguese man o' war, and incorporate the stinging cells of the jellies into multiple finger-like structures protruding from their bodies.
- Blue dragons occur in the warm tropical waters of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans. However, they have been rarely seen in the Mediterranean Sea. Being at the coast of Spain is a cause for concern. Scientists suggest that the blue dragons' arrival could be linked to rising Mediterranean temperatures.



Blue dragons (*Glaucus atlanticus*) are a small type of sea slug. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

- **Portuguese man o' war**

- **Portuguese man o' war** is a species of siphonophore, a group of animals that are closely related to jellyfish.
- A **siphonophore** is unusual in that it is comprised of a colony of specialized, genetically identical individuals called zooids — clones — with various forms and functions, all working together as one.
- Each of the four specialized parts of a man o' war is responsible for a specific task, such as floating, capturing prey, feeding, and reproduction.

(Source: oceanservice.noaa.gov)

- **Ghaggar River**

- Villages in Mohali and Patiala districts in Punjab were placed on heavy alert on Friday (August 29) after the Ghaggar River **crossed the 10-foot danger mark** at Bhankarpur in Mohali.
- The Ghaggar originates in the Shivalik foothills near Dagshai in Himachal Pradesh and enters the plains near **Kalka and Panchkula in Haryana**. Flowing southwest, it briefly runs along the Haryana-Punjab border before entering Punjab near Dera Bassi.
- The Ghaggar is regarded as **Malwa's “river of sorrow”** due to its repeated flooding and devastation. Almost dry for most of the year, it suddenly swells during the monsoon, inundating fields and villages.
- Ghaggar receives water from several tributaries and seasonal choes or streams that originate in the Shivalik foothills. Major tributaries include Kaushalya Nadi, Tangri, Markanda, Sarsa, Patiala Badi Nadi, Patiala Ki Rao, Jhabo Wali Choe, and Sirhind Choe.
- There is no major dam on the river. However, the Kaushalya Dam on the Kaushalya Nadi, near Pinjore in Haryana, serves as the main flood-control and water conservation structure in the basin.

## International

- **India and the Philippines conduct a naval drill**

- India and the Philippines began the two-day “bilateral maritime cooperative activity” on 2nd August in waters close to the Scarborough Shoal, a focal point of the maritime dispute between China and the Philippines.
- The Scarborough Shoal, also known as **Huangyan Island**, is located in the **South China Sea**.
- India delivered the first batch of **BrahMos missile system** to the Philippines on April 19, 2024, making it the first foreign nation to acquire the



India and the Philippines are celebrating 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relation.  
(PTI Photo)

missile weapon system.

— BrahMos is an extremely versatile stand-off range ‘**fire-and-forget**’ type supersonic cruise missile that has proved its capabilities in land-based, ship-based, air-launched, and submarine-based versions.

— It is a two-stage missile with a solid propellant booster engine. BrahMos Integration and Testing Facility Centre was recently inaugurated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in Lucknow.

— The Philippines ranks **sixth** among the 10 ASEAN member states in trade with India. In 2023–24, bilateral trade was \$3.5 billion: Indian exports accounted for approximately \$2 billion, while imports from the Philippines reached about \$1.5 billion.

— India and the Philippines announced a **strategic partnership** after bilateral talks between Modi and visiting Philippine President Ferdinand R Marcos Jr.

— India and the Philippines are celebrating 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations and the two leaders released a postage stamp to commemorate the occasion.

### ● **Peace Agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia**

— Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a US-brokered peace agreement on Friday (8th August) during a meeting with US President Donald Trump.

— The agreement includes exclusive US development rights to a strategic transit corridor through the South Caucasus that the White House said would facilitate greater exports of energy and other resources.

— Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at odds since the late 1980s when **Nagorno-Karabakh** – a mountainous Azerbaijani region that had a mostly ethnic Armenian population – broke away from Azerbaijan with support from Armenia.

— Both Armenia and Azerbaijan won independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Azerbaijan took back full control of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 in a military offensive, prompting almost all of the territory’s remaining 100,000 Armenians to flee to Armenia.

— Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous region officially recognised as part of Azerbaijan. But its 1.2 lakh population is predominantly ethnic Armenian, having close cultural, social, and historical ties with Armenia.

— Nagorno-Karabakh is an ethnic Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. The Armenians are Christians, while Azeris are Muslims. The conclave is connected to Armenia through the 5-km **Lachin Corridor**.

### ● **Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)**

— On August 11, the United States designated the Pakistani separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and its wing the Majeed Brigade as a **Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO)**.

— The BLA is among the most prominent flagbearers of Balochistan’s decades-long separatist movement. Pakistan has often accused India of fomenting separatism, a charge New Delhi has denied.

— An FTO designation for an organisation — under **section 219** of the Immigration and Nationality Act — makes extending support to it criminal in the US. This support can include everything from logistical to intelligence to financial aid.

— Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Iran. With gas, oil, copper and gold deposits, it is the most resource-rich of Pakistan's four provinces, but lags behind in development and economic growth.

- **Second part of the fifth session (INC-5.2)**

— The second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5.2) took place from 5 to 14 August 2025 at the **Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland**.

— A new draft on the plastics treaty was shared on 13th August on the penultimate day of the global negotiations.

— The draft has left out provisions on plastic production cuts, chemicals of concerns, and no clear definition of plastics, threatening to derail consensus on an agreement.

— This leg of negotiations collapsed yet again, and the chair of negotiations decided to adjourn the session to resume it at a later date.

- **Equator Prize 2025**

— The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** announced the ten winners of the Equator Prize 2025.

— It was launched in 2002 to honor Indigenous and local communities using nature-based solutions.

— The theme of this year is “**Nature for Climate Action**,” with a special focus on youth- and women-led climate action

— One of the winners is **Bibifathima Swa Sahaya Sangha** (Bibifathima Self Help Group) from Karnataka, India.

— According to the UNDP, this women-led initiative supports over 5,000 farmers across 30 villages through millet-based multi-cropping, seed banks, and solar-powered processing.

(Source: UNDP)

- **French submersible Nautile**

— Two Indian aquanauts - Cdr (Retd) **Jatinder Pal Singh** and **R Ramesh** - have taken dives to depths of nearly 4,000 metres and 5,000 metres in the Atlantic Ocean on board the French submersible Nautile.

— The Nautile gave the Indian team more than a seat — it gave them first-hand exposure to mission protocols, vessel handling, and recovery operations.

— This is the deepest an Indian has ever gone underwater. Until now, most submarine dives involving Indians were limited to 500 metres, with the previous record — 670 metres — held by one of the aquanauts, Cdr (Retd) Jatinder Pal Singh.



Aquanauts Singh and Ramesh inside the spherical vessel.(Express Photo)

- The August 4 and 5 dives saw Singh reach 5,002 metres and R Ramesh touch 4,025 metres. During the missions, an Indian flag was unfurled alongside a French one.
- It is part of the preparation for **Samudrayaan**, India's first manned deep-sea mission that aims to send three aquanauts to 6,000 metres by 2027 in the indigenously developed **Matsya6000** submersible.
- Only five countries — the USA, Russia, China, France, and Japan — have so far carried out successful crewed deep-ocean missions; India is set to join this exclusive club.

#### • Alaska Summit

- US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet in Anchorage, Alaska, to focus on reaching a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. However, the summit ended without any concrete outcome.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin said that his summit with US President Donald Trump in Alaska had been “timely and extremely useful,” adding that Moscow respected Washington’s position on the Ukraine conflict and continued to seek a peaceful resolution.
- Putin is the first Russian leader to visit Alaska, which was sold to the US in 1867 for \$7.2 million. He last visited the US in 2015 to attend events at the United Nations.

### MAINS Value-addition

In the context of the ongoing India-US tariff dispute, a few game theories are being referred to by the experts. These can be used in your Main answers.

**‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’** – a classic game theory scenario illustrating why two rational individuals might not cooperate even when it’s in their best interest to do so, essentially highlighting the conflict between individual rationality and collective well-being.

**Game of Chicken**, another game theory scenario where two parties must choose between driving forward or swerving to avoid a crash, and where if neither party backs down, the result could be catastrophic.

**“Hobson’s choice” of sorts**, a reference to a situation where there appears to be a free choice but there is actually no real alternative; the term originates from Thomas Hobson, a 17th-century stable owner in Cambridge, England, who required customers to take the horse nearest the stable door or have no horse at all.

#### • E1 area settlement project

- Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced work would start on a long-delayed revival of the E1 development, east of occupied East Jerusalem.
- The construction on a tract of land east of Jerusalem named E1 has been under consideration for more than two decades, and is especially controversial because it is one of the **last geographic links** between the major West Bank cities of



**Ramallah and Bethlehem.**

- The two cities are 22 kilometers (14 miles) apart by air. But once the E1 settlement project is completed, it will destroy the possibility of a direct route.
- Development in E1 was long frozen, largely due to U.S. pressure during previous administrations.

**• Exercise Bright Star 2025**

- Exercise Bright Star is a multilateral exercise hosted by **Egypt** in conjunction with the US since 1980 and is amongst the largest **Tri-Service multilateral exercises** in the region. The exercise is held biennially, with the last edition having taken place in 2023, which witnessed the participation of a host of nations including India along with troops.
- More than 700 personnel from the Armed Forces & Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff are set to participate in the Multilateral Exercise ‘BRIGHT STAR 2025’ from August 28 to September 10, 2025.

**• 15th India-Japan Economic Forum**

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Japan to attend the 15th India-Japan Annual Summit with his Japanese counterpart Shigeru Ishiba, from August 29-30.

— Modi last travelled to Japan for the Annual Summit in 2018; he has since visited the country for multilateral engagements such as the G20 summit in Osaka in 2019, and the G7 summit in Hiroshima in 2023.

— Notably, the **year 2025** is being celebrated as the **India-Japan Year of Science, Technology and Innovation Exchange**, marking the 40th anniversary of the first MoU on science and technology signed between the two countries.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shigeru Ishiba.  
(Photo: Narendra Modi/X)

**Outcome of the Summit**

- India and Japan agreed to raise the Japanese investment target in India to **10 trillion yen** (\$67.9 billion), with special emphasis on small and medium enterprises and startups.
- India and Japan will exchange about 5 lakh people in the next 5 years, including 50,000 skilled professionals from India.
- India and Japan also agreed on an annual dialogue of their National Security Advisors, who will take a comprehensive stock of the security situations facing India and Japan.
- The two Prime Ministers announced the **India-Japan Economic Security Initiative** to provide momentum for bilateral cooperation in the field of economic security
- They announced the launch of a **Japan-India AI Cooperation Initiative**, which is aimed at deepening bilateral

and multilateral cooperation on artificial intelligence

— An agreement was signed between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) for an exploration of the Moon's polar region under the forthcoming Chandrayaan-5 mission.

— JAXA will launch the Moon mission onboard its **H3-24L launch vehicle**, carrying the ISRO-made lunar lander, which, in turn, will carry the Japan-made lunar rover.

### ● Daruma Doll

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi was presented with a traditional **Daruma doll** during his visit to the **Shorinzen Daruma-Ji Temple in Kitakatsuragi**, Japan, on Friday, August 29, 2025.

— The Daruma is a traditional Japanese wish doll, which is typically made of **papier-mâché**. It is modelled after Bodhidharma, the 5th-century founder of Zen Buddhism.

— The doll is considered a symbol of perseverance and good luck, often used to represent setting and achieving goals.

— The doll's distinctive rounded bottom allows it to pop back up when tipped over, reflecting the Japanese proverb '*Nana korobi ya oki*', which translates to 'fall seven times, get up eight.'

— The Daruma symbolises meditation of Bodhidharma, an Indian monk from Kancheepuram, known in Japan as Daruma Daishi. Bodhidharma is said to have meditated in a cave in Henan Province, China, after travelling there from India.

— "Daruma" is a derivative of the **Sanskrit word Dharma**, which has no direct equivalent in Japanese or Chinese.

— Shorinzen Darumaji Temple in Takasaki, Gunma, built in 1697, is considered the place of origin of Daruma.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a Daruma Doll by Chief Priest of Shorinzen Daruma Temple, in Tokyo, Japan. (PMO via PTI Photo)

## Polity

### ● Rudrastra – India's longest freight train

— On August 7, the national transporter successfully operated "Rudrastra," a long freight train formed by combining six empty BOXN rakes, from Ganjkhwaja station of the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) Division.

— This **freight train** is about 4.5 km long, and is the longest freight train of Indian Railways till date.

— The initiative, undertaken by the DDU Division of the East Central Railway (ECR), is aimed at boosting freight capacity.

**• SabhaSaar**

- A new artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tool named SabhaSaar has been rolled out in Tripura on Independence Day, August 15.
- This AI-tool will automatically generate minutes of meetings of gram sabhas, the primary body of the Panchayati Raj system, consisting of all registered voters of a gram panchayat.
- ‘SabhaSaar’ leverages the power of AI to generate structured minutes of meetings from gram sabha videos and audio recordings.
- Panchayat officials can use their e-GramSwaraj login credentials to upload video/audio recordings on ‘SabhaSaar’.
- A source said ‘SabhaSaar’ is built on Bhashini, an AI-powered language translation platform launched by the government to bridge literacy, language, and digital divides.

**• Assam’s new arms licence portal**

- Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the launch of an online portal through which “indigenous citizens” living in “**vulnerable and remote areas**” can apply for arms licences.
- In May, the Assam cabinet had approved a ‘Special Scheme for Grant of Arms Licenses to Original Inhabitants and Indigenous Indian Citizens in Vulnerable and Remote Areas of Assam’ with the rationale that possession of firearms would enable “indigenous citizens” to protect themselves from “demographic and security challenges.”
- The eligibility criteria for the grant of licences through this portal are that the applicant must be “an indigenous citizen from Assam” and must be at least 21 years old.
- Applicant must reside in a “vulnerable and remote area,” must not have a criminal background or pending cases, must be “physically and mentally fit,” and must have a training certificate under the Arms Rules, 2016.
- The acquisition of arms in India is governed by **Arms Rules, 2016** framed under the Arms Act, 1959. **Schedule I** of the Arms Rules provides a list of prohibited, restricted and permitted arms and ammunition.
- Those in the prohibited and restricted categories are directly governed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Licences for arms and ammunition in the **permissible category** are governed by State governments.

**• SHRESTH**

- Union Health Ministry has launched SHRESTH – **State Health Regulatory Excellence Index**, a first-of-its-kind national initiative to benchmark and strengthen state drug regulatory systems through a transparent, data-driven framework.
- It aims to drive improvements in the performance of state drug regulatory authorities across India, ensuring drug safety and quality standards are consistently met.
- Dr. Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, Drug Controller General of India, stated that SHRESTH will have 27 indices for Manufacturing States across five key themes: Human Resources, Infrastructure, Licensing Activities, Surveillance Activities and Responsiveness and 23 indices for Primarily Distribution States.

(Source: mohfw)

- **Animal Birth Control (ABC) program**

— While asking the authorities to shift Delhi's stray dogs to shelters, the Supreme Court found it "unreasonable and absurd" that, under the Animal Birth Control (ABC) program, sterilised dogs are returned to the streets they were picked up from.

— The **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960**, which aims to prevent "the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals", is the primary animal rights legislation in India.

— Under the Act, the Centre in 2001 promulgated the ABC (Dogs) Rules. These rules mandated the sterilisation and immunisation of strays by local authorities supported by animal welfare organisations and private individuals. Humane methods were specified for capturing dogs.



*The apex court has directed the shifting of all stray dogs from all vulnerable localities in the city to areas where they can be rehabilitated. (File)*

- **Key takeaways from the PM's Independence Day speech**

— The 79th Independence Day celebrations started off with **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 103-minute address** — the longest I-Day speech by any Indian PM till date.

— This year, the Prime Minister also broke Indira Gandhi's record by delivering 12 consecutive speeches from the ramparts of Red Fort to stand next only to Jawaharlal Nehru who delivered 17 Independence Day addresses in a row.

— **Mission Sudarshan Chakra:** During the Independence Day Speech, Prime Minister Modi announced the launch of Mission Sudarshan Chakra.

- ◆ It is learnt to be an advanced, multi-tiered air defence system, aimed at creating a nationwide security shield to thwart enemy attacks across domains and strengthen the country's deterrent and offensive capabilities.
- ◆ All public places will be covered by the expanded nationwide security shield by 2035.

— **Demography Mission:** A High-Powered Demography Mission will be launched to study the population change in the region.

— **Reform Task Force:** A dedicated Reform Task Force will be created to drive next-generation reforms. Its mandate includes accelerating economic growth, cutting red tape, and modernising governance.

— **PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana:** PM Modi launched Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana for the youths of India. Under this Rs 1 lakh-crore scheme, the government will provide Rs 15,000 to the youths securing jobs in private companies.

— **Tenfold rise in nuclear energy by 2047:** Modi said India is rapidly working on 10 new nuclear reactors and has pledged to increase its nuclear energy capacity tenfold by 2047.

- **Digitally literate state-Kerala**

- In another significant milestone in the field of education, **Kerala** has become the first “digitally-literate” state in India.
- In 2023, the state government launched the ‘**Digi Keralam-complete digital literary programme**’ with the prime goal of taking the digital revolution to all sections of people, irrespective of their age, and help them avail its e-services.
- A survey of 83 lakh households was conducted to identify the “digitally illiterate” and training sessions were conducted.

- **Highlights from the Monsoon Session**

- The Monsoon Session, which commenced on July 21, saw the introduction of 14 Bills and the passing of 12 of them. Both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were adjourned sine die on 21st August.

- A **new income tax Bill** was passed to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961. It is likely to come into effect from April 1, 2026.

- Rajya Sabha **cleared the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025**, a day after its passage in Lok Sabha. Under the provisions of the Bill, only a sports body that receives financial assistance from the state qualifies as a “public authority” under the Right to Information Act, 2005. This effectively excludes the BCCI because it does not receive any direct financial aid from the government.

- The Lok Sabha passed the **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025** minutes after it was introduced in the House, offering a legal framework to regulate online gaming companies in India. At the heart of the proposed law are blanket prohibitions on online money games, multi-crore fines and potential jail sentences.

- Both the Houses passed **The Indian Ports Bill, 2025** seeks to modernise the outdated provisions of the Indian Ports Act, 1908, promote integrated port development, facilitate businesses and ensure utilisation of India’s coastline.

- **The Constitution (One Hundred And Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025** and two related statutory amendments to reflect the proposed changes for Union Territories have been referred to a joint committee of Parliament for review.

- The Constitution (One Hundred And Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025 seeks to remove a central or state Minister who is facing allegations of corruption or serious offences and has been detained for at least 30 days consecutively.

- The **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025**, introduced in Lok Sabha, seeks to amend 16 Central Acts to decriminalise and rationalise certain offences and penalties. This is the second Jan Vishwas legislation brought in by the Narendra Modi government.



*Addressing the media before the beginning of the Monsoon Session, Modi said, “The Monsoon Session stands as a proud moment for the nation.”*

*(Express photo by Anil Sharma)*

- **India's first 'smart intelligent village'**

— Satnavari, a Maharashtra village with a population of just over 1,800, became India's first 'smart intelligent village' under a pilot project launched by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

— **Satnavari**, located 31 km from Nagpur city, is equipped with technologies ranging from smart farming and telemedicine to AI-powered water monitoring and digital classrooms.

— The "smart and intelligent village" project was proposed by the **Voice of Indian Communication Technology Enterprises (VoICE)**, a consortium of major Indian players in the telecom sector.

— A Smart Intelligent Village is envisaged as representing a model of rural development that uses digital technologies, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and seamless connectivity to improve everyday living in India's villages.



*Satnavari became India's first 'smart intelligent village' under a pilot project launched by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. (Express photo)*

### MAINS VALUE ADDITION

In cases involving dowry deaths, here are some data.

- According to a World Bank study that examined 40,000 rural weddings between 1960 and 2008, 90 per cent of marriages in India involve dowry.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, in 2022 alone, 6,516 dowry deaths were reported. In 2022, NCRB recorded 1,44,593 cases under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code—cruelty by husband or his relatives.
- According to the NCRB, 35,493 brides were killed in India between 2017 and 2022 -- averaging nearly 20 deaths a day -- over dowry demands, sometimes occurring even years after the wedding.

## Defence

- **Integrated Air Defence Weapon System**

— The ministry of Defence (MoD) has successfully conducted the first flight-tests of an Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS).

— The IADWS is a multi-layered air defence system, which includes three components

**(i) Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missiles (QRSAM):** It is a short-range Surface to Air Missile (SAM) system, primarily designed to provide a protective shield to moving armoured columns of the Army from enemy aerial attacks.

(ii) **The advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) missiles:** It is a fourth-generation, technically advanced miniaturised Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD). The weapon system can neutralise targets between the range of 300 meters and six kilometers, including drones and other classes of aerial threats.

(iii) **High-power laser-based Directed Energy Weapon (DEW):** It can neutralise fixed-wing UAV and swarm drones, causing structural damage and disabling their surveillance sensors.

— With this, India has joined the exclusive club of global powers that possess such a system. DEW is said to have a range of less than three kilometers.

— The integrated operation of all these weapon system components is controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre, developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory, Hyderabad.

#### ● **INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri**

— The Indian Navy on August 26 commissioned **two Nilgiri-class stealth guided-missile frigates**, the INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri, at Visakhapatnam.

— This is the first time that two major surface combatants from two different Indian shipyards have been commissioned simultaneously.

— **INS Himgiri** is the first of the Project 17A ships constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.

— **INS Udaygiri** is the second ship of the Project 17A stealth frigates built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) in Mumbai. It is the 100th ship designed by the Navy's in-house Warship Design Bureau.

— The **Nilgiri-class stealth frigates** are being constructed under the codename Project 17 Alpha. They are follow-ons of the Shivalik class or Project 17 frigates that are currently active in service.

— Of the seven-member class of ships, **four** – Nilgiri, Udaygiri, Taragiri, and Mahendragiri – are being built by MDL, and three by **GRSE** (Himgiri, Dunagiri, and Vindhya).

— Notably, **Year 2025** has been declared by the **Ministry of Defence** as '**Year of Reforms**' aiming to transform the Armed Forces into a technologically-advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations.

## Science and Technology

#### ● **First private satellite network**

— A private consortium of four space start-ups led by Bengaluru-based PixxelSpace has won the bid to build and operate the country's first **fully-indigenous commercial earth observation (EO)** satellite constellation.

— The consortium will invest over Rs 1,200 crore to deploy 12 high-resolution satellites.

— The satellite will be equipped with panchromatic, multispectral, hyperspectral and microwave synthetic aperture radar (SAR) sensors.

— It is based on the Earth Observation satellite public-private partnership (**EO-PPP**) model, where the government provides strategic, technical and policy support while the private consortium takes charge of manufacturing, launches, operations and commercialisation.

**• Four New Chip Plants**

- The Union Cabinet has cleared four new semiconductor assembly and testing plants under its **India Semiconductor Mission**, which have a total financial outlay of Rs 4,594 crore.
- Two of these plants will come up in Odisha, and one each in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.
- The new locations for the chip plants mark a break from a majority of the facilities which have been approved for construction in Gujarat. Of the 10 plants now approved, four are in Gujarat.

**• Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)**

- The country's largest refiner and fuel retailer **Indian Oil Corporation (IOC)** expects to start producing sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) on a commercial scale at its Panipat refinery by December.
- IOC became the first company in India to receive the ISCC CORSIA certification for SAF production at its Panipat refinery in Haryana.
- **ISCC CORSIA** is a certification system for compliance with the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) criteria for SAF. It is a prerequisite for commercial SAF production.
- CORSIA, which applies to international flights, would require airlines globally to offset any growth in carbon dioxide emissions beyond the 2020 levels.
- SAF is a biofuel that is produced from sustainable feedstocks and has chemistry similar to conventional aviation turbine fuel (ATF) or jet fuel, which is derived from crude oil.
- It is a '**drop in**' fuel, meaning it can be blended with ATF without requiring any change in the existing machinery of aircraft.
- According to aviation industry and energy experts, SAF alone is likely to account for over 60 per cent of the global aviation industry's decarbonisation efforts.

**• India's first removable solar panel system**

- Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi has become the country's first city to have portable solar panels between railway tracks.
- **Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), Varanasi**, has commissioned India's first removable solar panel system installed between railway track.
- BLW has rolled out this pilot project in its workshop line number 19 with an indigenously-designed installation procedure to lay solar panels between the rails without disrupting train traffic.
- India plans to attain net zero status by 2070, which will require drastic cuts in GHG emissions from all sectors, including transport. Indian Railways aims to become a 'Net Zero Carbon Emission Railway' by 2030.

**• Lunar Module Launch Vehicle (LMLV)**

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V Narayanan said that the space agency was in the process of building its heaviest rocket ever, and had named it Lunar Module Launch Vehicle (LMLV).

— Narayanan said ISRO was **no longer working** on the **NGLV** (Next Generation Launch Vehicle), a heavy-lift rocket that was supposed to carry the modules for India's space station, the Bharat Antariksh Station, or BAS.

— He said the LMLV would be ready by 2035, and would be used for the lunar missions, including the first human mission to the Moon, planned by 2040.

— The new rocket would be capable of carrying about 27 tonnes to the Moon and 80 tonnes to low Earth orbits, which are between 200 and 2,000 km from the planet's surface. The heaviest payload that the current LVM3 has carried to low earth orbit is 5.8 tonnes.

— The LMLV will be a **three-stage rocket**, with the first two stages using liquid propellant and the third stage using a cryogenic propellant.

#### ● **Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-1)**

— The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully carried out its **first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-1)** on 24th August to evaluate the parachute-based deceleration system for the upcoming Gaganyaan mission.

— The system is critical for ensuring safe recovery of the crew module — the capsule in which astronauts sit during a human flight — during re-entry and landing.

— An air drop test recreates the final leg of a spacecraft's journey back to Earth. An aircraft or helicopter drops the spacecraft from a height to test various systems under different circumstances.

#### ● **Three hyperspectral imaging satellites**

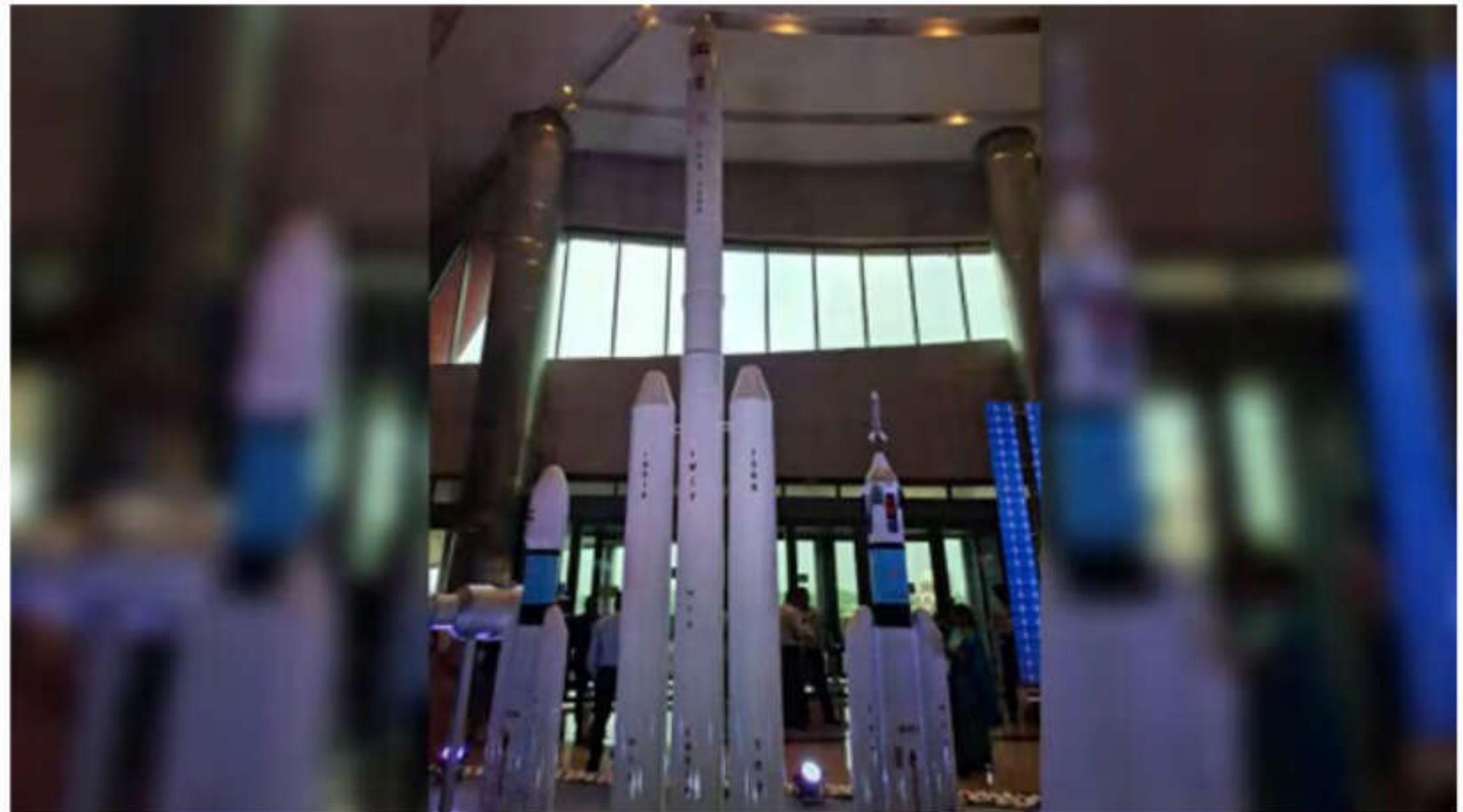
— SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket has placed the **three hyperspectral imaging satellites** developed by the Indian startup Pixxel.

— The launch of the three satellites, along with the three launched earlier in January, marked the completion of the first phase of the Firefly constellation.

— **Pixxel** plans to create an 18-24 **satellite constellation**, depending on customer needs. With the first six satellites, the company will be able to provide global coverage every 24 hours. The satellites will also provide high-resolution images of the Earth at a 5-metre resolution, captured in 135 spectral bands.

#### ● **UPM J1040–3551 AabBab**

— A team of scientists has discovered an extremely rare quadruple star system in the Milky Way, according to a new study. The system — known as **UPM J1040–3551 AabBab** — consists of a pair of cold brown dwarfs orbiting a pair



A model of LMLV rocket (centre). On the left is a model of the LMV-3 rocket, on the right is HLVM3. (Express photo)

of young red dwarf stars, a configuration never seen before.

— **Brown dwarfs** form like stars from collapsing clouds of gas and dust. However, they do not have enough mass to consistently fuse hydrogen, a process that heats a star and makes it shine. That is why they are often known as “failed stars”.

— They have atmospheres similar to gas giant planets such as Jupiter and Saturn. Their atmospheres can consist of clouds and molecules like H<sub>2</sub>O. Brown dwarfs can also be up to 70 times more massive than Jupiter.

## Economy

### • S&P rating upgradation

— Recently, **S&P Global Ratings had upgraded** its rating for India to BBB from BBB-. The upgrade by the American rating agency – the world’s largest – comes 18 years after it had last raised its India assessment in January 2007 to BBB- in the rating scale.

— S&P rates countries based on its assessment of **five key areas**: institutional, economic, external, fiscal, and monetary.

— According to S&P, a BBB rating indicates “adequate capacity to meet financial commitments, but more subject to adverse economic conditions”. The next step is A, then AA, and finally, AAA, which signifies “extremely strong capacity to meet financial commitments”.

### • Fitch Ratings on Indian economy

— Fitch affirmed its BBB- rating on India with a stable outlook. It has maintained the previous rating for India. At BBB-, Fitch’s rating on India is the lowest possible investment-grade rating, although the outlook on the rating is stable.

— According to **Fitch**, India’s general government debt – which combines that of the Centre and the states – is expected to inch up in 2025-26 to 81.5 per cent of GDP from 80.9 per cent in 2024-25 due to a decline in nominal GDP growth.

## Diseases

(**Just FYI:** UPSC has consistently included questions on health and diseases in its examinations over the years. For instance, in 2014, a question about the Ebola virus appeared in the Prelims, and in 2017, a question about the Zika virus was featured. Therefore, it is crucial to stay updated on diseases that are currently in the news.)

### • Rabies

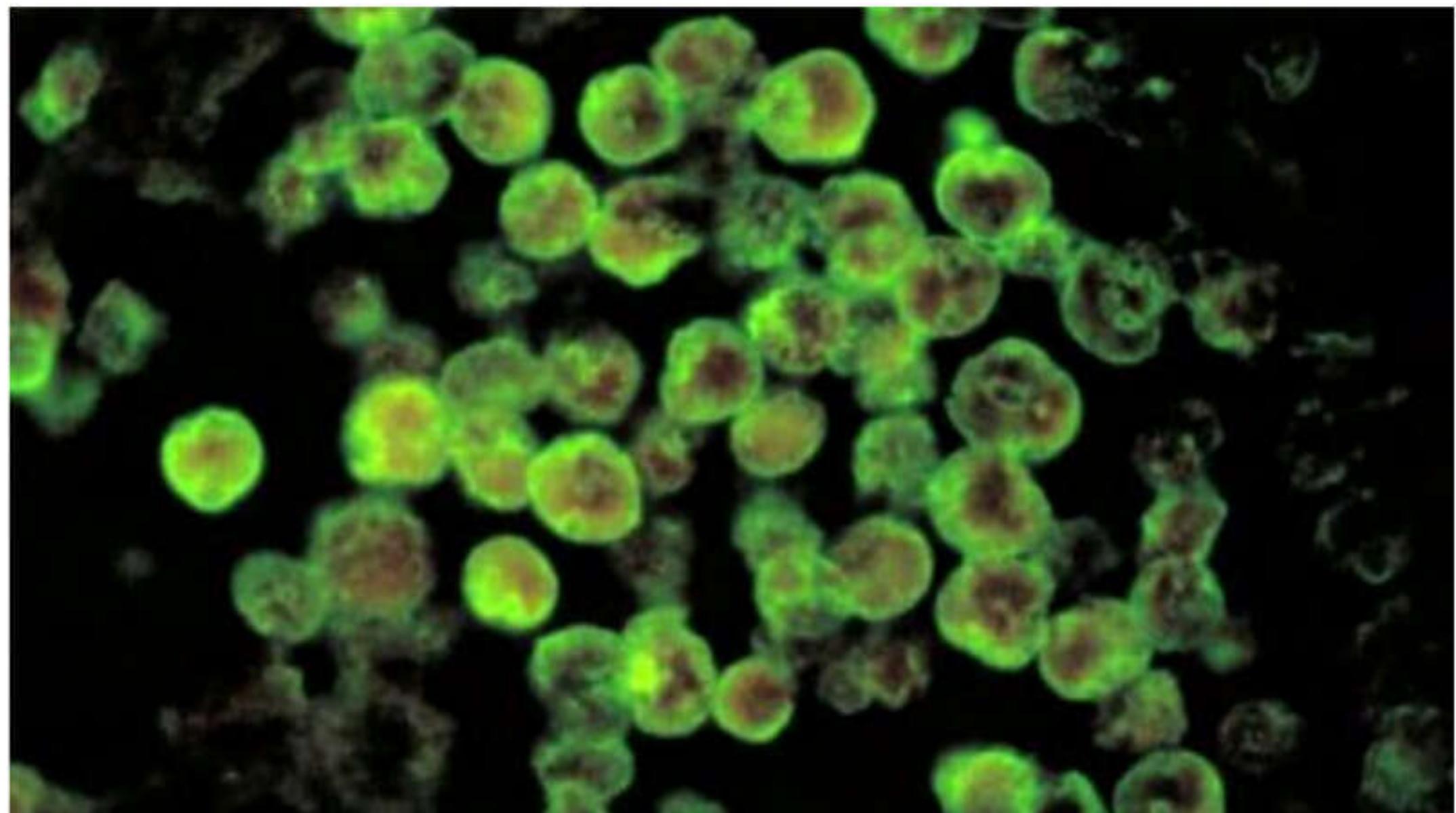
— Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Delhi government, civic bodies and authorities of Noida, Gurugram and Ghaziabad to relocate stray dogs from the streets to dedicated shelters amidst rising cases of dog bites.

— Rabies is a **viral disease** that can infect any mammal, not just dogs. While dogs account for the majority of human rabies cases many other animals are possible carriers. These include cats, cattle, horses, goats, ferrets, bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and monkeys.

- Wild mammals are significant transmission sources, especially bats and certain wild carnivores like raccoons and foxes. Domestic pets can contract rabies from wild animals and transmit it to humans. Birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish cannot contract or spread rabies.
- Survival from a rabies infection is extremely rare, according to doctors. Once symptoms appear, rabies is considered one of the deadliest infections known, with a nearly 100% fatality rate.
- Dog bites are dangerous due to the bacteria harboured in the animal's mouth, which can cause serious infection, including staphylococcus, pasteurella, and capnocytophaga, once the skin is broken.
- If post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) — a series of rabies vaccines begun before the onset of symptoms — is not received, the outcome is fatal.

### ● Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM)

- Kerala's health department has sounded an alert in Kozhikode district after three back to back cases of the rare primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) were reported in the region.
- Amoebic meningoencephalitis is caused by **Naegleria fowleri**, known as the “brain-eating amoeba”.
- It is a free-living amoeba found in warm, fresh water and soil, and infects people when it enters the body through the nose.
- The first case of PAM in India was reported in 1971, and the first case in Kerala was reported in 2016. From 2016 to 2023, the state had only eight cases. Last year, Kerala had 36 positive cases and nine deaths.
- One of the reasons for the spike in cases in Kerala has been increased testing for **acute encephalitis syndrome (AES)** — a condition that can be caused by various diseases, including amoebic meningoencephalitis.
- Acute Encephalitis Syndrome is an inflammation of the brain, usually due to an infection. AES affects central nervous system, mostly in children and young adults.
- It starts with high fever, then hampers neurological functions causing mental disorientation, seizure, confusion, delirium, coma.



*Amoebic meningoencephalitis is caused by Naegleria fowleri, known as the “brain-eating amoeba”. (Representational image/File)*

### ● New World screwworm myiasis

- The Department of Health and Human Services on August 24 reported the first human case of the flesh-eating parasite, the **New World screwworm**, in the United States.
- Screwworms are a type of blue-grey blowfly, typically found in South America and the Caribbean.
- **Screwworts** — specifically females — are attracted to and lay eggs on and in open wounds or another entry point

like a nasal cavity in warm-blooded animals and, rarely, humans. One female can lay up to 300 eggs at a time and may lay up to 3,000 eggs during her 10- to 30-day lifespan.

- These eggs hatch into larvae (known as maggots), which burrow into the wound using their sharp mouth hooks to feed on the living flesh, leading to infestation.
- The parasites are named after the screwlike way they burrow into the tissue. Their Latin name, *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, “literally means man-eater”.
- New World screwworm infestations can be extremely painful, especially in humans, with a high mortality rate if left untreated.

## Persons in News

(**Just FYI:** Noting historical personalities’ anniversaries aids UPSC prep. UPSC often includes such personalities in questions, so revisiting their lives refreshes your static syllabus.)

### • **Shibu Soren**

- Shibu Soren, popularly known as “Guruji”, passed away at 81 in Delhi on 4th August.
- Soren, who belonged to the Santal tribe, was born on January 11, 1944, in the Nemra village of **Ramgarh** in the then Bihar province.
- He took to public life at a young age, forming the **Santal Navyuvak Sangh** at just 18, and fought moneylenders who lent to tribals at exorbitant rates.
- Along with the Bengali Marxist trade unionist A K Roy and Kurmi-Mahato leader Binod Bihari Mahato, the Soren formed the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in late 1972. The following year, Binod Bihari Mahto became president of the party, with Shibu Soren as the general secretary.
- Soren was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1980 and became president of his party in 1986. He represented JMM from Dumka in 1989, 1991, 1996 and 2004. In 1998 and 1999, however, he lost the parliamentary election.
- In 2000, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister, Bihar was bifurcated to create Jharkhand from South Bihar, bowing to the long-standing demand in the region. Jharkhand officially became a state on November 15, 2000.

### • **Satya Pal Malik**

- Former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satyapal Malik passed away on 5th August. He was 79.
- Malik, who hails from the Baghpat district of Western UP, first served as an MLA in the state Assembly in 1974-77, having been elected on a ticket of Chaudhary Charan Singh’s Bharatiya Kranti Dal.



Satya Pal Malik (File)

- He was later appointed as a Member in the Rajya Sabha by Lok Dal in 1980, but joined the Congress party in 1984. He was once again appointed to the Rajya Sabha in 1986.
- He joined the BJP in 2004 after resigning from the Congress party and a short stint Janata Dal. Malik held multiple senior posts in the party, including the head of the parliamentary committee that looked into the land acquisition Bill.
- In 2017, Satya Pal Malik was appointed as the **Governor of Bihar** and was transferred to **Jammu and Kashmir** in 2018. During his tenure as the J&K Governor, the Centre scrapped Article 370.

### ● **Manika Vishwakarma**

— Manika Vishwakarma from Rajasthan is crowned as the winner of **Miss Universe India 2025**.

— Crowned by Miss Universe India 2024 Rhea Singha, she beat Tanya Sharma from Uttar Pradesh (the first runner-up), Mehak Dhingra from Haryana (the second runner-up), and Amishi Kaushik (the third runner-up) to win the coveted title.

— She will now represent India at the global **74th Miss Universe competition** to be held in **Thailand** later this year.

— Miss Universe 2024 was the 73rd Miss Universe pageant, held at the Arena CDMX in Mexico City, Mexico, and **Victoria Kjær Theilvig** of Denmark emerged as the winner.

— India has three title winners and ranks in the Top 10 Miss Universe winners list.

- ◆ **Sushmita Sen (1994)** – the first Indian to win Miss Universe.
- ◆ **Lara Dutta (2000)** – the second Indian Miss Universe.
- ◆ **Harnaaz Sandhu (2021)** – third crown for India after two decades.



*Tall, poised, and luminous, Manika Vishwakarma walked into the spotlight (Photo - Instagram)*

### ● **Shwetha Menon**

— Shwetha Menon, a leading actor in Kerala, was recently elected as the first woman president of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artistes (AMMA).

— AMMA is an organisation which has seen ups and downs over the past year due to sexual harassment allegations against its members.

— The last president, Mohanlal, had stepped down, and the executive committee of AMMA was dissolved, after the Justice Hema Committee report came out in 2024, accusing the film industry of discriminating against women.

**• Urjit Patel**

- The government has named former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel as **Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF)**.
- Patel served as the RBI Governor from September 4, 2016 to December 11, 2018. His appointment as an Executive Director at the IMF comes almost seven years after his surprise resignation as RBI Governor in December 2018.
- Set up in 1945, the IMF works to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity for all of its **191 member** countries.
- Unlike development banks, the **IMF does not lend for specific projects**. Instead, the **IMF provides financial support** to countries hit by crises to create breathing room as they implement policies that restore economic stability and growth. It also provides precautionary financing to help prevent crises.
- **IMF funds come from three sources:** member quotas, multilateral and bilateral borrowing agreements. Quotas are the IMF's main source of financing, wherein each member of the IMF is assigned a quota, based broadly on its relative position in the world economy.
- **Kristalina Georgieva** has been serving as Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund since October 1, 2019. She began her second term on October 1, 2024.

**Places in News**

**(Just FYI:** The location of the place is important, considering that UPSC has asked several questions about places that were in the news, such as Aleppo and Kirkuk, in the 2018 UPSC Prelims. The best way to remember them is to plot them on a world map.)

**• Mosque—Cathedral of Córdoba**

- Recently, a fire broke out at La Mezquita, the historic mosque-turned-cathedral in **Córdoba, Spain**, but the monument was saved after firefighters quickly contained the blaze.
- Built between the 8th and 10th centuries under **Abd al-Rahman**, an emir of the Umayyad dynasty, **La Mezquita** is regarded as a masterpiece of Islamic architecture.
- It was constructed on the site of an earlier church and served as a mosque until the Christian reconquest of Córdoba in the 13th century under King Ferdinand III of Castile.

**• Perito Moreno glacier**

— Perito Moreno has been thinning at a sharply accelerated rate since 2019, scientists reported on August 7. And if the thinning doesn't slow, it could kick-start a series of changes that might cause the ice to shrink even faster.

— The Perito Moreno glacier, also called the '**White Giant**', is located near the

*Perito Moreno Glacier was named after the explorer Francisco Moreno, who pioneered studies in the region in the 19th century and defended the Argentinian territory in international border dispute against Chile. (Source: Thinkstock Images)*

city of El Calafate in the **Argentine** province of Santa Cruz, and comes under the Los Glaciares National Park — a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- **Eatalin hydroelectric project**

- An expert panel of the Union Environment Ministry has recommended environmental clearance for the 3,087 MW Eatalin hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang valley.
- **Eatalin** is a large run-of-river project on the Dri and Tangon Rivers.
- The Dri River, after meeting Mathun, flows downstream and is joined by Tangon near Eatalin village, where it is called Dibang River.
- The major tributaries of Dibang River are Dri, Mathun, Talon, Eme, Ahi, Emra and Awa. Dibang River is a major left-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra River.



*China push to build transport infra in border areas.*

- **Planned Railway projects in China**

- Earlier this month, China established the Xinjiang-Xizang Railway Co Ltd with a plan to build a railway to connect two historically restive Chinese border regions adjoining each other.
- It plans to connect the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region** in the northwest, and Tibet, officially **Xizang Autonomous Region**, in the south of the country.
- The Xinjiang-Xizang line will run “from Hotan in northwest China’s Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Shigatse and Lhasa in Xizang”, and will be “part of China’s five planned railway corridors into Xizang”.
- Xinjiang is a vast but sparsely populated region of mountains, forests and deserts in far northwestern China that borders Russia, Pakistan and several Central Asian nations.
- The region contains a wealth of natural resources, including oil, gas and rare earth minerals, but perhaps its most important value is as a strategic buffer that extends China’s influence westward.

- **Lipulekh Pass**

— Nepal objected earlier this week to India and China announcing the reopening of border trade through the Lipulekh Pass, citing its claims over the region.

— In an official statement, the Government of Nepal said that Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani — located east of the Mahakali River — are integral parts of Nepal.

— In response, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “Border trade between India and China through Lipulekh pass commenced in 1954 and has been going on for decades... such claims are neither justified nor based on... evidence.”



*Not to scale. Credit: Ritesh Kumar*

— **Lipulekh pass** lies at an altitude of 5,115 metres, on the border between Uttarakhand and the Tibet Autonomous Region, near the trijunction with Nepal. It is an ancient passageway between the Indian subcontinent and the Tibetan Plateau, frequented by traders and pilgrims alike.

- **Tawi River**

— India has alerted Pakistan about “high flood” in the Tawi river on “humanitarian grounds”, even as the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) continues to remain in abeyance.

— A major left bank tributary of the **Chenab river**, Tawi originates from Kailash Kund glacier in Doda district’s Bhaderwah, and flows through Udhampur and Jammu districts before entering Sialkot in Pakistan’s Punjab province.

- **Duduma Waterfalls**

— The search for a 22-year-old man, a YouTuber from **Odisha’s Berhampur**, who was swept away into the 175-metre Duduma waterfall in Koraput, has entered its fourth day with officials saying they’ve found no trace so far.

— At 175 metres, Duduma is one of the highest waterfalls in Odisha. It originates from the Machkund river in Koraput district and is a major source of hydroelectric power. It is also a popular tourist destination, located at the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border.

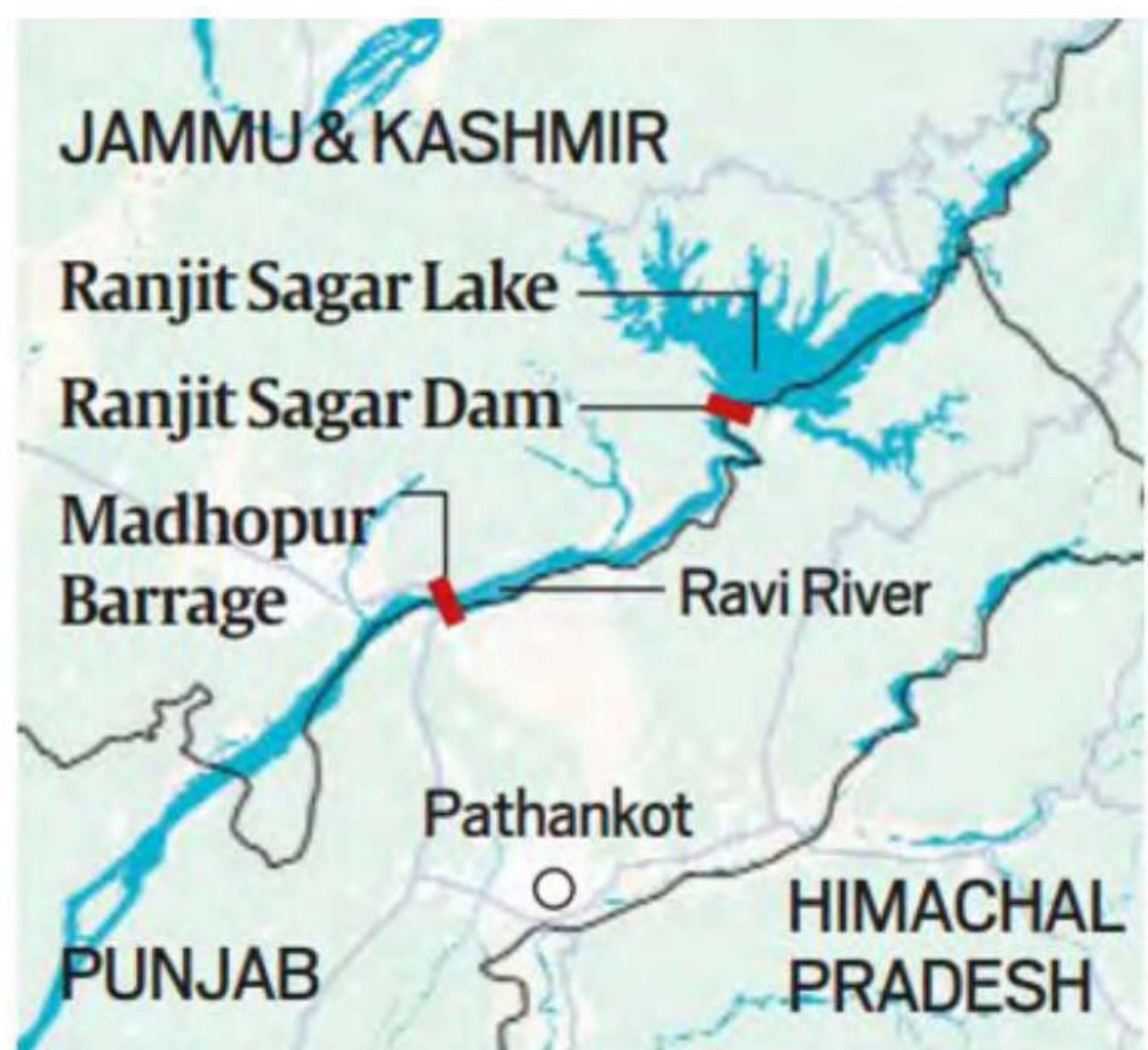
- **Madhopur barrage**

— Two of the 54 gates of the Madhopur barrage, located downstream of the Ranjit Sagar Dam on the Ravi River, gave way after heavy rains.

— This barrage was first built in the 19th century and rebuilt in 1959 near Pathankot to regulate the Ravi's flow.

— Barrages are different from Dams. Barrages are low structures with sluice gates to regulate and divert water. Rather than storing water, they regulate its flow, acting more like a tap.

— Located on the Ravi in the Gurdaspur district near Pathankot, the Madhopur Headworks diverts water into the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC) for irrigation in Punjab, and supplies water to Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, and nearby regions through canals.



Map showing the Madhopur barrage.

## Sports

**(Just FYI:** With the unpredictability of the UPSC examinations and questions like the ICC World Test Championship question 2021, you can't be sure of anything. It is wise to know what it is and not go into too much detail.)

### • 2025 World Schools Team Championship

— India's Velammal MHS School claimed the gold medal at the **2025 World Schools Team Championship** in Alexandria, Virginia after winning all eight of their matches.

— The World Schools Team Championship 2025 was organised at Episcopal High School, located in the historic city of Alexandria, just outside Washington, D.C, from 2nd-7th August, 2025.



Indian players representing Velammal MHS School pose at the Closing Ceremony of the 2025 World Schools Team Championship. (PHOTO: FIDE via Michal Walusza)

— Kazakhstan's National School of Physics and Mathematics ultimately clinched the silver medal, finishing on the same number of match points as The Harker School (USA), but edging them out on tiebreaks.

— The Harker School took a well-deserved third place, just ahead of Astana 2 RSPM, who narrowly missed the podium.

**● Asian Surfing Championships 2025**

- **Ramesh Budihal** won the bronze medal in the open men's event at the Asian Surfing Championships 2025 on the beaches of Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu.
- This marks the **first individual medal won by any Indian surfer** at the continental championships.
- The Republic of Korea's Kanoa Heejae (15.17) took the open men's gold while Indonesia's Pajar Ariyana (14.57) won the silver medal in Mahabalipuram.

**● 15th Junior National Women's Hockey Championship**

- **Jharkhand** was crowned as the champions of the 15th Hockey India Junior Women National Championship 2025 after they defeated Haryana 2-1 in the final division 'A' in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh.

**● Rugby-centric Bronco Test**

- To ensure top Indian cricketers maintain a high level of fitness and improve their aerobic capacity, the **rugby-centric Bronco Test** has been introduced.
- In the **Bronco Test**, a player starts off with a 20-metre shuttle run, followed by a 40m one and a 60m run, which constitutes one set.
- A player is required to do five such sets which adds up to 1,200 meters without taking a break. The Indian players have been asked to complete the Bronco Test in six minutes.
- The BCCI already has in place a **Yo-Yo Test** and a 2-kilometre time trial as fitness tests for top cricketers.
- The Yo-Yo-Test involves running between markers placed 20 meters apart, at increasing speeds, with a 10-second break between each 40-metre run. The minimum Yo-Yo level for the Indian team was set at 17.1.

**● Asian Shooting championships 2025**

- The Asian Shooting championships 2025 are taking place in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, from 18th August to 30th August.
- Olympian shooter **Elavenil Valarivan** shot 253.6 in the final of the women's 10m air rifle event at the Asian Shooting Championships to clinch the gold medal.
- This is the second senior gold medal for India in this edition of the continental championships, as **Anantjeet Singh Naruka** won gold in the men's skeet.
- Double Olympic medallist **Manu Bhaker** had won the bronze medal in the women's 10m air pistol competition.

**● U20 World Wrestling Championships 2025**

- **Kajal Dochak**, 17-year-old Haryana wrestler, won the title in the women's 72 Kg final with a 8-6 win over China's Liu Yuqi to become India's second U20 World Champion this week.
- **Tapasya Gahlawat**, 19-year-old, won the first gold for India in women's 57 Kg with a 5-2 win over Norway's

Felicitas Domajeva.

- The **U20 World Wrestling Championships 2025** was organised in Samokov, Bulgaria, from August 17 to 24.
- There are medal events for all three disciplines - men's **freestyle**, **Greco-Roman** and **women's freestyle** - each with 10 weight categories.

Indian wrestler	Event	Medal
Kajal	Women's freestyle 72kg	Gold
Tapasya Gahlawat	Women's freestyle 57kg	Gold
Sumit Malik	Men's freestyle 57kg	Silver
Srishti	Women's freestyle 68kg	Silver
Reena	Women's freestyle 55kg	Silver
Priya Malik	Women's freestyle 76kg	Silver
Saarika	Women's freestyle 53kg	Bronze
Shruti	Women's freestyle 50kg	Bronze
Suraj Vashisht	Greco-Roman 60kg	Bronze

(Source: [olympics.com](https://olympics.com))

### • National Sports Day 2025

- **August 29** of every year is celebrated as India's National Sports Day. The day marks the birth anniversary of the legendary Major Dhyan Chand, widely regarded as the greatest field hockey player of all time.
- The theme of this year is '**Ek Ghanta, Khel ke Maidan Main'**
- National Sports Day was first celebrated in 2012, with the significance behind observing the day being to promote sports in the country and acknowledge the efforts of Indian athletes.

### • Badminton World Championship 2025

- **Shi Yuqi** of the People's Republic of China defeated Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand to win his maiden title in the Men's category.
- **Akane Yamaguchi** of Japan won the Women's Singles final match of the Badminton World Championships after defeating Chen Yufei of China.

— **Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty** have won a Bronze medal in the Men's Double category.

— **Eleven** Indian badminton players have won 15 medals at the BWF World Championships over the years, with only **PV Sindhu** going on to become a world champion. Sindhu won gold in 2019.

(Source: Olympics)



*Satwik-Chirag in action at the BWF World Championships. (AP Photo)*

#### ● **Goa to host World Chess Championship**

— The FIDE World Cup has announced that the World Chess Championship will be hosted in **Goa**. The World Cup will be played from October 30 to November 27.

— The FIDE World Cup 2025 will feature 206 players competing in a head-to-head, two-game knockout format over eight rounds. Each round spans three days: two classical games (between two players) on the first two days, followed by tie-breaks on the third day, if necessary.

— In the first round, the top 50 players receive byes, while players seeded from 51 to 206 compete, with pairings based on the principle of the top half versus the reversed lower half.

#### ● **Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships 2025**

— The Commonwealth Weightlifting Championship 2025 was held at the **Veer Savarkar Sports Complex in Naranpura, Ahmedabad**, from August 24 to 30.

— India won a total of **13 senior medals** - three gold, seven silver, and three bronze.

Medals	Winners
<b>Gold</b>	Mirabai Chanu (48 kg) Ajith Narayana (71kg) Ajaya Babu Valluri (79kg)
<b>Silver</b>	Muthupandi Raja (65kg) Dilbag Singh (94kg) Soumya Sunil Dalvi (48 kg) Sneha Soren (53 kg) Bindyarani Devi (58 kg) Nirupama Devi (63 kg) Mehak Sharma (86 kg)
<b>Bronze</b>	Harjinder Kaur (69 kg) Vanshita Verma (86 kg) Lovepreet Singh (110 kg+)

## Terms making buzz

### • New words added to the Cambridge Dictionary

— Recently, Cambridge Dictionary has added more than 6000 words, which include skibidi, broligarchy, delulu, and tradwife.

— **Skibidi** originated in Skibidi Toilet, a surreal animated YouTube series in which human heads burst out of toilets to pounding beats. Children and teens picked up the word, using it as an all-purpose exclamation or sometimes as pure nonsense. Cambridge defines it as a term that can mean “cool,” “bad” or nothing at all.

— **Tradwife** is shorthand for “traditional wife.” The word describes women who broadcast their devotion to domesticity online through cooking, cleaning, raising children and submitting to husbands as a lifestyle brand.

— **Delulu**, short for delusional, began in K-pop fandoms more than a decade ago as a taunt for fans who imagined marrying their idols. On TikTok, it been reborn as philosophy: “delulu is the solulu,” which means ‘believing in your own delusion is the solution.’

— **Broligarchy** is a jab at wealthy men dominating tech, “mouse jiggler” is the pandemic-era device for faking productivity and “work spouse,” shorthand for office partnerships that feel marital in everything but name.



*The Skibidi Toilet is a machinima web series created by Alexey Gerasimov and released through YouTube videos and Shorts on his channel. It has since gone viral. (Wikimedia Commons)*

## Practice Quiz

# Current Affairs Revision MCQs

Brush Up Your Current Affairs Knowledge And Consolidate Your UPSC CSE Preparation.

Compiled by **Nitendra Pal Singh**

### QUESTION 1

With reference to the nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, consider the following statements:

1. Heads of state and members of national assemblies and national governments can send nominations for the Peace Prize.
2. In 2025, it is for the first time that the President of the United States has been nominated for the Peace Prize.
3. The full list of nominees is made public 50 years after the submission.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

### QUESTION 2

With reference to the radioisotopes, consider the following statements:

1. They are the unstable form of an element that emits radiation to transform into a more stable form.
2. Most radioisotopes are artificially produced in research reactors and accelerators by exposing a target material to “intense particles,” such as neutrons or protons, followed by different chemical processes to bring them into the required chemical form.
3. They are an effective tool for industrial applications.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one

- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

### QUESTION 3

**Recently, three ships of the Indian Navy participated in a naval exercise in the Philippines for the first time. The maritime exercise was held at:**

- (a) Pacific Ocean
- (b) South China Sea
- (c) Indian Ocean
- (d) Bay of Bengal

### QUESTION 4

Which of the following is/are the ‘Northern expansion’ of the Marathas?

1. Areas around Delhi
2. Bundelkhand
3. Malwa
4. Parts of Rajasthan

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

### QUESTION 5

Which of the following countries borders Somalia?

1. Ethiopia
2. Tanzania

- 3. Sudan
- 4. Kenya
- 5. Eritrea

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 4 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4
- (c) 1, 3 and 5
- (d) 2 and 5 only

### QUESTION 6

With reference to the refugees, consider the following statements:

- 1. The UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, lays down the obligations of states to protect refugees and grant them a minimum standard of care.
- 2. India is one of the UN member states that is a signatory to the UN Refugee Treaty.
- 3. According to a report by the National Human Rights Commission, India does not have any refugees from Myanmar.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

### QUESTION 7

**“Rudrastra” refers to the:**

- (a) Longest freight train of Indian Railways.
- (b) Indigenous air-to-air missile developed by DRDO.
- (c) New semi-high-speed passenger train under the Vande Bharat series.
- (d) Underwater surveillance system for the Indian Navy.

### QUESTION 8

With reference to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), consider the following statements:

- 1. It is a regional free trade agreement between ASEAN countries and Indo-Pacific countries.
- 2. India is a member of RCEP.
- 3. The RCEP has its headquarters in Manila, Philippines.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) None

### QUESTION 9

What is/are the eligibility criteria for an SFB to transition into a universal bank according to the RBI?

- 1. Scheduled status with a satisfactory track record of performance for a minimum period of two years.
- 2. Listing on a recognised stock exchange and minimum net worth of Rs 1,000 crore as at the end of the previous quarter (audited).
- 3. Meet the prescribed CRAR requirements for SFBs.
- 4. Having a net profit in the last two financial years and gross NPA and net NPA of less than or equal to 3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively in the last two financial years.

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 2, 3 and 4

**QUESTION 10**

**Which of the following countries has brokered a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia?**

- (a) Israel
- (b) United States
- (c) China
- (d) Russia

**QUESTION 11**

With reference to India's nuclear capacity, consider the following statements:

1. India's installed nuclear capacity stood at roughly 8.8 gigawatts (GW) as of June 30, 2025.
2. Indian government has opened the doors of nuclear energy to the private sector.
3. India aims to grow nuclear generation capacity tenfold by 2047.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 12**

Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The livestock and companion animal sector plays a pivotal role in the country's agricultural economy and rural livelihoods.

Statement 2: The animal husbandry and dairying sector contributes about 30 per cent of the agricultural GVA and 5.5 per cent of the national economy.

**Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?**

- (a) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and Statement 2 is the correct explanation for Statement 1.
- (b) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and Statement 2 is not the correct explanation for

Statement 1.

- (c) Statement 1 is correct but Statement 2 is incorrect.
- (d) Statement 1 is incorrect but Statement 2 is correct.

**QUESTION 13**

**The Sudarshan Chakra Mission is a:**

- (a) A space exploration programme aimed at sending India's first manned mission to Mars.
- (b) An archaeological initiative to preserve ancient Indian temples and cultural heritage.
- (c) A renewable energy mission focused on harnessing solar and wind power for national grid stability.
- (d) A major defence initiative aimed at protecting India's strategic, civilian, and religious sites from enemy threats.

**QUESTION 14**

With reference to the Samudrayaan Mission, consider the following statements:

1. It is aimed to develop a self-propelled manned submersible to carry human beings to a water depth of 6000 meters in the ocean.
2. It is India's first manned deep-sea mission.
3. Till now, only two countries have successfully carried out crewed deep-ocean missions.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 15**

**Which of the following countries has experienced a decline in population for the 16th consecutive year in 2024, marking the largest population drop since 1968?**

- (a) North Korea
- (b) China

- (c) Japan
- (d) Brazil

**QUESTION 16**

**Which of the following states in India is set to become India's 'first' digitally-literate state?**

- (a) Kerala
- (b) Mizoram
- (c) Sikkim
- (d) Tamil Nadu

**QUESTION 17**

With reference to the Hydrogen Train Engine India, consider the following statements:

1. India's hydrogen-powered engine, developed with indigenous technology, can deliver 1200 horsepower, surpassing other hydrogen engines across the world.
2. The locomotive is designed by the Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL).

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 18**

With reference to the NISAR mission, consider the following statements:

1. The satellite will scan the entire globe every 30 days, providing a series of very detailed images of the Earth's surface.
2. NASA's L-band and ISRO's S-band can see through clouds, smoke, rain or fog, thus getting an unfiltered view of the Earth.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 19**

With reference to the S-400 missile system, consider the following statements:

1. It is a mobile, surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by the United States.
2. It detects any aerial threat in the area it has been tasked with protecting, calculates the threat's path, and then dispatches a suitable missile to counter the threat.
3. It has a multifunction radar.
4. It has autonomous detection and targeting systems.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**QUESTION 20**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)-constituted committee to encourage the responsible and ethical adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recommended:

1. establishment of an AI innovation sandbox
2. development of indigenous financial sector-specific AI models
3. adaptive and enabling policies and adoption of an AI liability framework.

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**QUESTION 21**

With reference to the acquisition of arms in India, governed by Arms Rules, 2016 framed under the Arms Act, 1959, consider the following statements:

1. Licences for arms and ammunition in the

permissible category, however, are governed by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

2. Licenses for arms and ammunition in the prohibited and restricted categories are directly governed by the Union Ministry of Defence.

**Which of the statements mentioned above is/are true?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 22**

Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992, recognised two different types of urban local bodies.
- 2. A metropolitan area is defined as an area having a population of above 10 lakh.
- 3. Municipalities are supposed to be elected directly by the people.

**Which of the statements given above is/are true?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**QUESTION 23**

Parliament recently passed a new income tax Bill to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961.

With reference to this consider the following features listed below:

- 1. Taxpayers could only claim a refund if they had filed tax returns on or before the due date.
- 2. There will be nil Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) remittances for education purposes financed by any financial institution.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only

- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 24**

Consider the following statements with reference to Orbiting Carbon Observatories (OCOs).

- 1. They are a series of dedicated Earth remote sensing satellites that were designed specifically to observe atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from space in order to better understand the characteristics of climate change.
- 2. OCOs as a part of a mission was launched by ISRO along with other international space agencies as a first step to monitor the pollution status in Indian cities due to carbon dioxide.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 25**

**The LPG carrier Sahyadri, recently inducted by India, was built in which country?**

- (a) Russia
- (b) Japan
- (c) South Korea
- (d) Israel

**QUESTION 26**

With reference to the Space Station, consider the following statements:

- 1. India plans to launch the first module of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2028.
- 2. The International Space Station is operated by five space agencies, including India's ISRO.
- 3. Tiangong space station is operated independently by Japan.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 27**

With reference to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), consider the following statements:

1. The CEC is appointed by the President of India upon the recommendation of a three-member selection committee.
2. The appointments are made for a tenure of six years or until the age of 60 years, whichever comes first.
3. The CEC enjoys the same services and monetary benefits that are extended to justices of the High Court.
4. The CEC can be removed only on the grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**QUESTION 28**

Which of the following climate variations can bring anomalously cool waters into the Arctic region and lead to less loss of sea ice or expansion in some areas?

1. Atlantic Multidecadal Variability
2. Pacific Decadal Oscillation

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 29**

**Which of the following paramilitary forces has been allowed to attend the biannual border talks with Bangladesh in Dhaka?**

- (a) Border Security Force (BSF)
- (b) Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
- (c) Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
- (d) Assam Rifles

**QUESTION 30**

With reference to the Crimean Peninsula, consider the following statements:

1. It is bordered by the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea.
2. In the 13th century, it became part of the Mongol Golden Horde.
3. It is known for its fertile land and strategic ports.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 31**

**The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) was recently in the news. It is led by:**

- (a) Russia
- (b) European Union
- (c) United States
- (d) United Nations

**QUESTION 32**

Which of the following countries are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)?

1. Armenia
2. Kazakhstan
3. Turkmenistan
4. Belarus
5. Ukraine

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1, 2 and 4
- (b) 1, 2, 3 and 5
- (c) 2, 3 and 4
- (d) 3, 4 and 5

### QUESTION 33

With reference to the monsoon trough, consider the following statements:

- 1. It is an elongated high-pressure area that extends from the heat low over Afghanistan to the Arabian Sea.
- 2. Its northward movement results in heavy rain in central India and the Deccan.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

### QUESTION 34

With reference to the monsoon trough, consider the following statements:

- 1. It is an elongated high-pressure area that extends from the heat low over Afghanistan to the Arabian Sea.
- 2. Its northward movement results in heavy rain in central India and the Deccan.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

### QUESTION 35

The Sixth Schedule applies to the Northeastern states of:

- 1. Assam

- 2. Nagaland
- 3. Tripura
- 4. Mizoram
- 5. Arunachal Pradesh

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1, 2 and 5
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- (d) 1, 3 and 4

### QUESTION 36

With reference to the “Daruma Doll”, consider the following statements:

- 1. It is a traditional Chinese wish doll.
- 2. It is modelled after Bodhidharma.
- 3. It is considered a symbol of perseverance and good luck.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

### QUESTION 37

With reference to the Blue Dragons, consider the following statements:

- 1. These are a small type of sea slug that live on the ocean surface, drifting with the currents.
- 2. They feed on jellyfish.
- 3. They are typically found in temperate waters.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 38**

With reference to the H-1B visa program, consider the following statements:

1. It allows American employers to hire immigrant workers in occupations that require “a high level of skill” and “at least a bachelor’s degree”.
2. There is no capping on the total number of new H-1B visas.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 39**

**The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has an agreement to develop the Chandrayaan-5 / LUPEX (Lunar Polar EXploration) mission in collaboration with:**

- (a) European Space Agency
- (b) National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- (c) Canadian Space Agency
- (d) Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency

**QUESTION 40**

With reference to the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC), consider the following statements:

1. It carries warm surface waters from the tropics towards the Northern Hemisphere.
2. Gulf Stream is not a part of the AMOC.
3. An AMOC shutdown would cool the northern hemisphere and increase rainfall over Europe.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 41**

With reference to the National Sports Day, consider the following statements:

1. The day commemorates the birth anniversary of Major Dhyan Chand.
2. The theme for the year 2025 is ‘Ek Ghanta, Khel ke Maidan Main’.
3. National Sports Day was first celebrated in 2010 to promote sports in the country and acknowledge the efforts of Indian athletes.
4. The Khelo India movement was launched on the occasion of National Sports Day in 2015.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**QUESTION 42**

India-Japan bilateral relations were elevated to:

1. Global Partnership in 2000.
2. Strategic and Global Partnership in 2010
3. Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2020

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

**QUESTION 43**

With reference to the Titas River, consider the following statements:

1. It forms part of the Surma-Meghna river system.
2. The river originates in India.
3. It flows along Meghalaya and merges directly with the Brahmaputra River.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one

- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 44**

With reference to the dams and rivers associated, consider the following pairs:

- 1. Pong dam – Chenab
- 2. Ranjit Sagar Dam – Beas
- 3. Bhakra Nangal Dam – Sutlej

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one pair
- (b) Only two pairs
- (c) All three pairs
- (d) None of the pairs

**QUESTION 45**

The country's first bullet train, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project, will pass through:

- 1. Gujarat
- 2. Goa
- 3. Maharashtra
- 4. Dadra & Nagar Haveli

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3
- (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- (d) 1, 3 and 4

**QUESTION 46**

With reference to the Sardar Sarovar Dam, consider the following statements:

- 1. It is a concrete gravity dam.
- 2. It generates eco-friendly hydro power.
- 3. It has been built over the Tapi River in Gujarat.
- 4. The Sardar Sarovar Dam provides irrigation water to the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and

Maharashtra only.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**QUESTION 47**

Which of the following factors are responsible for earthquake-led tsunamis?

- 1. The earthquake must be a marine event.
- 2. An earthquake should occur due to "normal" faults.
- 3. The magnitude of the earthquake should be more than 7.0.

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1 and 3 only

**QUESTION 48**

With reference to the Patalpani-Kalakund railway line, consider the following statements:

- 1. Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar II, who reigned from 1844 to 1886, proposed the construction of a railway line.
- 2. It is a narrow-gauge section which was preserved by the Indian Railways in 2018.
- 3. The railway line is located in two states, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**QUESTION 49**

Which of the following prescribes the legal framework for surrogacy?

1. The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021
2. The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**QUESTION 50**

With reference to the Kavach system, consider the following statements:

1. It is an indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system.
2. It aids the Loco Pilot in running the train within specified speed limits by automatic application of brakes in case Loco Pilot fails to do so.
3. It was adopted as a National ATP system in 2020.

**How many of the statements given above are correct?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

**Answer Key**

1. (b)	2. (c)	3. (b)	4. (d)	5. (a)	6. (a)	7. (a)	8. (a)	9. (d)	10. (b)
11. (c)	12. (a)	13. (d)	14. (b)	15. (c)	16. (a)	17. (a)	18. (b)	19. (c)	20. (d)
21. (d)	22. (c)	23. (b)	24. (a)	25. (c)	26. (a)	27. (b)	28. (c)	29. (a)	30. (b)
31. (b)	32. (a)	33. (d)	34. (b)	35. (d)	36. (b)	37. (b)	38. (a)	39. (d)	40. (a)
41. (b)	42. (a)	43. (a)	44. (a)	45. (d)	46. (b)	47. (d)	48. (a)	49. (c)	50. (c)

**Detailed Explanations:**

For a detailed explanation, visit [indianexpress.com/section/upsc-current-affairs/](https://www.indianexpress.com/section/upsc-current-affairs/). Click on the UPSC Quiz tab and explore weekly current affairs quizzes from August 2025.