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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & **STUDY CENTRE**

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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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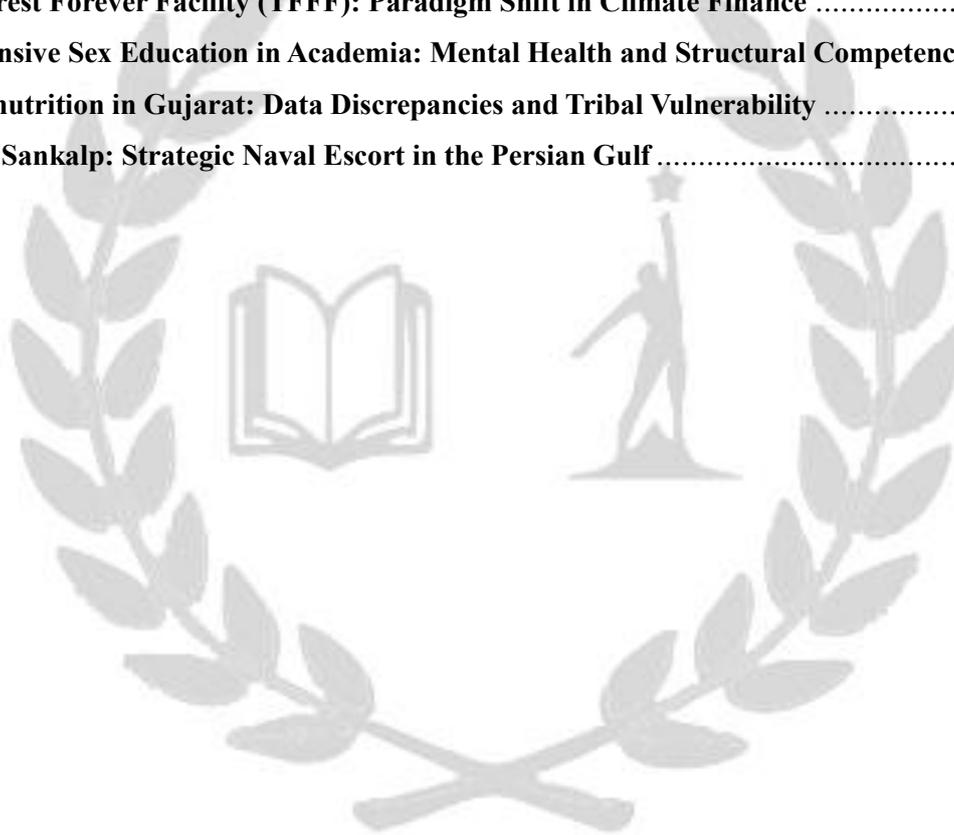
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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. India-U.S. Trade Negotiations: Strategic Patience and Tariff Architecture

Context: India has adopted a "wait and watch" approach regarding a formal trade deal with the United States, prioritizing clarity on the emerging U.S. "tariff architecture" and the global implications of recent U.S. Executive Orders before committing to bilateral terms.

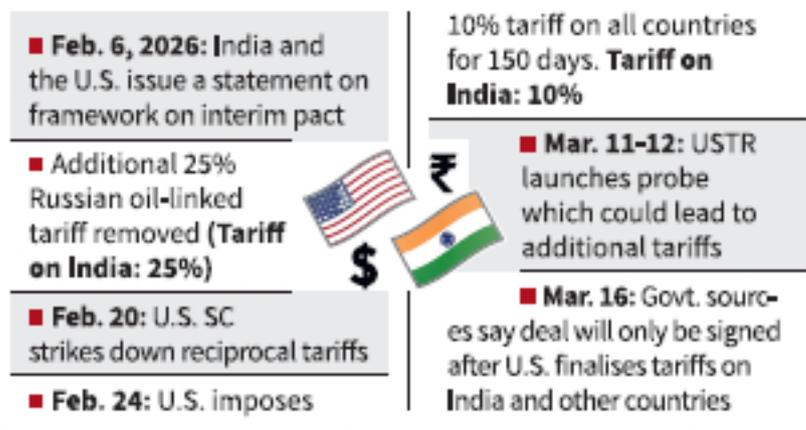
- **Prioritizing Comparative Advantage:** India's stance is rooted in ensuring that any signed agreement translates into a genuine competitive edge for Indian exports. Negotiators are evaluating how potential U.S. global tariffs (approx. 10% under Section 122) might erode or alter the benefits of a bilateral deal.
- **Impact of Judicial Interventions:** The landscape of U.S. trade policy has shifted following a February 2026 U.S. Supreme Court judgment that invalidated "reciprocal tariffs." This legal reset has forced both nations to re-evaluate the baseline of their trade negotiations.
- **Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974:** The U.S. has invoked Section 122 to impose 10% tariffs on specific products globally. India is currently analyzing the country-wise impact of these levies to determine if a separate trade deal remains "mutually beneficial" under these broader protectionist measures.
- **Bilateral Engagement Continuity:** Despite the cautious approach, the Ministry of Commerce maintains that India remains actively engaged with Washington. The focus is on resolving pending trade investigations and seeking exemptions or favorable status for Indian goods.
- **Strategic Tariff Architecture:** The U.S. is currently attempting to recreate its global trade framework. India's decision to delay signing is a strategic move to ensure it does not lock into an agreement that becomes obsolete or disadvantageous once the new U.S. global tariff structure is fully finalized.

Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Tariff Architecture:** The comprehensive framework of customs duties, trade barriers, and preferential rates that define a country's import-export environment.
- **Section 122 (U.S. Trade Act, 1974):** A provision granting the U.S. President the authority to impose temporary import surcharges or quotas to deal with large and serious balance-of-payments deficits.
- **Comparative Advantage:** An economic principle where a country produces goods or services at a lower opportunity cost than its trade partners, forming the basis for beneficial trade.
- **Constitutional Provision (India):** Under **Article 253** of the Indian Constitution, the Parliament has the power to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.

Tariff travails

In 2025, U.S. imposed 25% reciprocal tariffs on India. An additional 25% linked to import of Russian oil was later imposed taking total tariffs to 50%. A timeline of events thereafter:





Additional Key Points

- **Trade Investigations:** The U.S. is conducting ongoing investigations into Indian trade practices, which could lead to retaliatory duties if not settled via diplomatic or trade channels.
- **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** A recurring point of contention is the restoration of GSP benefits for India, which would allow duty-free entry for several thousand Indian products into the U.S. market.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Both nations are looking beyond simple tariffs toward "friend-shoring" and securing critical mineral and technology supply chains.

Conclusion

India's refusal to rush into a trade agreement reflects a shift toward "interest-based" diplomacy over "sentiment-based" deals. By seeking clarity on the U.S. internal legal shifts and global tariff hikes, New Delhi is ensuring that the final agreement safeguards domestic industries while maximizing market access in a volatile global trade environment.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **Prelims:** Concepts like Section 122, GSP, Article 253, and the impact of U.S. Supreme Court rulings on international trade dynamics.

2. Delhi Urban Flood Mitigation Program: A Strategic Infrastructure Overhaul

Context: In response to recurring monsoon crises, the Delhi government is deliberating a ₹21,068-crore 'Urban Flood Mitigation Program'. The initiative seeks to transition from the obsolete 1976 drainage framework to a modern, climate-resilient system capable of handling the needs of a population that has grown fourfold over the last five decades.

- **Creation of Off-Channel Reservoirs:** A centerpiece of the plan involves developing 2,500 acres of reservoirs along the Yamuna floodplains (Palla, Mayur Vihar, and Okhla). These facilities are designed to capture excess floodwater, which a successful pilot project showed can recharge up to 4,500 million litres of groundwater per season.
- **Drainage Revitalization and Desilting:** The program allocates ₹1,418 crore for widening and strengthening the three primary arteries of Delhi's drainage—the Najafgarh, Shahdara, and Barapullah drains. This is complemented by a ₹400-crore renovation of the Wazirabad Barrage to enhance its water-holding capacity and extensive desilting of the Yamuna.
- **Hotspot-Targeted Intervention:** The Public Works Department (PWD) has identified 1,440 flood hotspots across the city based on data from 2023–2025. The mitigation strategy focuses on these vulnerable zones through "critical infrastructure" projects, including a specific ₹345-crore plan for the IGI Airport area.





- **Decentralized Water Management:** Moving away from centralized discharge, the plan emphasizes "local resilience" by constructing recharge trenches and storage tanks in low-lying areas. It also proposes connecting stormwater drains to 125 local water bodies after treatment to rejuvenate lakes and marshes.
- **Six-Pronged Strategic Approach:** The mitigation framework is structured into six functional verticals: Yamuna river flood mitigation, drainage revitalization, decentralized wastewater/stormwater management, low-lying area resilience, urban water body restoration, and advanced early warning systems.

Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Urban Heat Island & Runoff:** Urbanization replaces permeable soil with concrete, increasing surface runoff. This plan addresses "Urban Flooding," which occurs when the inflow of water exceeds the capacity of the drainage system in a built-up area.
- **Off-Channel Reservoir:** A water storage facility located away from the main river channel, used to store excess water during high-flow periods to prevent downstream flooding and assist in groundwater recharge.
- **Section 33 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005:** Empowers the District Authority to give directions to any local authority or government department to take measures for the prevention or mitigation of a disaster.
- **Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) 2041:** The legal policy framework that guides the development of the city, including environmental protection and water management strategies.

Additional Key Points

- **Obsolescence of the 1976 Plan:** The current system was designed for a population of 60 lakh and a rainfall intensity of only 50mm, making it fundamentally inadequate for contemporary climate patterns and population density.
- **Nature-Based Solutions (NbS):** By utilizing floodplains for reservoirs and recharging groundwater, the plan moves toward "Sponge City" concepts popularized globally for flood management.
- **Inter-Departmental Coordination:** The involvement of the Lieutenant-Governor and the Chief Minister underscores the need for a unified command between the DDA, PWD, and Municipal Corporation to resolve jurisdictional overlaps in drain maintenance.

Conclusion

The proposed ₹21,068-crore program represents a critical shift from reactive crisis management to proactive infrastructure resilience. By integrating groundwater recharge with flood control, Delhi aims to solve its twin problems of seasonal flooding and depleting water tables. However, the success of this capital-intensive project will depend heavily on timely execution and the continuous desilting of secondary and tertiary drains.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps).
- **GS Paper III:** Disaster and disaster management (Urban Flooding); Environmental pollution and degradation; Infrastructure (Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.).



- **Mains Perspective:** Questions on the "Sponge City" concept, the impact of unplanned urbanization on hydrological cycles, and the effectiveness of the Disaster Management Act in urban contexts.

3. Tamil Nadu Heritage: ASI Approval for Keeladi and Multi-Site Excavations

Context: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has formally granted permission to the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) to conduct excavations at eight historical sites. This includes the high-profile 11th phase at Keeladi, following a period of administrative delay that threatened the narrow excavation window (January to July) before the onset of the monsoon.

- **Keeladi Phase XI and Clusters:** The approval facilitates the continuation of work at Keeladi (Sivaganga district), a site that has already provided landmark evidence of an advanced urban civilization in South India, potentially contemporaneous with or succeeding the late Harappan phase.
- **Diversified Geographical Scope:** Beyond Keeladi, the 2026 excavation season will cover seven other diverse sites: Pattinamarudhur (Thoothukudi), Karivalamvanthanallur (Tenkasi), Manikollai (Cuddalore), Adichanur (Villupuram), Vellalore (Coimbatore), Telunganur-Mangadu (Salem), and Nagapattinam.
- **Legal and Regulatory Framework:** The permission was granted on March 13 under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Rules, 1959. This followed recommendations from an ASI expert committee and repeated high-level requests from the State government to align with the local climatic cycle.
- **Chronological Significance:** Previous phases at Keeladi have pushed the timeline of the "Second Urbanization" in the Indian subcontinent and the antiquity of the Tamil-Brahmi script back to the 6th century BCE, bridging gaps in the "Dark Age" of South Indian history.
- **Budgetary and Policy Support:** These excavations were a key component of the Tamil Nadu Budget for 2025-26, reflecting a structured state policy to scientifically establish the antiquity and cultural continuity of the Tamil civilization through systematic field archaeology.



Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Stratigraphy:** The primary tool of the archaeologist; it is the study of layered materials (strata) deposited over time, where the deepest layers are generally the oldest.
- **Tamil-Brahmi:** An adaptation of the Brahmi script used to write the Tamil language; findings at Keeladi suggest its usage was more widespread and earlier than previously recorded.
- **AMASR Act, 1958 & Rules 1959:** The central legislation for the preservation of archaeological resources. It mandates that any excavation, even by state departments, requires "License to Excavate" from the Central Government (ASI).
- **Article 49 (Directive Principles):** Obligations of the State to protect every monument or place of artistic or historic interest, declared by or under law made by Parliament to be of national importance.



Additional Key Points

- **Vaigai River Valley Civilization:** Keeladi is part of a larger cluster along the Vaigai river, suggesting a riverine civilization model similar to the Indus or the Nile.
- **Maritime Links:** Sites like Nagapattinam and Pattinamarudhur are expected to yield evidence of ancient maritime trade routes connecting the Coromandel coast to Southeast Asia and the Roman Empire.
- **Scientific Dating:** The TNSDA utilizes Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) carbon dating to ensure global scientific acceptance of the excavated artifacts' age.

Conclusion

The ASI's nod for the 11th phase of Keeladi and seven other sites marks a pivotal moment for Indian historiography. By moving beyond a "Ganges-centric" view of Indian history, these excavations provide a more inclusive and pan-Indian understanding of ancient urbanism, literacy, and industrial craftsmanship, reinforcing the cultural depth of the Sangam Era.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Ancient History (Sangam Age, Megalithic culture).
- **Mains Perspective:** Importance of archaeological findings in reconstructing history; Federalism in heritage management (State vs. Central roles in AMASR implementation).
- **Prelims:** Locations of sites (Keeladi, Adichanur, etc.); Scripts (Tamil-Brahmi); Legal acts governing archaeology in India.

4. Administrative Crisis in Garo Hills: Tenure Extension of GHADC

Context: The Meghalaya State Cabinet has extended the tenure of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) by six months (April 18 to October 18, 2026). This decision follows large-scale violence in Tura and surrounding areas triggered by a notification barring non-tribals from participating in the council elections, leading to the postponement of the polls originally scheduled for April 10, 2026.

- **Emergency Tenure Extension:** Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the Governor (acting on Cabinet advice) can extend the five-year term of a District Council during a state of emergency or specialized circumstances where elections cannot be held. In this case, the breakdown of law and order and the resignation of the Chief Executive Member (CEM) necessitated the delay.
- **The "Non-Tribal" Participation Dispute:** The core of the unrest lies in the eligibility of non-tribals to vote or contest in tribal council elections. While the Sixth Schedule aims to protect tribal interests, the demographic reality of the region has led to legal and social friction regarding the democratic rights of non-tribal residents.
- **Political Transition Amidst Unrest:** The extension coincided with a leadership change within the GHADC. Albinush R. Marak resigned as CEM facing a no-confidence motion by 21 members, leading to the election of Dhormonath Ch. Sangma as the new head of the Executive Committee.





- **Consultative Resolution Strategy:** The state government has committed to a six-month "consultation window" with various stakeholders. The objective is to refine candidate eligibility rules and election provisions to prevent further communal or ethnic polarization in the sensitive Garo Hills region.
- **Security and Infrastructure Impact:** The violence resulted in the loss of life and significant damage to both private and "critical infrastructure." The postponement highlights the challenge of balancing ethnic protectionism with inclusive governance in Sixth Schedule areas.

Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)):** Provides for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. It creates "States within a State" by granting legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy to Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).
- **Chief Executive Member (CEM):** The head of the Executive Committee of an ADC, functioning similarly to a Chief Minister at the district level.
- **No-Confidence Motion:** A parliamentary motion moved in the Council to demonstrate that the existing executive no longer enjoys the majority support of the House.
- **Para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule:** Stipulates that there shall be a District Council for each autonomous district consisting of not more than 30 members, where the term of the Council is five years unless dissolved earlier.

Additional Key Points

- **Governor's Discretionary Powers:** Unlike regular districts, the Governor of Meghalaya holds significant discretionary powers over ADCs, including the power to assent to laws passed by the council regarding land, forests, and inheritance.
- **Inner Line Permit (ILP) Context:** The demand for restricting non-tribal participation in local governance often overlaps with the broader regional demand for the implementation of the ILP to regulate the entry of outsiders.
- **Conflict of Laws:** A recurring issue in Meghalaya is the overlapping jurisdiction between the State Legislative Assembly and the ADCs. Under Para 12A of the Sixth Schedule, if a law made by the ADC is repugnant to a state law, the state law prevails.

Conclusion

The extension of the GHADC's tenure is a pragmatic use of constitutional provisions to prevent a power vacuum during ethnic volatility. However, it underscores a deeper constitutional challenge: reconciling the "exclusionary" protections granted to Scheduled Tribes with the universal adult franchise and "inclusionary" rights of non-tribal citizens living within these autonomous zones.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.
- **Mains Perspective:** Effectiveness of the Sixth Schedule in preserving tribal identity vs. administrative efficiency; The role of ADCs in local self-governance; Ethnic conflict and internal security in Northeast India.



- **Prelims:** Specifics of the 6th Schedule (States involved); Power of the Governor in tribal areas; Composition of ADCs.

5. Distress Migration from Punjab: Structural Causes and Economic Stagnation

Context: The Punjab Economic Survey 2025-26 highlights a significant trend of "brain drain" and "distress migration" from the state. While the survey identifies traditional "pull" and "push" factors, experts point toward deep-seated economic stagnation, low employment elasticity, and a disconnect between the political-administrative system and youth aspirations as the primary drivers of this exodus.

- **The Aspirations-Opportunity Mismatch:** A critical driver is the lack of jobs suited to the qualifications of the youth. Data from the State's Unemployment Bureau (September 2025) shows that 42% of the 1,22,842 registered applicants are "skilled," yet they remain unemployed, leading to a sense of hopelessness and a preference for developed economies like Canada, the U.S., and the U.K.
- **Agricultural Plateau and Rural Distress:** Growth in the primary sector has reached a saturation point. With shrinking landholdings and stagnant farm incomes, the children of farmers no longer find agriculture viable or prestigious, pushing them to seek labor or professional roles abroad to ensure financial stability for their families.
- **Declining Capital Formation:** Experts note that Punjab's Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) as a percentage of GSDP has been on a downward trend since the mid-1980s. This lack of sustained capital investment has resulted in a sluggish industrial sector and low employment elasticity, meaning economic growth (where present) does not translate into proportional job creation.
- **Socio-Political Push Factors:** Beyond economics, systemic issues such as corruption, a perceived failure of the politico-administrative system, social insecurity, and the pervasive fear of drug addiction act as powerful catalysts. These factors erode public confidence, making migration appear as a "survival strategy" rather than a choice.
- **Deteriorating Employment Quality:** There is a notable decline in the quality of available jobs in both the public and private sectors. Precarious contracts, low wages, and a lack of social security in domestic roles contrast sharply with the perceived "better standards of living" and dignity of labor offered by Western nations.



Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Distress Migration:** A form of migration where individuals are forced to move due to a lack of viable economic alternatives or threats to their livelihood at home, rather than being attracted primarily by better prospects elsewhere.
- **Employment Elasticity:** A measure of how employment opportunities respond to changes in economic growth. Low elasticity indicates that even if the economy grows, it fails to generate sufficient new jobs.
- **Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF):** A statistical measure of the value of acquisitions of new or existing fixed assets by the business sector, governments, and households. It is a key indicator of future productive capacity.



- **Article 19(1)(g):** The Constitutional right of Indian citizens to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business. The state's failure to provide an enabling environment for this right often leads to migration.
- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State to ensure the "Right to Work" within the limits of its economic capacity and development. The current crisis reflects a gap in achieving this directive.

Additional Key Points

- **Brain Drain vs. Brain Gain:** While the state loses its most productive human capital (Brain Drain), the resulting remittances provide a temporary liquidity boost to the rural economy but fail to create long-term productive assets.
- **Demographic Dividend at Risk:** Punjab risks squandering its demographic dividend as the most innovative and educated segment of its population chooses to contribute to the GDP of foreign nations.
- **The "Demonstration Effect":** The social prestige associated with "going abroad" in Punjabi culture creates a snowball effect, where migration becomes a default life goal for youth, regardless of their local potential.

Conclusion

The migration crisis in Punjab is not merely an individual choice but a symptom of structural economic decay. Resolving this requires the political leadership to move beyond "denial mode" and focus on resurrecting growth fundamentals. Only by increasing capital investment, diversifying the economy beyond the agricultural plateau, and restoring faith in the administrative machinery can the state transform "distress migration" back into domestic productivity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Population and associated issues, poverty, and developmental issues.
- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **Mains Perspective:** Analyzing the "Push-Pull" model of migration in the context of regional disparities in India; The impact of the Green Revolution's stagnation on social mobility.

6. Protest Against Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026

Context: The Union Government has introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, sparked widespread protests across major Indian cities including New Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru. The bill seeks to redefine the criteria for being recognized as a transgender person and, most controversially, proposes to withdraw the right to "self-perceived gender identity," a right previously upheld by the judiciary.

- **Challenge to Self-Identification:** The core grievance of the transgender community and civil society is the removal of the right to self-perceived gender identity. Protesters argue this forces individuals back into a system of state-mandated or medical verification, which is seen as an affront to personal dignity and autonomy.



- **Violation of NALSA Principles:** Activists highlight that the 2026 Bill contradicts the landmark 2014 NALSA vs. Union of India judgment. In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that gender identity is central to a person's self-determination and falls under the fundamental right to liberty.
- **Impact on Gender-Affirming Processes:** Members of the community express deep concern that redefining "transgender person" in the middle of their transition processes—such as gender-affirming surgeries or while holding existing transgender ID cards—will create legal limbo and social vulnerability.
- **Widespread Civil Society Mobilization:** Beyond student protests, a spontaneous coalition of doctors, lawyers, and professionals has emerged. This group is utilizing online petitions (gathering over 13,000 signatures) and direct lobbying of MPs to register opposition to the "discriminatory and unjust" amendments.
- **Legislative Intent vs. Community Rights:** While the government aims to amend the 2019 Act, the community views the 2026 proposal as "snatching back" rights. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment faces pressure to align the legislation with constitutional morality and international human rights standards regarding bodily autonomy.



Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Self-Perceived Gender Identity:** The internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the physiology or the sex assigned at birth.
- **NALSA Judgement (2014):** A Supreme Court of India ruling that recognized transgender persons as a "third gender," affirmed their fundamental rights under the Constitution, and gave them the right to self-identify their gender.
- **Article 21 of the Constitution:** Protection of life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court has interpreted this to include the right to live with dignity and the right to privacy, which encompasses gender identity.
- **Article 14 and 15:** Guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The judiciary has expanded "sex" to include gender identity.

Additional Key Points

- **The 2019 Act Context:** The original Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, was already criticized for its "District Magistrate certification" requirement; the 2026 amendment is seen as an even more restrictive regression.
- **International Standards:** The Yogyakarta Principles, a global set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, emphasize that self-identification is the basis for recognizing gender identity.
- **Social Vulnerability:** Redefinition may lead to increased harassment by state authorities and exclusion from welfare schemes specifically designed for the trans community.



Conclusion

The friction over the 2026 Amendment Bill reflects a significant tension between executive legislative power and the judiciary's expansion of fundamental rights. For the transgender community, the right to self-identify is not merely a legal checkbox but a vital component of their survival and dignity. Resolving this will require the government to engage in genuine consultation with the community to ensure that "protection of rights" does not become a tool for "curtailment of identity."

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population; Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- **Mains Perspective:** Discussing the evolution of LGBTQ+ rights in India; The role of judicial activism in protecting minority rights; Analyzing the 2019 Act vs. the 2026 Amendment through the lens of Constitutional Morality.
- **Prelims:** NALSA Judgment (2014); Articles 14, 15, and 21; Provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act.

7. Discovery of Gynandromorphy in *Vela Carli*: Ecological Significance in Silent Valley

Context: Researchers from the Centre for Conservation Ecology, MES Mampad College, and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have documented a rare biological phenomenon in a freshwater crab, *Vela carli*, within the Silent Valley National Park, Kerala. This discovery marks the first reported instance of "gynandromorphy" in the *Gecarcinucidae* family of crabs.

- **Rare Phenomenon of Gynandromorphy:** Unlike hermaphroditism, where an organism may have functional organs of both sexes, gynandromorphy is a condition where an individual exhibits a biological mosaic—different parts of the body possess distinct male or female physical characteristics. In these specimens, researchers observed male reproductive structures alongside female features like gonopores.
- **Endemic Freshwater Species:** *Vela carli* is a species endemic to the Central Western Ghats. These crabs are primarily found in the pristine streams and unique micro-habitats, such as tree holes (phytotelmata), within the evergreen forests of Silent Valley.
- **Taxonomic Milestone:** While gynandromorphy has been recorded in some marine crab families, this is the first time it has been observed in the *Gecarcinucidae* family, a major group of Old World freshwater crabs. The findings were published in the international journal *Crustaceana*.
- **Intrinsic Developmental Cause:** Scientists suggest that the condition in these crabs likely results from intrinsic genetic or developmental anomalies during early embryonic stages rather than external environmental stressors, as the Silent Valley ecosystem remains largely free from chemical pollutants.





- **Tree Hole Ecosystems:** The discovery highlights the ecological importance of "tree holes" in tropical rainforests. These small, water-filled cavities serve as critical refugia and breeding grounds for endemic fauna, often harboring yet-to-be-discovered biological mysteries.
- **Collaboration in Research:** The study underscores the importance of multi-institutional collaboration, involving the ZSI and local academic centers, in mapping the specialized biodiversity of India's Western Ghats, a designated UNESCO World Heritage site.

Key Definitions and Biological Concepts

- **Gynandromorphy:** A rare genetic condition where an organism contains both male and female characteristics. It is typically a result of a mutation or error in the distribution of sex chromosomes during early cell division.
- **Phytotelmata:** Small, water-filled cavities in terrestrial plants (like tree holes or leaf axils) that function as a habitat for various specialized aquatic and semi-aquatic organisms.
- **Endemic:** A species that is naturally restricted to a specific geographical area and is found nowhere else in the world.
- **Gecarcinucidae:** A family of freshwater crabs widely distributed across South and Southeast Asia, known for their high levels of endemism in the Western Ghats.

Additional Key Points

- **Silent Valley National Park:** Known as "Sairandhrivanam," it is the core of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It is unique for its absence of cicadas (hence "Silent") and its protection of the endangered Lion-tailed Macaque.
- **Evolutionary Origins:** The *Gecarcinucidae* family is believed to have originated in the Indian subcontinent during the Paleogene period, making them phylogenetically significant for studying continental drift.
- **Conservation Value:** Rare biological traits like gynandromorphy provide insights into the resilience and developmental plasticity of species in undisturbed habitats.

Conclusion

The discovery of a dual-sex *Vela carli* in Silent Valley is a significant addition to India's zoological records. It reinforces the Western Ghats' status as a "living laboratory" of evolution. Such findings emphasize the need for rigorous conservation of micro-habitats like tree holes, which are often overlooked in traditional large-scale forest management but are vital for endemic survival.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
- **Prelims Focus:** Geography of Silent Valley (Kunthipuzha river, Nilgiri Biosphere); Species in news (*Vela carli*); Biological terms (Gynandromorphy vs. Hermaphroditism).
- **Mains Perspective:** Importance of biodiversity hotspots in climate resilience; Role of specialized research in national conservation policies.



8. Impact of West Asia Conflict on South Asia: Strategic and Economic Imperatives

Context: The escalation of the West Asia war, marked by the U.S. sinking of the Iranian warship *IRIS Dena* on March 4, 2026, and the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, has directly impacted South Asian security and economic stability. India faces the dual challenge of managing its "strategic autonomy" while addressing the vulnerabilities of its 10 million-strong diaspora and maritime interests in the Indian Ocean.

- **Diaspora and Human Security:** Approximately 25 million South Asians (including 10 million Indians) reside in West Asia. The conflict threatens their safety and the steady flow of remittances. Furthermore, Indians constitute 15% of global seafarers, many of whom are currently at risk near the weaponized Strait of Hormuz.
- **Economic Disruptions and Energy Security:** The war has triggered shortages in daily necessities, fuel, and fertilizers across South Asia. India is facing urgent requests for petrol and diesel from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, necessitating an "all-of-region" approach to avoid the supply chain failures seen during the 2021 pandemic.
- **Diplomatic Balancing Act:** India's initial posture—perceived as tilted toward the U.S.-Israel axis—contrasts with the immediate condemnations issued by neighbors like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. Restoring the "traditional balance" is essential to maintain India's role as a trusted mediator and a neutral power in regional fault lines.
- **Maritime Security and Net Security Provider:** The unilateral U.S. strike on *IRIS Dena* in the Indian Ocean challenges India's status as the "Net Security Provider." It highlights the need for India to strengthen indigenous maritime coalitions like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Colombo Security Conclave.
- **Regional Political Shifts:** Economic distress fueled by global conflicts has contributed to youth-led political changes in the neighborhood, notably the Gen-Z-led government in Nepal. India must adapt its "Neighborhood First" policy to engage with new leaders who are less beholden to traditional diplomatic ties.
- **Global Leadership Roles:** As the current Chair of the Quad and the upcoming host of the 2026 BRICS Summit, India must leverage these platforms to forge a consensus that highlights South Asian economic and security concerns amidst the North-South geopolitical divide.



Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Net Security Provider:** A nation that addresses the security concerns of other countries in its region by providing training, equipment, and maritime surveillance, and by leading humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- **Section 122 of the Trade Act (U.S.):** Though primarily a trade tool, it signifies the broader trend of U.S. unilateralism currently affecting global maritime and economic "status quo."
- **Article 51 of the UN Charter:** Concerns the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs, a point of frequent debate regarding recent strikes in West Asia.
- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international treaties/agreements, critical for India's upcoming roles in Quad and BRICS.



Additional Key Points

- **Strategic Autonomy:** India's ability to exercise its own foreign policy without being pressured by other powerful nations or blocs, currently tested by the U.S.-Iran confrontation.
- **Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR):** An Indian initiative based in Gurugram that plays a vital role in tracking merchant shipping and maritime security threats in real-time.
- **Youth Disaffection:** The survey notes that unemployed and underemployed youth in South Asia are increasingly driving political mandates, forcing a shift toward more domestic-centric foreign policies.

Conclusion

The migration of the West Asia conflict into the Indian Ocean theater marks a turning point for Indian diplomacy. To safeguard its interests, New Delhi must transition from a reactive stance to a proactive balancing act. By prioritizing regional energy security and reinforcing maritime cooperation platforms, India can mitigate the "push factors" of global instability while preserving its strategic influence in a rapidly polarizing world.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood- relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
- **GS Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; Linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Maritime security.
- **Mains Perspective:** Analyze the impact of West Asian instability on India's "Extended Neighborhood" policy; Discuss the challenges to India's role as a "Net Security Provider" in the face of major power unilateralism.

9. Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF): Paradigm Shift in Climate Finance

Context: The COP30 climate summit held in Belém, Brazil (November 2025), centered on the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), a ground-breaking \$125 billion proposal. Unlike traditional carbon credit models, the TFFF focuses on compensating nations for maintaining standing forests, moving beyond the narrative of merely "reducing deforestation" to rewarding existing ecological stewardship.

- **Innovative Finance Mechanism:** The TFFF is structured not as a standard donation-based fund, but as a sophisticated investment vehicle designed to generate returns while rewarding long-term conservation. It has already secured over \$5.5 billion in initial commitments, including a substantial \$3 billion pledge from Norway.
- **Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):** A mandatory 20% of the performance-based payments are reserved for indigenous and local communities. This recognizes their outsized role in forest protection; however, critics point out that these groups still lack formal voting rights in the Fund's primary governing bodies.
- **The "Standing Forest" vs. Market Logic:** The facility addresses a long-standing gap in climate





policy by paying for the preservation of intact forests. However, the Global Forest Coalition and other civil society groups warn that relying on market logic may fail to address structural drivers of deforestation like agribusiness, mining, and large-scale infrastructure.

- **Land Tenure and Territorial Rights:** The Belém summit reinforced the scientific consensus that secure land rights are the most effective conservation tool. To support this, the Forest and Land Tenure Pledge committed \$1.8 billion (2026-2030) to secure the territories of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.
- **Digital Access and Eligibility Platform:** To bridge the technical gap, Brazil, in partnership with the UNDP and FAO, launched a digital platform at COP30. This tool aims to help forest-rich nations and local communities navigate TFFF eligibility and build capacity without the interference of intermediaries.

Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF):** A multi-country fund proposed by Brazil to provide a continuous stream of income to tropical forest nations based on the area of forest they keep standing.
- **Phytotelmata/Ecosystem Services:** The manifold benefits humans derive from nature, including carbon sequestration, water cycle regulation, and biodiversity maintenance.
- **Article 21 (Indian Context):** The "Right to Life" has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to a clean environment, which aligns with global climate justice demands for forest protection.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 (India):** A critical domestic benchmark for the TFFF's goals, as it recognizes the individual and community rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.

Additional Key Points

- **Adequacy of Compensation:** Early proposals suggested a rate of \$4 per hectare, which many experts argue is insufficient to compete with the high opportunity costs of land-use change for agriculture or mining.
- **Colonialism in Conservation:** Critics argue that if funds primarily flow to international consultants or government bureaucracies rather than the "boots on the ground," the TFFF risks becoming a "green-washed" version of old hierarchical aid models.
- **The "Sponge City" and Forest Connection:** While urban areas focus on infrastructure, the preservation of tropical forests acts as the ultimate global "sponge," regulating global precipitation and temperature.

Conclusion

The TFFF represents a transition from "aid" to "payment for services." Its ultimate success will be measured not by the billions accumulated, but by the degree of power transferred to the indigenous communities who live within these forests. Without addressing the underlying pressures of extractive industries and ensuring absolute land tenure, financial mechanisms risk providing a superficial solution to a deep-seated structural crisis.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Investment models.

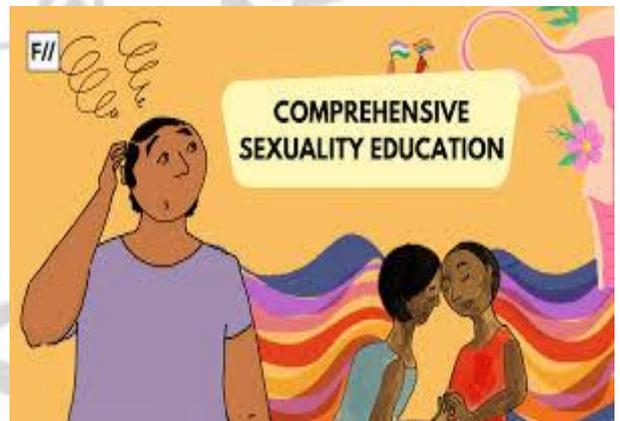


- **GS Paper II:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
- **Mains Perspective:** Analyze the shift from REDD+ to the TFFF model; The role of indigenous knowledge in climate change mitigation; Challenges of climate finance in the Global South.
- **Prelims:** Locations (Belém, Amazon); Initiatives (TFFF, GATC, FCLP); COP30 themes.

10. Comprehensive Sex Education in Academia: Mental Health and Structural Competence

Context: In light of rising student suicides and systemic marginalization, there is an urgent academic discourse on integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into higher education. Moving beyond a narrow biomedical lens, experts argue for an inclusive curriculum that addresses pleasure, consent, and the structural violence faced by sexual minorities to foster mental well-being and institutional equity.

- **Linkage between Sexuality and Mental Health:** Stigma, silence, and shame surrounding intimacy are significant drivers of mental health crises. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies lack of bodily autonomy and restricted sexual freedom as sources of "immense suffering," highlighting that mental health support in universities must reckon with sexual and relational equality.
- **Challenging Heteronormative Curricula:** Current mental health and academic curricula in India are often criticized for being "cis-gendered" and "heteronormative." By reducing sexuality to "medical dysfunctions," academia erases the lived realities of LGBTQ+ individuals, inhibiting the "structural competence" required for effective clinical and social practice.
- **Judicial Interventions and Guidelines:** In 2024 and 2025, the Supreme Court of India took proactive steps by emphasizing the need for open discussions on intimacy and seeking government responses on integrating transgender-inclusive CSE. Furthermore, the Court's 2025 pan-India guidelines on student suicide explicitly recognized gender and sexual orientation as grounds for institutional discrimination.
- **Beyond the Biomedical Approach:** Academic spaces often prioritize a "medicalized" view of sex, ignoring the socio-cultural dimensions of pleasure and identity. Experts advocate for a shift from "workforce training" to cultivating critical awareness, resisting anti-democratic movements that seek to marginalize diverse sexual experiences.
- **Pedagogical Innovation for Safer Spaces:** Teaching sensitive topics requires moving away from "detached abstraction" toward "accountable spaces." Utilizing icebreaker exercises and small-group discussions allows students to connect theory with personal meaning, building the trust and rapport necessary for transformative learning.
- **Fostering Care Communities over Short-Term Fixes:** While hiring psychologists is a step forward, it often acts as a "band-aid" solution. The focus must shift toward creating sustained "care communities" and "diversity-aware" environments that address the root causes of institutional oppression rather than isolated events or workshops.





Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE):** A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality, aimed at empowering young people to realize their health and dignity.
- **Structural Competence:** The ability of professionals to recognize how social, economic, and institutional structures (like heteronormativity) impact the health and well-being of individuals.
- **Cis-gendered/Heteronormative:** Frameworks that assume "cis-gender" (identity matching birth sex) and "heterosexuality" are the only normal or preferred orientations, effectively erasing other identities.
- **Article 21 (Personal Liberty):** The Supreme Court has expanded the scope of Article 21 to include the right to choose a partner and the right to privacy, which encompasses sexual identity and orientation.
- **Article 15 (Non-Discrimination):** Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The judiciary increasingly interprets "sex" to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Additional Key Points

- **Student Suicide Crisis:** Data suggests that a significant portion of student distress in India is linked to identity-based bullying and the inability to discuss intimate struggles in a supportive environment.
- **Epistemic Gaps:** The "knowledge gap" in academia regarding queer politics and consent results in "ethical failures" when mental health professionals attempt to support marginalized students.
- **Global Academic Exchange:** Observations from DAAD fellows highlight that while Germany and India have different cultural contexts, both face "academic resistance" to prioritizing pleasure and diversity over traditional theory.

Conclusion

Integrating sex education in academia is not merely a matter of health; it is a prerequisite for social justice and mental resilience. By breaking the "culture of silence," educational institutions can evolve from being sites of anxiety and majoritarian norms into compassionate ecosystems that equip students with the tools to navigate a diverse and complex world.

UPSC Relevance

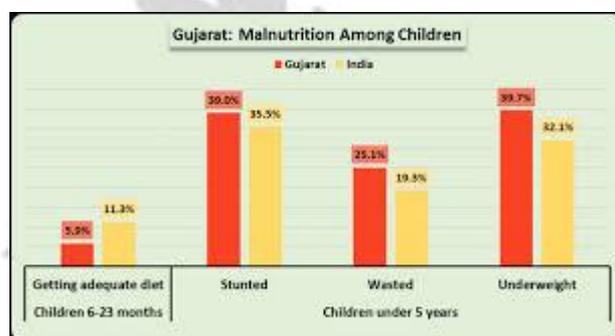
- **GS Paper I:** Social empowerment; Salient features of Indian Society; Diversity of India.
- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources; Important Judiciary rulings.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Ethical concerns in public and private institutions; Compassion towards the vulnerable sections; Values in education.
- **Mains Perspective:** Discuss the role of "inclusive education" in mitigating the mental health crisis among Indian youth; Analyze the impact of judicial activism in expanding the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in India.



11. Child Malnutrition in Gujarat: Data Discrepancies and Tribal Vulnerability

Context: A recent debate in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly has highlighted significant discrepancies between different nutrition monitoring datasets. While government officials cite a 11.4% malnutrition rate based on real-time monitoring, independent surveys and historical data suggest the figure remains close to 40%, particularly within the state's tribal belt.

- **Data Conflict (NFHS vs. Poshan Tracker):** The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) indicates that 39.7% of children in Gujarat are underweight, aligning with the "40 out of 100" claim. Conversely, the government's Poshan Tracker reports only 11.4%. This gap arises because NFHS is a representative household sample, while the Poshan Tracker relies on Anganwadi self-reporting, which may suffer from incomplete enrollment or data entry pressures.
- **Prevalence of Stunting and Wasting:** According to July 2025 Poshan Tracker data, Gujarat faces a "triple burden" with 32.7% stunting (chronic undernutrition), 7.2% wasting (acute undernutrition), and 18.4% underweight children. Nationally, the state ranks in the bottom bracket (31st) for wasting and underweight indicators.
- **The Tribal Malnutrition Burden:** There is a stark geographical concentration of malnutrition in Gujarat's "Eastern Belt." Tribal districts such as Dahod, The Dangs, and Narmada report stunting and underweight levels exceeding 50%. In The Dangs, 53.1% of children are underweight, nearly double the figures seen in non-tribal urban centers.
- **Methodological Limitations:** Experts caution against replacing NFHS data with Poshan Tracker figures. The Tracker serves as a management tool for Anganwadi services but may exclude children not enrolled in the system. Furthermore, administrative pressure on frontline workers can lead to "data smoothing," where actual heights and weights are not accurately captured.
- **Comparative State Performance:** While some northern and eastern states like Uttar Pradesh (48.8% stunting) and Bihar perform poorly, Gujarat's performance is notable because its high Per Capita Income and industrial growth have not translated into proportional improvements in nutritional outcomes—a phenomenon often termed the "Nutritional Paradox."



Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Stunting:** Low height-for-age, reflecting chronic undernutrition and long-term effects of poor socio-economic conditions and repeated infections.
- **Wasting:** Low weight-for-height, indicating acute undernutrition, often resulting from recent rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight.
- **Mission Poshan 2.0:** A flagship program of the Ministry of Women and Child Development aiming to strengthen nutritional content, delivery, and outreach.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Directs the State to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** Legalizes the right to food and includes the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to provide nutritional support to children aged 6 months to 6 years.



Additional Key Points

- **NFHS-6 Delay:** The results for NFHS-6 (2023-24) are crucial for settling the current debate, as they will provide the most updated representative snapshot of the post-pandemic nutritional landscape.
- **The "Gujarat Paradox":** Despite being a leading state in GSDP and ease of doing business, Gujarat lags behind states like Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh in human development indicators (HDI), specifically child health.
- **Hidden Hunger:** Beyond calorie deficiency, many children in these regions suffer from micronutrient deficiencies (anemia and Vitamin A deficiency), which are not always captured by height/weight metrics.

Conclusion

The malnutrition challenge in Gujarat is a multidimensional issue that cannot be resolved through administrative data alone. While the Poshan Tracker is a valuable tool for real-time intervention, the representative figures of the NFHS highlight deep-seated structural inequalities, especially among tribal populations. Future policy must bridge this "data divide" and focus on tribal-centric nutritional interventions to ensure that economic prosperity reaches the most vulnerable.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources; Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger.
- **GS Paper III:** Inclusive growth and issues arising from it; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping.
- **Mains Perspective:** Discuss the "Nutritional Paradox" in Indian states; Analyze the role of technology (Poshan Tracker) vs. traditional surveys (NFHS) in policy formulation.

12. Operation Sankalp: Strategic Naval Escort in the Persian Gulf

Context: Amid escalating tensions in West Asia, the Indian Navy has successfully executed high-stakes escort missions for Indian-flagged merchant vessels. Under "Operation Sankalp," three warships secured the safe passage of the LPG carriers *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*, and the crude oil tanker *Jag Laadki* through the volatile Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, ensuring the stability of India's energy supply chain.

- **Strategic Maritime Escort:** The Indian Navy deployed three undisclosed warships to provide a secure corridor for merchant vessels carrying critical cargo (including 92,172 tonnes of LPG and 80,000 tonnes of crude oil). This move was necessitated after the tanker *Jag Laadki* narrowly escaped an attack at the Fujairah terminal in the UAE.
- **Operation Sankalp Framework:** Launched in June 2019, this mission serves as the Navy's primary vehicle for safeguarding Indian maritime interests in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. It provides a persistent presence to deter piracy, missile attacks, and unilateral blockades, ensuring that Indian-flagged ships are not collateral damage in regional conflicts.
- **Energy Security and Logistics:** The safe arrival of *Shivalik* at Mundra Port and the expected arrival of *Nanda Devi* at Kandla address immediate concerns over LPG (cooking gas) shortages. The Ministry of Shipping has implemented "priority berthing" and accelerated documentation to ensure rapid discharge of fuel cargo into the domestic market.
- **Domestic Production Surge:** To mitigate the risk of "dry outs" at the distributor level, domestic LPG production has been increased by 36% since the issuance of the supply maintenance order. This



internal ramp-up acts as a buffer against the 22 Indian-flagged vessels currently stranded west of the Strait of Hormuz.

- **Diplomatic Autonomy:** Despite calls from the U.S. administration for a collective international naval guard in the Strait of Hormuz, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has maintained a policy of independent strategic action. India's preference for unilateral or bilateral naval escorts under its own command reflects its commitment to strategic autonomy in a polarized maritime theater.
- **Port Efficiency Amid Crisis:** Contrary to fears of supply chain bottlenecks, major ports like the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) have reported reduced container congestion, indicating that the Indian maritime infrastructure is successfully absorbing the logistical shocks of the West Asian war.

Key Definitions and Legal Provisions

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A critical maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; it is the world's most important oil transit pass, through which approximately 20% of global petroleum liquids pass.
- **Operation Sankalp:** The Indian Navy's maritime security operation initiated to ensure the safety of Indian merchant vessels following attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman in 2019.
- **Net Security Provider:** A role India aspires to in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), involving the protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).
- **Section 3 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958:** Defines "Indian ships" and provides the legal basis for the government to take measures for their protection during international hostilities.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea):** The international agreement that defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, including the "Right of Innocent Passage" through territorial waters.

Additional Key Points

- **Vulnerability of the "East of Strait" Region:** While conflict is concentrated west of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman to the east has become increasingly dangerous, requiring naval escorts further out into the Arabian Sea.
- **Economic Impact:** The cumulative cargo of nearly 1,00,000 tonnes carried by the three escorted vessels is vital for maintaining the domestic price stability of fuel and preventing industrial slowdowns.
- **Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR):** This center plays a silent but pivotal role in these operations by providing real-time data on vessel movements and threat assessments to the escorting warships.

Conclusion

The successful escort of merchant vessels under Operation Sankalp underscores India's growing naval capability and its resolve to protect its economic "lifelines" independently. By balancing domestic production increases with active naval protection, the government is successfully insulating the Indian consumer from the immediate shocks of the West Asian conflict. However, the 22 vessels still stranded west of Hormuz remain a significant strategic challenge that will test India's diplomatic and tactical maneuvers in the coming weeks.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; Linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security (Maritime Security).
- **Mains Perspective:** Discuss the importance of "Sea Lines of Communication" (SLOCs) for India's energy security; Analyze Operation Sankalp as a tool of India's maritime diplomacy and strategic autonomy.



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