DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 05/12/2025 (FRIDAY)
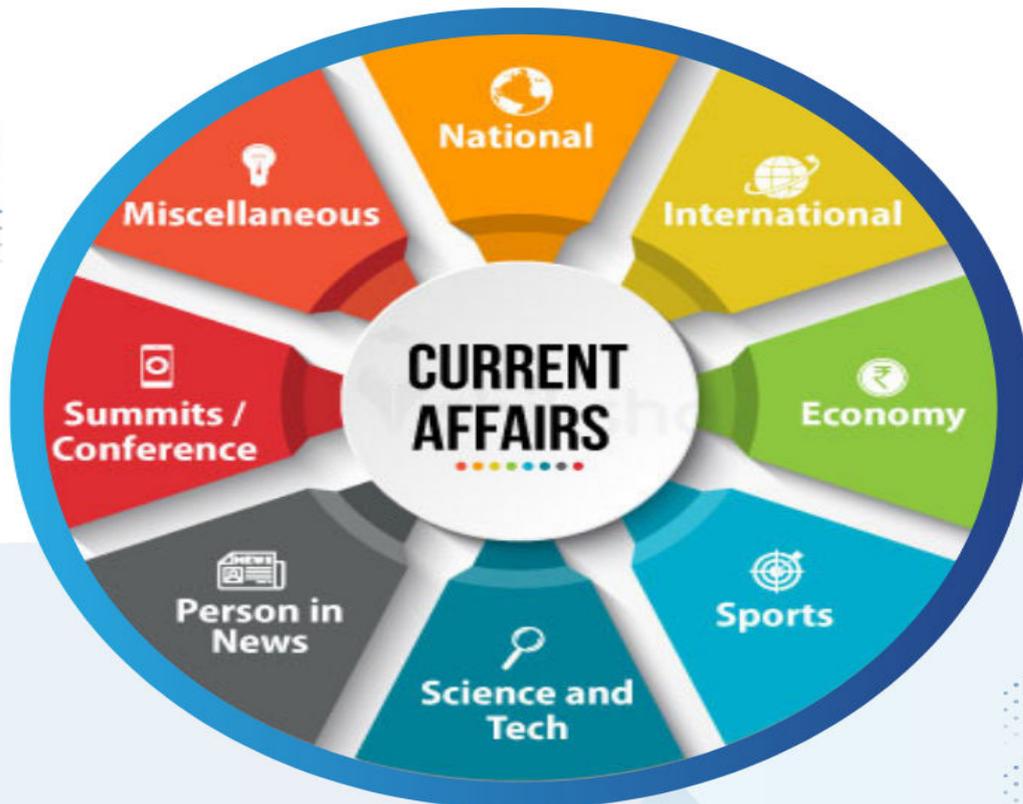
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1. SC Directs States to Replace Distressed BLOs during Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

Key Points

- **State Responsibility to Replace Distressed BLOs:** The Supreme Court ruled that *State governments* must substitute Booth Level Officers (BLOs) who are unable to manage SIR-related workload, ensuring the election process is not hampered.

- **Obligation of BLOs as Statutory Duty:** The Court underscored that employees assigned as BLOs are legally bound to perform duties such as distributing enumeration forms under the *Representation of People Act (RPA), 1950* and EC instructions.

- **Exemption on Case-to-Case Basis:** The Bench clarified that employees with genuine, specific reasons for exemption may be considered by the State authorities individually, and replaced accordingly.

- **State's Duty to Support Election Commission:** States are mandated to provide adequate human resources to the EC to ensure timely completion of the *Special Intensive Revision (SIR)* of electoral rolls across multiple States and UTs.

- **Court's Stand on Workload Concerns:** While petitions highlighted overwhelming targets and distress among BLOs, the EC contested these claims, citing that each BLO handles only one booth with a maximum of 1,200 electors and a 37-day time frame for enumeration.

Additional Important Points (UPSC-Oriented)

- **Booth Level Officer (BLO) – Definition:** A local government/State employee appointed by the Election Commission to verify, update and maintain electoral roll entries at the polling station level.

- **Legal Basis:**

  - *Article 324* – Empowers EC with superintendence, direction, and control over elections.

  - *RPA 1950* – Deals with preparation and revision of electoral rolls.

  - *EC Instructions/Handbooks* – Provide operational guidelines for BLOs.

> Whenever an employee has any individual, specific reasons for seeking exemption from the assigned duties, the competent authority, the State government, may consider such requests on a case to case basis and replace such persons
>
> **SUPREME COURT**

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A targeted exercise conducted by the EC to correct, update, and verify electoral rolls more rigorously than the routine annual revision.

- **Administrative Principle Reiterated:** Courts generally avoid interfering with ongoing electoral processes unless the EC's ability to conduct free and fair elections is compromised.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court has clearly placed the responsibility on State governments to ensure that BLO duties are performed without interruption during the SIR. While acknowledging possible individual hardships, the Court emphasised that such concerns cannot impede the electoral roll revision process, which is foundational to democratic elections. The judgment reinforces the statutory obligations of BLOs and the cooperative role of State governments in assisting the Election Commission.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **Polity (Election Commission, Article 324, RPA 1950)**.

- Relevant to topics on **Governance, Administrative Efficiency, Centre–State Coordination, Electoral Reforms**, and **Role of Bureaucracy in Elections**.

- Useful for **Prelims (Constitutional & statutory provisions)** and **GS-II Mains (electoral management, institutional responsibilities)**.

2. Assam Row over ST Status for Six Communities

Key Points

- **GoM Recommendation for Inclusion of Six Communities:** Assam's Group of Ministers (GoM) submitted an interim report recommending *Scheduled Tribe (ST)* status for six communities — Adivasi/Tea Tribes, Chutia, Koch-Rajbongshi, Matak, Moran, and Tai Ahom — triggering protests from existing ST groups.

- **Opposition from Existing ST Communities:** Current ST communities, especially the Bodos, fear that granting ST status to socially and economically advanced groups may dilute their constitutional rights, quota benefits, and political representation.

- **Government's Proposed Safeguards:** The GoM suggested a *three-tier ST classification* — ST (Plains), ST (Hills), and a new category ST (Valley) to include the six proposed communities, without affecting the existing tribes' rights and privileges.

- **Dialogue with Tribal Organisations:** Tribal Affairs Minister Ranoj Pegu met the Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations, Assam (CCTOA), clarifying safeguards and urging review of chapters 5 and 6 of the report. CCTOA will form an expert committee to respond within a month.

- **Core Concern of Tribals:** Existing tribes argue that adding "2 crore advanced people" could overshadow approximately 45 lakh existing tribals, undermining affirmative action and constitutional protections.

- **Assembly Resolution Basis:** The GoM report claims its framework aligns with the Assam Assembly's resolution that new communities may be recognized as STs without harming the rights of present STs.

Additional Important Key Points

- **Scheduled Tribes (ST) – Definition:** Communities identified under *Article 342 of the Constitution* as socially and economically disadvantaged, requiring special protections and affirmative action.

- **Process for Inclusion/Exclusion:** The President notifies ST lists under Article 342; Parliament alone can alter them. States may recommend changes, but final approval rests with the Union.

- **Concerns with Expansion of ST List:**

  o Risk of **reduced access to reservation benefits** due to larger beneficiary pool.

  o Possible **political marginalisation** in ST-reserved constituencies.

  o **Socio-economic imbalance** between relatively advanced and marginalized communities.

- **Tea Tribes (Adivasi) Community:** A historically marginalised labour community brought by the British to Assam's tea estates; long-standing demand for ST status.

Conclusion

The Assam ST inclusion issue reflects the complex balance between expanding social justice to deserving communities and protecting the constitutional entitlements of existing STs. While the government argues that its tiered classification prevents dilution of rights, tribal groups remain wary of demographic and socio-economic impacts. The ongoing dialogue and expert review signal an attempt to reach a negotiated and equitable resolution.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **Indian Polity (Articles 15, 16, 46, 338, 342)** and issues of *affirmative action & tribal welfare*.

- Relevant for **Governance, Identity Politics, Federalism, Scheduled Tribe Policy**, and socio-economic classification debates.

- Useful for **Prelims** (constitutional provisions for STs) and **GS-II/GS-I Mains** (vulnerable sections, rights of tribes, Assam's ethnic politics, policy challenges).

3. Karnataka Cabinet Approves Bill to Prevent Hate Speech and Hate Crimes
Key Points

- **Cabinet Approval for New Legislation:** The Karnataka Cabinet has approved a Bill aimed at preventing hate speech and hate crimes, signalling a stronger legal and administrative framework to curb rising incidents of communal and identity-based violence.

- **Objective of the Bill:** The proposed legislation intends to *define, criminalise, and penalise* hate speech and hate-motivated crimes more clearly than existing provisions under the IPC, ensuring quicker action and enhanced accountability.

- **Expanded Definitions and Offences:** The Bill reportedly broadens the scope of *hate speech* to include verbal, written, digital, and symbolic expressions that promote enmity, discrimination, or violence against individuals or groups based on religion, caste, language, gender, or identity.

- **Stricter Penalties & Enforcement Mechanisms:** It proposes stringent punishments for repeat offenders, empowers law enforcement agencies with clearer procedures, and mandates faster investigation timelines for hate incidents.

- **Alignment with Constitutional Duties:** The Bill aims to uphold *Articles 14, 15, 19(2), and 21*, ensuring equality, protection from discrimination, reasonable restrictions on speech, and safeguarding dignity and life.

- **Context of Rising Hate Incidents:** The move comes amid national debates over polarising speech, misuse of social media, and communal flare-ups, prompting States to strengthen legislative action in harmony with Supreme Court directives.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Hate Speech – Definition (General):** Any expression that incites violence, discrimination, hostility, or hatred against individuals or groups based on protected characteristics such as religion, caste, ethnicity, nationality, gender, etc.

- **Relevant Legal Provisions:**

  o *IPC Sections 153A, 153B, 295A, 505* deal with promoting enmity, imputations prejudicial to national integration, and inflammatory statements.

  o *Article 19(1)(a)* guarantees freedom of speech; *Article 19(2)* allows the State to impose reasonable restrictions in the interest of public order, morality, and security.

  o *Supreme Court Judgments*: SC has repeatedly urged governments to act against hate speech (e.g., *Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan vs Union of India*, 2014).

- **Need for State-Level Legislation:** Existing IPC provisions are considered insufficient in addressing online hate, targeted attacks, and organised hate campaigns. States can legislate on public order under the State List (Entry 1).

Conclusion

The Karnataka Cabinet's approval of a Bill against hate speech and hate crimes represents a proactive step toward strengthening public order, protecting vulnerable groups, and aligning with constitutional principles. By defining offences more clearly and providing stricter enforcement mechanisms, the legislation aims to address modern manifestations of hate, including digital and organised forms.

UPSC Relevance

- Relevant for **GS-II: Governance, Law & Order, Government Policies**.

- Important for **Polity (Fundamental Rights, Article 19 restrictions)** and **Social Issues (communalism, discrimination)**.

- Useful for **Prelims** (constitutional provisions, legal framework for hate speech) and **Mains** (essay themes, ethical governance, freedom of speech vs responsibility).

4. Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar (MGMD) Programme: 6.38 Lakh Villages Identified for Cultural Mapping

Key Points

- **Large-Scale Cultural Mapping:** Under the MGMD Programme, *6,38,365 villages* have been identified for cultural mapping across India, with data of *6,23,449 villages* already uploaded on the MGMD Portal.

- **Comprehensive Cultural Documentation:** The programme records both *tangible and intangible* cultural elements such as oral traditions, customs, art forms, heritage sites, traditional food, prominent artists, festivals, dress, ornaments, and village landmarks.

- **Strengthening Rural Identity:** MGMD creates authentic cultural profiles for each village, helping recognise and preserve local heritage, improving a sense of identity and pride among rural communities.

- **Community-Led Approach:** The initiative encourages community participation through *crowd-sourced documentation and validation*, fostering ownership and ensuring accuracy of cultural data.

- **Support for Planning & Development:** Availability of structured cultural data on a national platform facilitates *cultural cluster development, heritage tourism*, promotion of traditional skills, and supports *rural livelihood generation*.

- **Government Initiative:** Information was shared by the Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, emphasising the programme's role in cultural preservation and rural economic development.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **MGMD Programme – Definition:** A Government initiative under the Ministry of Culture aimed at documenting, preserving, and promoting India's village-level cultural heritage through digital mapping.

- **Related Constitutional Provisions:**

  - *Article 29*: Protection of interests of minorities and cultural distinctiveness.

  - *Article 51A(f)*: Fundamental duty to value and preserve India's rich heritage.

  - *7th Schedule – Culture*: Culture primarily falls under the *Concurrent List*, allowing both Centre and States to legislate.

- **Relevant Schemes & Linkages:**

  - *National Mission on Cultural Mapping*,

  - *Dekho Apna Desh* (Tourism),

  - *PM Vishwakarma* (traditional skills),

  - *Rural Tourism Policy* linkages for livelihood support.

- **Importance of Cultural Mapping:** Helps prevent cultural erosion, enables targeted policy-making, supports grassroots tourism, and aids in documenting disappearing art forms.

Conclusion

The MGMD Programme represents a landmark effort in digitising and preserving India's vast cultural landscape at the village level. By combining technology with community participation, the initiative strengthens rural identity, enhances cultural planning, and contributes to sustainable rural development. The extensive village-level cultural profiles will serve as a valuable resource for heritage conservation and economic upliftment.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **GS-I (Indian Culture, Heritage, Art Forms, Rural Society)**.

- Relevant to **GS-II (Governance, Government Schemes, Community Participation)** and **GS-III (Rural Development, Livelihoods, Tourism)**.

- Useful for Prelims on government initiatives related to culture and for Mains/Essay on cultural preservation, rural empowerment, and digital governance.

5. India's Strategic Isolation and Emerging Internal Security Challenges
Key Points

- **India's Diminishing Role in Global Affairs:** Despite strong diplomatic credentials, India is increasingly seen as an 'outlier', remaining on the sidelines of major global crises in West Asia, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific. This marks an unusual phase where India's influence appears limited.

- **Regional Turmoil in South Asia:** Several neighbouring countries — Afghanistan, Nepal, Maldives, Myanmar — are undergoing instability. India faces simultaneous hostility from *Pakistan (west)* and *Bangladesh (east)*, aggravating its strategic vulnerability.

- **Escalating Threat from Pakistan:** Pakistan's 27th Constitutional Amendment and creation of a *Chief of Defence Forces* with absolute authority, including over nuclear assets, enhances the risk of military adventurism. Concentration of power in Field Marshal Asim Munir heightens the possibility of miscalculation and conflict with India.

- **Hostile Shifts in Bangladesh:** The interim government's unfriendly posture, coupled with growing Bangladesh–Pakistan engagement (e.g., Pakistani naval visit after 50 years), increases India's security concerns in the Bay of Bengal.

- **Return of Urban Terrorism:** A new terror module involving educated professionals (notably doctors) has emerged from Srinagar–Faridabad–Delhi. Unlike past attacks by lumpen groups or Pakistan-sponsored networks, this *indigenous, ideologically radicalised* group reflects deep societal fault lines and long-term grievances (e.g., Babri Masjid demolition legacy).

- **Internal Security Lapses Exposed:** The group accumulated nearly 3,000 kg of explosives, evaded detection, and executed an attack near Red Fort — revealing either high sophistication or severe administrative lapses in urban policing and intelligence.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Urban Terrorism – Definition:** Acts of planned violence in densely populated urban settings by organised groups or individuals aimed at creating fear, destabilising society, or achieving ideological goals.

- **Key Internal Security Concerns:**
    - Rise of *home-grown radicalisation* through encrypted communication channels.
    - Use of professional networks for funding and logistics under social or charitable cover.
    - Transnational linkages with entities in *Pakistan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye*.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**
    - *Article 355*: Duty of Union to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbances.
    - *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)* for dealing with terrorism.
    - *National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act* enabling central investigation of terror offences.

      o *National Security Act (NSA)* for preventive detention in security-related situations.

- **Strategic Implications:** India's simultaneous external pressures and internal radicalisation challenges require recalibration of foreign policy, stronger intelligence coordination, and societal healing to prevent widening of fault lines.

Conclusion

India today faces a dual challenge: diminishing geopolitical influence coupled with rising threats from hostile neighbours and renewed domestic terrorism. The emergence of educated radicalised actors highlights deeper socio-religious fractures within Indian society. Combined with Pakistan's military consolidation and Bangladesh's shifting posture, India must exercise strategic vigilance, enhance counter-terror mechanisms, and rebuild regional partnerships to ensure security and stability.

UPSC Relevance

- Highly relevant for **GS-II (International Relations, Neighbourhood Policy, India–Pakistan–Bangladesh relations)**.

- Crucial for **GS-III (Internal Security, Terrorism, Radicalisation, Intelligence Coordination)**.

- Useful for **Essay Paper** on themes like national security, India's global role, communal harmony, and societal challenges.

- Important for Prelims: constitutional provisions (Art. 355), anti-terror laws (UAPA, NIA Act), South Asian geopolitics.

6. World Soil Day 2025 – "Healthy Soils for Healthy Cities"
Key Points

- **Importance of World Soil Day (December 5):** Established by FAO, the day highlights soil as a foundational but overlooked resource essential for human civilisation. The 2025 theme shifts focus to *urban soils*, emphasising their vital role in sustaining modern cities.

- **Role of Urban Soils in Climate Resilience:** Healthy urban soils act as *carbon sinks, natural coolers,* and reduce urban heat island effects. They absorb heat, sequester carbon, and regulate microclimates in parks, gardens, and green belts.

- **Critical Functions of Urban Soil Systems:** They prevent flooding by absorbing excess rainwater, recharge groundwater, support urban agriculture and biodiversity, and enhance human well-being by enabling green spaces that reduce stress and improve mental health.

- **Urban Soil Degradation – A Growing Crisis:** Nearly one-third of global soils are degraded, aggravated in cities by contamination, compaction, loss of organic matter, and soil sealing through concrete. This threatens food safety, biodiversity, and ecosystem services.

- **Blueprint for Action:** The campaign urges soil restoration (composting, organic amendments), green infrastructure (rain gardens, tree belts), urban agriculture, eco-friendly soil management, and soil literacy. Community participation and responsible municipal planning are central.

- **Core Message:** Healthy cities fundamentally depend on healthy soils, making soil conservation a shared responsibility of governments, planners, schools, and citizens.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Soil – Definition:** A natural body composed of minerals, organic matter, water, air, and living organisms that forms the upper layer of Earth and supports plant life.

- **Urban Heat Island (UHI):** A phenomenon where urban regions show significantly higher temperatures compared to surrounding rural areas due to lack of vegetation and excess concrete.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**

  o *Article 48A*: Duty of the State to protect and improve the environment.

  o *Article 51A(g)*: Fundamental duty of citizens to protect the natural environment.

  o *Environment (Protection) Act, 1986* and *Soil Health Management Scheme* support soil conservation.

  o Linkages with *SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities)*, *SDG 13 (Climate Action)*, *SDG 15 (Life on Land)*.

- **Importance for Sustainable Urban Development:** Urban soils reduce heat, improve air quality, support food security, enhance climate adaptation, and contribute to disaster resilience in cities.

Conclusion

World Soil Day 2025 reminds humanity that the foundation of resilient and livable cities lies beneath our feet. Urban soils, though often neglected, are vital ecological infrastructure essential for climate resilience, biodiversity, food systems, and human well-being. Protecting them requires informed communities, proactive governance, and sustainable urban planning.

UPSC Relevance

- Relevant for **GS-I (Geography: Soil, Urbanisation), GS-III (Environment, Climate Change, Conservation)**.

- Important for **GS-II (Urban Governance, Sustainable Development)**.

- Useful for Prelims (FAO initiatives, soil functions) and Mains (urban environmental challenges, climate resilience, sustainable cities).

7. India–Indonesia Joint Special Forces Exercise "Garuda Shakti" (10th Edition)
Key Points

- **Commencement of 10th Edition (2025):** The India–Indonesia Joint Special Forces Exercise *Garuda Shakti* began at the Special Forces Training School, Bakloh (Himachal Pradesh), from December 3–12, 2025.

- **Participating Forces:** India is represented by *Parachute Regiment (Special Forces)*, while Indonesia is represented by personnel from the *Indonesian Special Forces (Kopassus)*.

- **Aim of the Exercise:** The primary objective is to enhance *mutual understanding, interoperability,* and *military cooperation* between the Special Forces of both nations, particularly in counter-terrorism operations.

- **Scope & Training Modules:** The exercise covers unarmed combat, combat shooting, sniping, heliborne operations, and planning for drone, counter-UAS, and loiter-munition strikes in semi-mountainous terrain. It also includes information exchange on weapons, equipment, and operational best practices.

- **High-Intensity Joint Training:** Emphasis is placed on physical fitness, tactical manoeuvres, and high-intensity combat simulations. The exercise concludes with a validation drill replicating real-world operational scenarios.

- **Strategic Importance:** The exercise deepens defence ties, enhances operational synergy, and contributes to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

INDIA–INDONESIA LAUNCH 10TH 'GARUDA SHAKTI' SPECIAL FORCES EXERCISE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Joint Military Exercise – Definition:** A coordinated training activity between armed forces of two or more nations aimed at improving interoperability, strengthening defence diplomacy, and sharing tactical expertise.

- **India–Indonesia Defence Relations:**

  o Part of India's *Act East Policy* and Indonesia's strategic role in the *Indo-Pacific*.

  o Both nations cooperate in maritime security, anti-terrorism, and HADR (Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief).

- **Other Notable Exercises:**

  o *With Indonesia:* "Samudra Shakti" (naval exercise).

  o *With Other Nations:* "Vajra Prahar" (India–U.S.), "Nomadic Elephant" (India–Mongolia), "Yudh Abhyas" (India–U.S.).

- **Relevant Constitutional/Legal Links:**

  o Defence cooperation aligns with *Article 51* (promotion of international peace and security).

  o Strategic exercises support India's external security mandates under *Article 355* (Union responsibility for national defence).

Conclusion

Exercise Garuda Shakti reinforces India's commitment to strengthening defence diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific and improving counter-terrorism capabilities through joint training with Indonesia. Such exercises enhance operational readiness, promote interoperability, and contribute to regional stability.

UPSC Relevance

- Highly relevant for **Prelims** (joint military exercises, defence training schools, Act East Policy).

- Relevant for **GS-II** (India's bilateral relations, Indo-Pacific strategy) and **GS-III** (internal security, counter-terrorism, defence preparedness).

- Useful for **Essay** on regional cooperation, security partnerships, and India's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

8. Putin's 27-Hour Visit to India to Bolster Bilateral Relations

Key Points

- **High-Level Visit Amid Geopolitical Shifts:** Russian President Vladimir Putin began a 27-hour visit to India to reinforce an eight-decade-long strategic partnership, despite global geopolitical tensions and a downturn in India–U.S. relations. PM Modi personally received him at the airport, highlighting the significance India attaches to the visit.

- **Setting the Stage for the 23rd India–Russia Summit:** Modi and Putin held a private dinner and discussions to set the tone for the 23rd bilateral summit. The meeting is expected to deliver major outcomes, especially on defence cooperation, energy, nuclear collaboration (including small modular reactors), and insulating bilateral trade from Western sanctions.

- **Trade & Energy Concerns:** India is likely to raise the issue of the growing trade deficit due to high imports of Russian crude oil and discuss ways to minimise the impact of U.S. sanctions, including the recent tariffs (up to 50%) imposed on Indian goods and levies linked to Russian oil procurement.

- **Ukraine Conflict & Diplomatic Dialogue:** Putin is expected to brief Modi on U.S. diplomatic moves regarding the Ukraine conflict. India will maintain its consistent stand that dialogue and diplomacy are the only paths toward conflict resolution.

- **Strengthening Defence & Labour Mobility:** Agreements expected include logistics support for defence cooperation and a framework enabling easier movement of Indian workers to Russia. Both sides aim to deepen military-technical collaboration amid Western scrutiny.

- **Symbolic & Cultural Diplomacy:** Putin will receive a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan, visit Rajghat, and launch a new India channel of Russia's state broadcaster. President Droupadi Murmu will host a state banquet before Putin departs.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **India–Russia Strategic Partnership:**

  o Formalised in *2000* (Declaration on Strategic Partnership).

  o Upgraded to *Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership* in *2010*.

  o Key pillars include defence (BrahMos, S-400), nuclear energy (Kudankulam), hydrocarbons, space cooperation, and geopolitical coordination.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Policy Context:**

  o *Article 51*: Promotes international peace and security—supports India's diplomatic stance on Ukraine.

  o India's *principle of strategic autonomy* guides its balance between Russia and Western partners.

- **Key Terms:**

  o *Strategic Autonomy*: India's ability to pursue foreign policy independently of major-power pressures.

- *Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)*: Advanced nuclear reactors with lower capacity (typically <300 MW) offering safer, flexible, and cost-effective energy solutions.

- *Geoeconomics*: The use of economic tools (like tariffs, sanctions) to achieve geopolitical aims—a major theme affecting India–Russia trade today.

Conclusion

Putin's short but strategically important visit signals continuity in India–Russia ties amid global uncertainties and pressure on India from Western sanctions. The summit is expected to strengthen defence cooperation, stabilise bilateral trade mechanisms, and enhance energy partnerships. India continues to maintain a balanced foreign policy rooted in strategic autonomy while safeguarding national interests.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **GS-II (International Relations: India–Russia ties, impact of sanctions, strategic autonomy)**.

- Relevant for **GS-III (Defence technology, energy security, nuclear cooperation)**.

- Useful in **Essay** topics on multipolarity, India's diplomatic balancing, and global power shifts.

- Prelims relevance: key summits, bilateral agreements, Russia's role in India's defence and energy sectors.

9. Forest Land Diversion in India (2020–2025): Over 99,000 Hectares Diverted
Key Points

- **Massive Forest Land Diversion:** The Government informed Rajya Sabha that *over 99,000 hectares* of forest land have been diverted for non-forestry purposes between 2020 and 2025.

- **Major Sectors Responsible:** The largest share of diversion is attributed to *road construction, mining activities, hydroelectric projects,* and *irrigation infrastructure*—reflecting development pressures on ecologically sensitive areas.

- **Lack of Data on Affected People:** The government reply did not disclose the number of people (including forest dwellers, tribals, and local communities) affected by such diversions, raising concerns related to displacement and livelihood loss.

- **Legal Basis of Diversion:** Forest diversion is governed under the *Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980* (amended in 2023), which regulates the use of forest land for non-forestry purposes with mandatory approvals and compensatory afforestation.

- **Environmental Concerns:** Large-scale diversion threatens biodiversity, increases carbon emissions, disrupts hydrological cycles, and undermines India's climate commitments under the Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

- **Policy Implication:** The magnitude of diversion indicates tension between developmental imperatives and ecological sustainability, demanding stronger environmental governance and transparent monitoring.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Forest Diversion – Definition:** Allocation of legally recorded forest land for non-forestry purposes such as infrastructure, mining, industries, or development projects, subject to statutory clearance.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**

  - *Article 48A*: Duty of the State to protect and improve forests and the environment.

  - *Article 51A(g)*: Duty of citizens to safeguard forests and wildlife.

  - *Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 & 2023 Amendment*: Regulates forest diversion and exempts certain linear projects from prior clearance in specific areas.

  - *Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006*: Protects forest dwellers' rights; requires Gram Sabha consent for diversion.

  - *EIA Notification 2006*: Mandates environmental impact assessments for major projects.

- **Key Environmental Concepts:**

  - *Compensatory Afforestation*: Planting trees on non-forest land to offset diversion.

  - *Net Present Value (NPV)*: Monetary valuation charged for forest land diverted.

Conclusion

The diversion of more than 99,000 hectares of forest land within five years underscores India's ongoing developmental-environmental trade-offs. While infrastructure and energy projects are essential for economic growth, unmonitored or excessive diversion risks ecological degradation and violations of forest-dependent communities' rights. Effective enforcement of forest laws, transparent reporting, and community participation remain crucial.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **GS-III (Environment, Conservation, Climate Change, Forest Governance)**.

- Relevant for **GS-II (Rights of forest dwellers, environmental legislation, governance issues)**.

- Useful for **Prelims** (Forest Conservation Act, FRA 2006, constitutional provisions).

- Potential for **Essay** topics on sustainable development, ecological balance, and environmental justice.

10. UN Weather Agency Reports 55% Likelihood of La Niña This Winter

Key Points

- **55% Probability of Weak La Niña:** The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) announced a *55% likelihood* of a weak La Niña event developing over the next three months, influencing global climate and weather patterns.

- **Expected Climate Effects:** While La Niña generally causes *temporary global cooling*, WMO predicts that many regions will still experience *warmer-than-normal conditions* due to long-term global warming trends.

- **Global Weather Impacts:** La Niña typically alters rainfall and temperature patterns—bringing wetter conditions to some regions (e.g., Southeast Asia, Australia) and drier conditions to others (e.g., parts of South America), potentially affecting agriculture, fisheries, and disaster risk profiles.

- **Implications for India:** La Niña phases often correlate with *enhanced monsoon rainfall* and *cooler winters*, but impacts vary based on strength and regional atmospheric interactions. A weak La Niña may have limited or mixed effects.

- **Climate Variability Context:** The event follows recent strong El Niño conditions, highlighting ongoing climate variability influenced by greenhouse gas-driven warming. Even cooling events now occur against a backdrop of rising global temperature anomalies.

- **WMO Forecast Significance:** The update underscores the need for preparedness in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, water resources, disaster management, and energy planning.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **La Niña – Definition:** A climate phenomenon characterised by *abnormally cold sea surface temperatures* over the central and eastern Pacific Ocean, forming one phase of the *El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO)* cycle.

- **ENSO Effects on India:**

  - *El Niño:* Often associated with weak monsoons and drought.

  - *La Niña:* Generally linked to stronger monsoon and reduced drought risk, though its effects vary annually.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Policy Framework:**

  - *National Disaster Management Act, 2005*: Supports climate-related preparedness.

  - *National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)*—mission on sustainable agriculture and climate adaptation.

  - *Article 48A & 51A(g)*: Environmental protection duties.

- **Impact on Global Systems:** Influences cyclone activity, jet streams, winter storm patterns, and marine ecosystems; affects food security, health, and economy globally.

Conclusion

The WMO's forecast of a possible weak La Niña indicates a shifting global climate pattern following recent El Niño events. Although La Niña typically cools global temperatures, persistent warming trends may overshadow its effects, leading to unpredictable and region-specific weather outcomes. Nations must remain alert and adapt planning across critical sectors to manage potential climate risks.

UPSC Relevance

- Important for **GS-I (Geography: Climate Patterns, ENSO)**.

- Significant for **GS-III (Disaster Management, Climate Change, Agriculture)**.

- Useful for Prelims on ENSO, WMO, and global climate terminology.

- Relevant for Mains and Essay on climate variability, climate adaptation, and environmental governance.

11. Tobacco Tax Regime Change by End of December

Key Points

- **New Tobacco Tax Framework by December End:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that the *current tobacco tax structure remains unchanged until month-end*, after which a new framework will take effect; however, the *overall tax burden on tobacco products will largely remain the same*.

- **GST Increase from 28% to 40%:** Under the upcoming regime, tobacco products will attract the *highest GST slab of 40%* (up from 28%). This will be balanced by replacing the GST Compensation Cess with the *Health Security and National Security Cess*, ensuring no major change in effective taxation.

- **Total Tax Incidence Still Below WHO Benchmark:** India's total tax incidence on tobacco is *53% of retail price*, significantly lower than the *World Health Organization (WHO) benchmark of 75%* aimed at discouraging tobacco consumption.

- **No Change in Bidi Taxation:** Tax incidence on *bidis* will remain unchanged considering the socio-economic vulnerability of bidi workers. Existing excise duties (5–10 paise per thousand units) and National Calamity Contingency Duty (₹1–₹2 per thousand) continue.

- **Government's Public Health Position:** The Finance Minister clarified that taxes will *not be reduced* on tobacco—classified as a "sin good"—as lower taxation would undermine public health goals and fail to curb consumption.

Change for Status Quo

No increase in overall tax incidence on cigarettes, gutkha | New levies could come into effect next calendar year

Additional revenues to be used for defence, health spends.

Compensation cess was introduced to make up for states' revenue loss in GST transition

- **Legislative Context:** The Rajya Sabha passed the *Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025*, paving the way for the new taxation structure; the existing tax regime has been in place since the rollout of GST in 2017.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Sin Goods – Definition:** Products harmful to society or health (e.g., alcohol, tobacco), taxed at higher rates to discourage consumption and generate revenue for welfare programmes.

- **Relevant Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**

  o *Article 47*: Duty of the State to improve public health and reduce consumption of intoxicating substances.

  o *GST Act, 2017*: Governs indirect taxation including GST slabs.

  o *Central Excise Act*: Continues to apply to certain goods such as tobacco after GST introduction.

  o *National Calamity Contingency Duty (NCCD)* under the Finance Act for funding disaster response.

- **Economic & Social Dimensions:**

  o Tobacco taxation is a key tool for demand reduction under *WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)*.

      o Balancing public health with livelihoods of bidi workers (mostly from poorer sections) remains a policy challenge.

Conclusion

The government's decision to modify the tobacco tax regime without reducing the overall tax burden reflects India's commitment to public health while managing socio-economic sensitivities. Despite a higher GST rate, the net incidence remains unchanged due to cess restructuring. India, however, still falls short of the WHO-recommended tax benchmark, signalling scope for more aggressive tobacco control measures.

UPSC Relevance

- Useful for **GS-II (Health policy, WHO standards, government legislation)**.

- Relevant for **GS-III (Taxation, fiscal policy, public health, sin taxes)**.

- Important for Prelims: GST structure, NCCD, excise duties on non-GST goods.

- Potential for Mains and Essay topics: health economics, behaviour change through taxation, regulatory reforms.

12. How the Mahad Satyagraha(s) Shaped India's Constitutional Discourse

Key Points

- **Mahad as Birthplace of India's Early Human Rights Movement (1927):** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar launched the Mahad satyagrahas (1927) in the Bombay Province to challenge caste-based untouchability, especially the denial of Dalits' right to access public water resources like the Chavadar Tank. It became a foundational movement asserting dignity, equality, and human rights.

- **Origins in the Bole Resolution (1923):** The Bombay Legislative Council resolution moved by S. K. Bole affirmed Dalits' right to use publicly funded water bodies and institutions. This marked one of the earliest legislative recognitions of equality and paved the ground for Ambedkar's direct action.

- **Mahad Satyagraha 1.0 and 2.0:** In March 1927, Ambedkar and his followers asserted Dalits' right to drink water but faced violence, purification rituals, and social backlash. After judicial stay orders blocked access, Mahad 2.0 (December 1927) shifted from symbolic water rights to a deeper ideological struggle, culminating in the burning of Manusmriti to reject caste-based tyranny and asserting gender-inclusive human rights.

- **Influence of Global Revolutionary Ideas:** Ambedkar compared Mahad 1.0 and 2.0 to the French Revolution's ideals—liberty, equality, fraternity—but expanded them by explicitly including women and the oppressed castes, unlike the French Revolution which excluded women.

- **Birth of Gendered Constitutional Morality:** Ambedkar introduced the idea of a *gendered nation* where true democracy is rooted in *Manuski* (humanism) and *Maitri* (fellowship). By addressing women at Mahad 2.0 and burning the Manusmriti, he laid early foundations for constitutional morality grounded in equality, fraternity, and non-violent Buddhist ethics.

- **Legacy for Indian Constitutionalism:** Mahad shaped India's human rights discourse by demonstrating that social liberation required legal as well as moral transformation. December 25 is
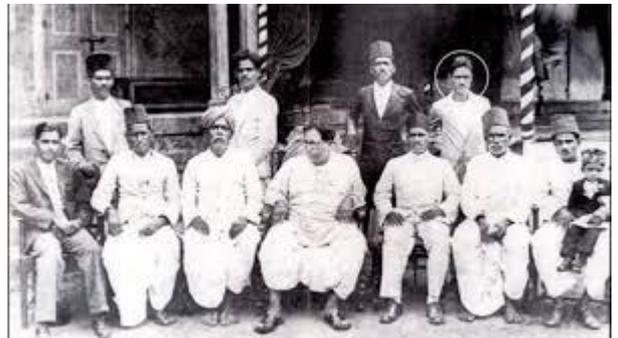
celebrated as *Indian Women's Liberation Day*, marking Ambedkar's insistence on gender equality as intrinsic to social justice.

Additional Important Key Points (UPSC-Focused)

- **Untouchability – Definition:** A system of caste-based exclusion denying social, economic, and religious access to certain communities, rooted in Brahmanical hierarchy.

- **Key Constitutional Provisions Linked to Mahad Principles:**

  o *Article 14*: Equality before law.

  o *Article 15*: Prohibition of caste and gender discrimination.

  o *Article 17*: Abolition of untouchability—directly inspired by Ambedkar's anti-caste struggles.

  o *Article 21*: Protection of dignity and life.

  o *Article 23*: Prohibition of exploitative labour (relevant to caste oppression).

  o *Preamble*: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—Ambedkar's conceptual contributions rooted in Mahad's moral vision.

- **Social Reform Dimension:** The satyagraha influenced later Dalit movements, triggered discourse on water democracy, and shaped Ambedkar's approach to annihilation of caste through legal, social, and gendered perspectives.

Conclusion

The Mahad Satyagraha(s) were not merely local protests but revolutionary assertions of human dignity that reshaped India's political consciousness. They provided the ethical and philosophical foundations for constitutional values such as equality, fraternity, and abolition of untouchability. Mahad remains a cornerstone in India's civil rights history, demonstrating how grassroots struggles shaped the democratic ethos of the Indian Constitution.

UPSC Relevance

- Crucial for **GS-I (Modern Indian History, Social Reform Movements, Ambedkar's role)**.

- Important for **GS-II (Indian Constitution, Fundamental Rights, Constitutional Morality)**.

- Useful for **GS-I/GS-II Mains** answers on caste, untouchability, human rights, gender justice, Ambedkar's thought.

- Very relevant for **Essay** topics on social equality, gendered justice, and constitutional values.