



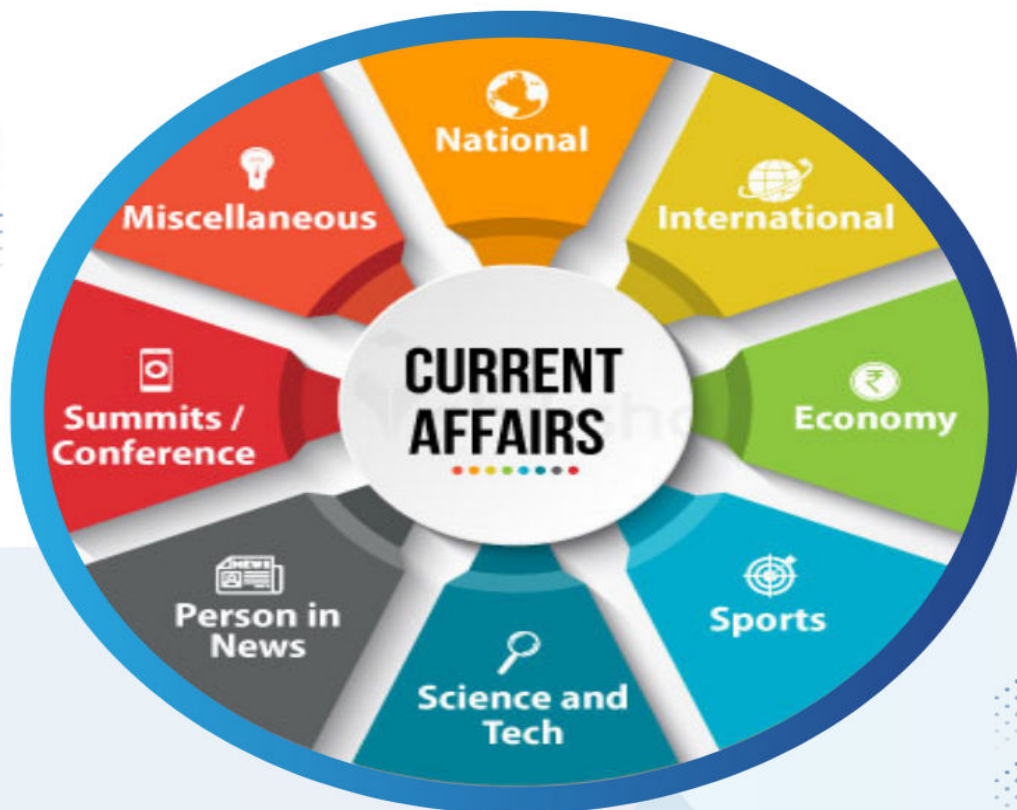
“ We help you reach for the star ”

# VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

**DATE: 28/03/2026 (SATURDAY)**



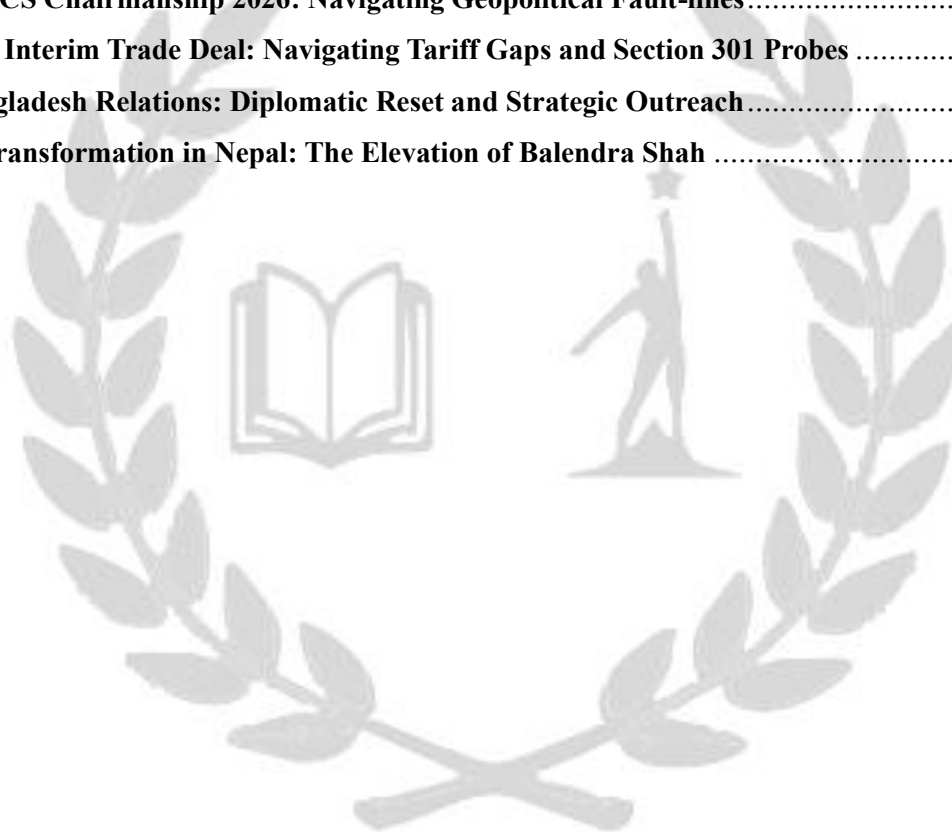
9972258970 & 9740702455

#317/A SKB Arcade, D. Subbaiah Road,  
Ramaswamy Circle, Mysuru-570004



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**VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY**



## 1. Fiscal Calibration of Fuel Excise Duties: Impact on OMCs and Revenue

- **Policy Shift and Rationale:** The Union government has reduced the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on petrol and diesel by ₹10 per litre each. While this looks like a consumer-centric move, the retail prices remain unchanged. The primary objective is to mitigate the **under-recoveries** of Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) who were absorbing the shock of high international crude prices to keep domestic inflation in check.
- **Neutralizing Consumer Impact:** By reducing the duty but keeping the retail price static, the government is effectively transferring the "tax cushion" to the OMCs. This improves the **balance sheets** of public sector undertakings (PSUs) like IOCL, BPCL, and HPCL, preventing a liquidity crunch in the energy sector while ensuring the consumer price index (CPI) does not spike further.
- **Windfall Tax and Export Levies:** To partially offset the revenue loss from the excise cut, the government simultaneously hiked export duties on diesel (to ₹21.5/litre) and Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) (to ₹29.5/litre). This targeting of "windfall gains" ensures that private refiners who prioritize high-margin exports over domestic supply contribute to the national exchequer.
- **Fiscal Implications:** The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) estimates a gross revenue loss of ₹7,000 crore over a 15-day period due to the excise cut. However, the hike in export duties is expected to claw back approximately ₹1,500 crore, resulting in a **net fiscal impact** that the government must manage within its fiscal deficit targets.
- **Strategic Energy Governance:** This move highlights the "calibrated approach" of the state in a deregulated market. Although fuel prices were technically deregulated in 2010 (petrol) and 2014 (diesel), the government continues to use **fiscal levers** (Excise and SAED) to balance the tripartite interests of fiscal stability, corporate health of OMCs, and consumer inflation.

### Key Definitions

- **Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED):** A type of excise duty often referred to as a "windfall tax" when applied to petroleum products to capture extraordinary profits during high global price cycles.
- **Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs):** Entities responsible for the refining, distribution, and marketing of petroleum products (e.g., IOCL, BPCL).
- **Exchequer:** The national treasury or the department responsible for receiving and custody of public revenue.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 265:** No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law. Excise duties are levied under the **Central Excise Act, 1944** and the **Finance Acts**.
- **Seventh Schedule:** Duties of excise on tobacco and other goods manufactured in India (except liquors/narcotics) fall under the **Union List (Entry 84)**. Note: Petroleum crude, high-speed diesel, and motor spirit are currently outside the ambit of GST.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Used by the government to ensure the smooth supply and distribution of petroleum products at fair prices.

### Fiscal cushion

Government cuts excise duty on fuel to ease OMC losses, but consumers see no relief at pumps



**Fuel rush:** Long queues seen at a petrol pump in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday.

- Oil marketing companies (OMCs) will not pass on **excise cuts** to consumers, govt. says

- The purpose of the cuts is to **reduce the losses** OMCs are facing

- Govt. estimates these losses to be **₹2,400 crore a day**

- Govt.'s net revenue loss due to tax cuts expected at around **₹5,500 crore per 15 days**

- Private sector OMC Nayara Energy has **raised petrol and diesel prices**



### Additional Key Points

- **Macroeconomic Stability:** High fuel prices have a cascading effect on logistics and food inflation; this move stabilizes the "input cost" for the economy.
- **Revenue Volatility:** Frequent adjustments in SAED reflect the volatile nature of global energy markets and the government's shift toward **dynamic taxation** over fixed long-term rates.

### Conclusion

The decision to cut excise duties without lowering retail prices is a strategic fiscal maneuver aimed at protecting the operational viability of OMCs. By balancing this with higher export duties on refined products, the government is attempting a "revenue-neutral" tightrope walk. It underscores the reality that in an era of global energy uncertainty, the Indian state remains the ultimate shock absorber for the domestic economy.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Fiscal Policy, Taxation, and Infrastructure (Energy).
- **Prelims:** Concepts of Indirect Taxes, SAED, Windfall Tax, and the role of OMCs in the Indian economy.

## 2. Judicial Safeguards for Anonymity of Sexual Assault Survivors

- **Supreme Court Intervention:** The Apex Court has flagged a "systemic lowering of the guard" regarding the mandatory anonymity of sexual assault survivors. Recent interventions highlight that despite clear legal prohibitions, law enforcement agencies and lower courts continue to disclose personal details of survivors in affidavits, school records, and judicial orders, necessitating immediate redaction by the SC Registry.
- **Statutory Prohibition and Penalties:** Disclosure of a survivor's identity is not merely an administrative lapse but a criminal offense. Under Section 72 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)—formerly Section 228A of the IPC—any person who prints or publishes the name or any matter which may make known the identity of a victim of sexual offenses faces rigorous imprisonment for up to two years and a fine.
- **The Nipun Saxena Precedent:** The Court reiterated the landmark 2018 judgment in *Nipun Saxena vs. Union of India*, which established that the right to privacy of a survivor is an integral part of Article 21. The judgment emphasizes that survivors should not face "secondary victimization" through public exposure or defamatory questioning in courtrooms.
- **Scope of Protection:** The mandate for anonymity extends beyond the victim's name to include any "identity marks," such as the names of parents, specific addresses, or school records annexed in documents. This protection is applicable even in pending cases that preceded the 2018 guidelines, ensuring a retrospective safeguard for dignity.

**RIGHT TO  
ANONYMITY  
IN CASE OF  
SEXUAL  
ASSAULT**

**Anonymity for  
survivors of sexual  
assault**

**Protection from  
judgment and  
harm**

**Maintaining the  
dignity & safety of  
survivors seeking  
justice**



- **Systemic Directives to Judiciary:** Disturbed by "nonchalant disclosures" in cases involving minors, the SC has directed the Registrar Generals of all High Courts to ensure strict compliance. The goal is to dismantle the barriers of social stigma and fear that historically discouraged survivors from reporting crimes and seeking effective prosecution.

### Key Definitions

- **Secondary Victimization:** The trauma suffered by survivors through the insensitive response of institutions (police, judiciary, media) following the primary assault.
- **In-Camera Proceedings:** A trial or hearing conducted in private, away from the public and press, to protect the privacy of the parties involved.
- **Redaction:** The process of editing a document to obscure or remove sensitive or confidential information before publication.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life and Personal Liberty, which the SC interprets to include the right to live with dignity and the right to privacy for survivors of sexual violence.
- **Section 72 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** (Formerly Sec 228A IPC) Specifically criminalizes the disclosure of a victim's identity in certain offenses, including rape.
- **Section 327 of CrPC / Section 366 of BNSS:** Mandates that inquiries and trials of rape and related offenses shall be conducted in-camera.
- **POCSO Act, 2012 (Section 33 & 37):** Provides stringent protection for the identity of child victims, prohibiting any form of media or judicial disclosure that might identify the minor.

### Conclusion

The Supreme Court's proactive stance serves as a crucial reminder that the "shield of anonymity" is fundamental to the delivery of justice in sexual offense cases. Legal reforms are ineffective if the implementing agencies—the police and trial courts—exhibit indifference toward statutory protections. Ensuring survivor privacy is not a judicial courtesy but a mandatory legal obligation essential to upholding the rule of law and human dignity.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Judiciary, Important Supreme Court Judgments, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections, and Issues relating to Women and Children.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Sensitivity of public officials, rights of victims, and the ethical responsibility of the media and legal fraternity.
- **Prelims:** Provisions of the BNS/IPC regarding victim identity and the significance of the *Nipun Saxena* case in the context of Article 21.

## 3. Strengthening Dust Mitigation and C&D Waste Management in Delhi-NCR

- **Mandatory Waste Estimations:** Effective April 1, 2026, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has mandated that all construction projects must provide detailed estimates of demolition waste. This shift from reactive to proactive monitoring ensures that the volume of waste generated is accounted for before the project begins, preventing illegal dumping.



- **Spatial Grid for Collection Points:** In a move to decentralize waste management, municipal corporations and development authorities in the National Capital Region (NCR) are now required to establish at least one collection point within every 5x5-km grid. This localized infrastructure is designed to reduce the logistical burden on project proponents and ensure easier compliance.
- **Pre-construction Compliance for Plot Size:** For all projects with a plot area of 200 sq. metres or more involving demolition, the project proponent must deposit waste at a designated facility and obtain an official receipt before commencing any new construction or reconstruction. This linking of waste disposal to construction permits creates a strong regulatory check.
- **Digital Oversight and Geo-Tagging:** The CAQM has directed state governments within the NCR to establish an integrated web portal for real-time monitoring. Key features include the geo-tagging of all waste collection and processing facilities and the mandatory GPS tracking of vehicles transporting construction and demolition (C&D) waste to ensure it reaches authorized sites.
- **Environmentally Sound Disposal:** The order shifts the primary responsibility for the "environmentally sound" transportation and disposal of C&D waste onto municipal authorities. This includes ensuring that processing centers are operational and that waste is treated as a resource for recycling rather than a pollutant for landfills.



### Key Definitions

- **C&D Waste:** Waste comprising building materials, debris, and rubble resulting from construction, remodeling, repair, and demolition of any civil structure.
- **Project Proponent:** The individual, group, or organization responsible for initiating and overseeing a construction or demolition project.
- **Dust Mitigation:** A set of practices (like windbreaks, water sprinkling, and covering debris) aimed at reducing the amount of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) suspended in the air.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Every citizen has the duty to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **CAQM Act, 2021:** The legislative framework that established the Commission for Air Quality Management as a statutory body with overriding powers over other state pollution control boards in the NCR for air quality issues.
- **C&D Waste Management Rules, 2016:** The primary legal rules under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, which govern the scientific handling of construction debris.

### Additional Key Points

- **Impact on PM Levels:** Construction dust is a major contributor to PM10 levels in Delhi-NCR; strict adherence to these norms is critical for the success of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).



- **Circular Economy:** These norms encourage the reuse of recycled C&D waste in road construction and non-structural building components, aligning with India's Net Zero and sustainability goals.

## Conclusion

The CAQM's new directives represent a transition from "guidelines" to "enforcement-heavy" governance. By integrating technology like GPS and geo-tagging with localized collection infrastructure, the authorities aim to plug the loopholes in waste management that contribute significantly to the NCR's seasonal smog. The success of this move will depend heavily on the inter-state coordination between Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment):** Environmental pollution and degradation; Conservation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (CAQM); Government policies for various sectors.
- **Prelims:** Specifics of the CAQM Act, 2021; Difference between PM2.5 and PM10; and the 2016 C&D Waste Management Rules.

## 4. Emerging Wildlife Crime Hotspots: The Case of Punjab

- **Paradigm Shift in Wildlife Crime:** Recent studies indicate that Punjab, despite having a forest cover of less than 3.6%, has emerged as a high-intensity wildlife crime zone. This challenges the traditional notion that poaching and trafficking are restricted to dense forest ecosystems, highlighting instead how illegal networks adapt to human-dominated agrarian landscapes.
- **Spatial Concentration of Crimes:** Research reveals that "extreme-intensity" hotspots are concentrated in just 1% (509 sq. km) of the state's area. Key districts flagged include Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Pathankot, and the Shivalik foothills, which serve as both source regions and critical transit nodes.
- **Targeted Species and Bushmeat Trade:** Wild boars are the most frequently targeted for the illegal bushmeat trade. However, the recovery of "high-value" derivatives like tiger skins, bear bile, and lizard oil indicates the presence of organized criminal syndicates that use Punjab's connectivity for long-distance smuggling.
- **International Trafficking Links:** The seizure of 201 Shahtoosh shawls (derived from the endangered Tibetan Antelope or Chiru) exposes Punjab's role in international trafficking chains. Since the Chiru is native to Ladakh and Tibet, its presence in Punjab underscores the state's role as a sophisticated processing or transit hub.
- **Modus Operandi:** Poaching methods range from primitive clutch-wire snares and nets to firearms and trained dogs. The recovery of marine products (corals) in a landlocked state further proves that these are not isolated local incidents but part of a well-coordinated national and global illegal supply chain.
- **Monitoring Gaps:** The study warns that reported incidents are merely the "tip of the iceberg." The transition of agrarian border districts like Attari into





critical nodes for wildlife trade signifies a systemic failure in monitoring and enforcement at state and international borders.

### Key Definitions

- **Bushmeat:** Meat derived from wild animals hunted for consumption, often linked to illegal poaching and health risks like zoonotic diseases.
- **Shahtoosh:** A highly prized wool obtained from the Tibetan Antelope (Chiru). It is illegal to trade globally under CITES as the animal must be killed to extract the wool.
- **Transit Hub:** A geographical location used by traffickers to store, repack, or move illegal goods from the source to the final market.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Directs the State to endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Provides the legal framework for the protection of various species of wild animals and plants. The Tibetan Antelope and Tiger are listed under **Schedule I**, granting them the highest level of protection and the harshest penalties for trade.
- **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species):** An international agreement to which India is a signatory, prohibiting the international trade of specimens of wild animals and plants that threatens their survival (e.g., Chiru/Shah-toosh).

### Additional Key Points

- **Ecological Connectivity:** The Shivalik foothills act as a biological corridor; increased crime here disrupts the migration and genetic flow of species like Leopards and Sambars.
- **The "Lesser Forest" Paradox:** The Punjab case proves that low forest cover does not equate to low wildlife value or low crime risk, necessitating a re-evaluation of wildlife policing in non-protected areas.

### Conclusion

The emergence of Punjab as a wildlife crime hotspot signifies the evolution of trafficking from "jungle-based poaching" to "logistics-based organized crime." Effectively curbing this requires a multi-agency approach involving the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), State Police, and Border Security Forces (BSF) to dismantle the transit infrastructure and supply chains that operate in the shadow of the agrarian economy.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Biodiversity):** Issues related to poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and conservation challenges in non-protected areas.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security):** Linkages between organized crime and trafficking; border management challenges in Punjab.
- **Prelims:** Species profile (Tibetan Antelope/Chiru), status of Shahtoosh trade, and the geography of the Shivalik range.



## 5. Discovery of *Euthalia zubeengargi*: New Butterfly Species in Arunachal Pradesh

- **Discovery and Taxonomy:** A new butterfly species, scientifically named *Euthalia zubeengargi* (common name: Basar Duke), has been recorded in the Leparada district of Arunachal Pradesh. This species belongs to the genus *Euthalia*, a group prevalent across South and Southeast Asia, characterized by earthy brown wings with pale spots.
- **Geographical and Ecological Niche:** The species was identified in the semi-evergreen forests of the Eastern Himalayas at elevations ranging between 600m and 750m. The discovery highlights the ecological significance of Arunachal Pradesh as a "biodiversity hotspot" within the Indo-Burma region.
- **Rarity and Population Status:** During extensive field surveys conducted in 2025, researchers documented only two male individuals—one collected and one photographed. This suggests that the species is either extremely rare, highly localized, or has a very short flight period, making it a priority for conservation status assessment.
- **Collaborative Research:** The discovery was a result of collaboration between Roshan Upadhaya (a researcher and Arunachal police constable) and Kalesh Sadasivan of the Travancore Natural History Society. The findings were published in *Entomon*, a peer-reviewed journal by the Association for Advancement of Entomology.
- **Cultural Significance in Nomenclature:** The butterfly has been named after the late Zubeen Garg, a cultural icon of Assam, reflecting a growing trend of "taxonomic naming" to bridge the gap between regional heritage and scientific conservation.



### Key Definitions

- **Genus *Euthalia*:** Commonly known as the "Barons" or "Dukes," these are nymphalid butterflies often found in the forest undergrowth of tropical Asia.
- **Semi-Evergreen Forest:** A forest type characterized by a mix of evergreen and deciduous tree species, typically found in regions with high rainfall but with a short dry season.
- **Taxonomy:** The branch of science concerned with the classification of organisms; it involves naming, describing, and categorizing biological entities.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the wildlife of the country.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** While the new species is yet to be formally listed in the Schedules (such as Schedule I or II), its genus *Euthalia* contains several species already protected under Indian law due to their ecological sensitivity.
- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Regulates access to biological resources and ensures fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use. Discovery of new species requires documentation with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA).



### Additional Key Points

- **Indicator Species:** Butterflies are sensitive to climate change and habitat loss; the discovery of a new species indicates a healthy, undisturbed forest micro-climate in the Leparada district.
- **Community Science:** The involvement of a police constable (Roshan Upadhaya) in the discovery underscores the importance of "citizen science" and local knowledge in biodiversity documentation.

### Conclusion

The discovery of *Euthalia zubeengargi* adds to the rich faunal diversity of the Eastern Himalayas and emphasizes the need for continued taxonomic exploration in Northeast India. Given its apparent rarity, it is crucial to conduct further studies to determine its host plants and potential threats, such as habitat fragmentation or climate-induced altitudinal shifts.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Biodiversity):** Conservation of flora and fauna, new species discoveries, and biodiversity hotspots in India.
- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Physical geography of the Eastern Himalayas and vegetation types of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Prelims:** Specific location of the discovery (Leparada district), genus details (*Euthalia*), and the importance of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot.

## 6. Global Buddhist Peace Conference 2026: Hyderabad as a Hub for Heritage Diplomacy

- **Conference Overview and Theme:** Hyderabad hosted the inaugural two-day World Buddhist Peace Conference 2026, themed around Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and healing. Bringing together delegates from over 20 countries, the summit moved beyond abstract peace-building to emphasize inner transformation, ethical leadership, and sustained dialogue as the bedrock of global harmony.
- **Positioning Telangana in Buddhist Diplomacy:** The event is a strategic move to position Telangana as a global center for "Buddhist Heritage Diplomacy." By showcasing the state's historical connection to profound scholars like Acharya Nagarjuna, the government aims to leverage soft power to foster international cultural ties, particularly with South and Southeast Asian nations.
- **Emphasis on Inner Discipline:** High-level delegates, including Sri Lanka's Minister for Buddhasasana, highlighted that material advancement alone cannot secure lasting peace. The conference underscored the "Middle Path" and the cultivation of inner discipline as essential tools for addressing modern global tensions and divisions.
- **Integrated Buddhist Tourism Circuit:** The Telangana government is actively developing a specialized tourism circuit. This infrastructure project links significant archaeological and spiritual sites such as Phanigiri, Dhulikatta, and Nagarjunakonda with "Buddhavanam" (Nagarjunasagar), envisioned as a world-class center for spiritual tourism.
- **The Buddhavanam Project:** Organized by the Telangana Tourism Development Corporation, the conference concludes at Buddhavanam, Asia's largest Buddhist theme park. A "Global Peace Declaration" is expected to be adopted here, reinforcing the region's historical role as a crucible of Buddhist learning and exchange.



## Key Definitions

- **Heritage Diplomacy:** The use of shared cultural, historical, and religious heritage (like Buddhism) as a tool for international relations and building soft power.
- **Acharya Nagarjuna:** One of the most important Buddhist philosophers after the Buddha himself; he founded the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school of Mahayana Buddhism and was closely associated with the Andhra-Telangana region (Nagarjunakonda).
- **Buddhasasana:** A term used to refer to the teachings, practice, and the entire institutional framework of the Buddhist religion.



## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations. Events like the Peace Conference align with this directive.
- **Article 25 to 28:** Provides for the Right to Freedom of Religion, which includes the freedom to manage religious affairs and promote religious harmony within the secular fabric of India.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List - Entry 13):** Relates to participation in international conferences and associations and implementing decisions made thereat.
- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958:** Governs the protection and preservation of heritage sites like Phanigiri and Nagarjunakonda which are central to the proposed tourism circuit.

## Additional Key Points

- **Soft Power Strategy:** India's "Look East" and "Act East" policies are often complemented by Buddhist diplomacy to strengthen ties with nations like Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Thailand.
- **Archaeological Significance:** Sites like Phanigiri have recently yielded important artifacts (monastic complexes, stupas) that rewrite the history of Buddhism's spread in Southern India.

## Conclusion

The World Buddhist Peace Conference in Hyderabad marks a significant step in India's efforts to reclaim its status as the "Vishwa Guru" through the lens of ancient wisdom. By integrating heritage preservation with modern diplomacy, the state not only boosts its tourism potential but also provides a philosophical framework—rooted in compassion and non-violence—to address contemporary global challenges.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I (Art and Culture):** Buddhist architecture, philosophy (Nagarjuna), and significant sites in South India.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** India's soft power diplomacy, bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, and the role of cultural organizations in foreign policy.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Ethical leadership and Buddhist values in conflict resolution and peace-building.



## 7. The North-South Divergence: Addressing India's Existential Federal Fault-line

- **Growing Socioeconomic Asymmetry:** A profound divergence has emerged between the "Peninsular States" and the "Great Indian Plain" (Hindi heartland). While the South mirrors upper-middle-income nations in human development indicators (HDI), the North remains mired in development metrics comparable to sub-Saharan Africa. This "two nations in one sovereign space" reality threatens the structural integrity of the Indian Union.
- **The Delimitation Crisis:** The upcoming Census and subsequent redistribution of parliamentary seats pose a democratic paradox. If seats are allocated purely by population, the economically productive South will see its political voice diminished, while the demographically heavy but economically lagging North will gain dominant political power. This decoupling of wealth creation from political representation is historically a precursor to regional conflict.
- **Fiscal Federalism and Subsidization:** India faces a unique challenge where a productive minority (South) is tasked with subsidizing a politically dominant majority (North). Unlike other federations where wealth and population are more aligned, the current Indian trajectory risks the South perceiving itself as an "extractive colony" for the political ambitions of the North, unless a "Grand Bargain" is struck.
- **The Middle-Income Trap in the South:** Despite higher per-capita incomes, the Southern States face internal crises. Economic growth remains largely extractive and unequal; for instance, while Tamil Nadu's per-capita income is triple that of Bihar, agricultural wages have not kept pace. High inequality, persistent casteism, and weak institutions suggest that the South has yet to fully translate wealth into social transformation.
- **Proposed Solution—Digressive Proportionality:** To balance the interests of populous and high-HDI states, experts suggest "digressive proportionality." This system ensures fair representation by granting larger states more seats but fewer per person, while ensuring smaller, high-performing states maintain a significant voice, thereby preventing total domination by any single region.
- **Need for a New Social Contract:** The resolution lies beyond regional rhetoric. It requires a shift toward internal inclusivity in the South and a move away from hegemonic control by the Centre. The future of the Union depends on a social contract that ensures prosperity is shared by the many, rather than being concentrated in a few urban pockets or being used solely to bridge fiscal gaps in laggard regions.

### Key Definitions

- **Delimitation:** The act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats to represent changes in population over time.
- **Digressive Proportionality:** A principle where the ratio of population to seats increases with the population of a state, ensuring smaller states are not overshadowed by larger ones.
- **Middle-Income Trap:** An economic situation where a region attains a certain level of income but gets stuck due to an inability to transition from low-value to high-value productivity and social equity.
- **Fiscal Fault-line:** The tension arising from the redistribution of tax revenues from high-performing "surplus" states to "deficit" states.





## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 81:** Defines the composition of the Lok Sabha and the basis for allotting seats to states based on population.
- **84th Amendment Act, 2001:** Froze the delimitation of constituencies until the first Census after 2026 to encourage population stabilization.
- **Article 280:** Mandates the Finance Commission to recommend the distribution of tax proceeds between the Union and States, a key point of contention in the North-South debate.
- **Seventh Schedule:** Distributes legislative powers; the current crisis often involves "Union List" dominance over "State List" subjects like local economic planning.

## Additional Key Points

- **Internal Migration:** Massive labor movement from the North to the South is creating a class of "internal outsiders" who lack local political clout, complicating the social fabric.
- **Divergent HDI:** Kerala remains an outlier in social indicators, performing well across literacy and daily wages, whereas other Southern states show significant intra-state disparities (e.g., Dharmapuri vs. Chennai).

## Conclusion

The North-South divide is no longer a mere regional squabble but an existential crisis for Indian federalism. The upcoming delimitation exercise will be the ultimate test of the Union's ability to balance demographic weight with economic contribution. Solving this requires more than just a political deal; it demands a radical commitment to social cohesion and a sophisticated electoral formula that respects both people and performance.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Federal structure, Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, Devolution of powers, and the impact of Delimitation.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Inclusive growth, Planning, Resource mobilization, and Fiscal Federalism.
- **Essay/Ethics:** Regionalism vs. Nationalism, Social Justice, and the ethics of wealth redistribution in a diverse democracy.

## 8. Dual-Track Defence Procurement: Strategic Autonomy and MRO Self-Reliance

- **Diversified Defence Partnerships:** The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed two significant contracts totaling ₹858 crore, underscoring India's "Multi-aligned" foreign policy. By engaging simultaneously with Russia's JSC Rosoboronexport and the U.S.-based Boeing India, New Delhi continues to balance its traditional security ties with emerging strategic partnerships, maintaining its strategic autonomy amidst global geopolitical shifts.
- **Upgrading Army's Air Defence:** A ₹445 crore deal for the Tunguska Air Defence Missile System will bolster the Indian Army's tactical capabilities. The Tunguska is a self-propelled anti-aircraft weapon (SPAAG) combining surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft guns, designed to provide unified protection for infantry and tank regiments against low-flying aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, and increasingly, swarm drones.



- **Strengthening Naval Readiness (P-8I Fleet):** A ₹413 crore contract with Boeing India focuses on the depot-level inspection and maintenance of the Navy's P-8I Long-Range Maritime Reconnaissance (LRMR) aircraft. As the "eyes and ears" of the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the operational availability of the P-8I is critical for anti-submarine warfare and maritime domain awareness.
- **Push for Aatmanirbhar MRO Hub:** The Boeing contract falls under the 'Buy Indian' category with 100% indigenous content, aiming to establish robust in-country Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities. This reduces dependency on foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for routine technical inspections, significantly lowering long-term lifecycle costs and turnaround time.
- **Strategic Significance of Kartavya Bhavan:** The signing of the Russian deal at the newly designated Kartavya Bhavan symbolizes a transition in India's administrative and strategic identity, emphasizing a commitment to national duty and modernized governance in defence procurement.

### Key Definitions

- **Tunguska System:** A Russian-origin tracked air defence system that provides point-defence using a combination of 30mm guns and 9M311 missiles.
- **Depot-Level Inspection:** The highest and most comprehensive level of maintenance for aircraft, involving complete teardowns, complex repairs, and overhauls that cannot be performed at the operational unit level.
- **MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul):** The specialized industry focused on ensuring that aerospace and defence equipment is maintained in a condition of operational readiness and safety.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** Defence of India and every part thereof is a "Union List" subject (Entry 1), giving the Central Government exclusive power to legislate and enter into international defence contracts.
- **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020:** The governing framework for all capital and revenue procurements; the recent Boeing deal aligns with its 'Buy Indian' and 'Indigenisation' categories to promote local industry.
- **Article 51 (DPSP):** While promoting international peace, the State also ensures national security as a prerequisite for peace, justifying the continuous modernization of the Armed Forces.

### Additional Key Points

- **Combatting Asymmetric Threats:** The Tunguska upgrade is particularly relevant given the lessons from recent global conflicts where low-cost drones have bypassed traditional high-altitude air defences.
- **Blue Water Navy Aspirations:** Enhancing the MRO for P-8I aircraft supports India's role as a "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean, ensuring persistent surveillance from the Gulf of Aden to the Malacca Strait.





## Conclusion

These contracts represent a pragmatic blend of immediate hardware acquisition and long-term structural self-reliance. While the Russian deal addresses a specific capability gap in the Army's mobile air defence, the U.S. deal focuses on the sustainability of naval assets through indigenous MRO. Together, they reflect India's refusal to be siloed into a single security camp, prioritizing national interest and "Aatmanirbharta" in a volatile global order.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral relations with Russia and the US; India's strategic autonomy.
- **GS Paper III (Security & Defence):** Indigenization of technology; self-reliance in defence (Aatmanirbhar Bharat); and challenges to internal/external security (Air Defence).
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Growth of the domestic MRO sector and the impact of 'Make in India' on the aerospace industry.

## 9. India's BRICS Chairmanship 2026: Navigating Geopolitical Fault-lines

- **Strategic Invitations Amidst Conflict:** India, as the current Chair of BRICS, has issued formal invitations for the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in May and the 18th BRICS Summit scheduled for September 9-10, 2026. This move comes at a critical juncture as New Delhi attempts to maintain the grouping's relevance despite the expansion to a 10-nation body and the ongoing volatility in West Asia.
- **The Challenge of Consensus:** A primary hurdle for Indian diplomacy is the lack of a joint statement regarding the West Asian conflict. Internal friction, particularly between new members like Iran and the UAE, has stalled consensus. While India seeks a balanced approach, regional rivalries and direct involvement of member states in the conflict have made a unified stance "elusive."
- **Expansion and Global Governance:** The 2026 summit is expected to see the participation of leaders from the expanded bloc, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE, and Indonesia. This "BRICS-10" configuration represents a significant shift toward a multipolar world order, aiming to provide an alternative to Western-led financial and political institutions.
- **High-Profile Participation:** Russian government officials have confirmed the May ministerial meeting as a "political track" priority. The potential presence of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in New Delhi for the September summit underscores India's role as a bridge-builder between the Global South and traditional power blocs.
- **Historical Precedent and Divergence:** Diplomats note that while BRICS managed a strong joint statement in June 2025 (under Brazil's chair) regarding strikes on Iranian sites, the current internal dynamics are more complex. India's task is to navigate these "differing opinions" to ensure the grouping remains a functional platform for "joint action" rather than a fragmented talk-shop.
- **West Asia as the Litmus Test:** The grouping's ability to tackle the international agenda, particularly the role of BRICS in conflict resolution, will be the central theme. India's leadership will be tested





on whether it can decouple economic cooperation from the sensitive security interests of its diverse member base.

### Key Definitions

- **BRICS-10:** The expanded version of the original BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) following the 2024-25 expansion to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia/Indonesia.
- **Elusive Consensus:** A diplomatic term used when member states of a multilateral body are unable to agree on a common text or "Joint Communiqué" due to conflicting national interests.
- **West Asia:** A geopolitical term used primarily in India to describe the region traditionally called the "Middle East," encompassing countries from Iran to the Mediterranean.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** The Directive Principles of State Policy mandate that India shall "promote international peace and security" and "maintain just and honourable relations between nations." Chairing BRICS is an operationalization of this constitutional goal.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List - Entry 10 & 13):** The Union Government has exclusive jurisdiction over "Foreign Affairs" and "Participation in international conferences, associations and other bodies."
- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, including the implementation of international treaties and agreements reached at summits.

### Additional Key Points

- **Economic Multipolarity:** Beyond politics, the meetings will likely discuss "De-dollarization" and the strengthening of the New Development Bank (NDB) as a counterweight to the IMF.
- **Soft Power and Logistics:** Hosting the 18th Summit provides India an opportunity to showcase its digital infrastructure and organizational capacity on the global stage, similar to the G20 presidency.

### Conclusion

India's BRICS Chairmanship in 2026 is a high-stakes balancing act. The transition from a 5-nation to a 10-nation bloc has increased the group's global footprint but decreased its internal cohesion. For New Delhi, the success of the September summit will depend not on resolving deep-seated regional wars, but on proving that BRICS can still function as a cohesive economic and political voice for the Global South despite internal contradictions.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International 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.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** India's role as a leader in the Global South and the "Act West" policy.
- **Prelims:** BRICS member countries (original and new), locations of summits, and the New Development Bank (NDB) headquarters/functioning.



## 10. India-U.S. Interim Trade Deal: Navigating Tariff Gaps and Section 301 Probes

- **Interim Deal Status and Key Gaps:** India and the U.S. are reportedly close to finalizing an interim trade deal, yet significant negotiating gaps persist. Primary points of contention include market access for agricultural commodities—specifically pulses—and the "staging" or timeline for tariff reductions. While the U.S. pushes for faster phased reductions, India remains cautious about safeguarding its domestic agricultural sector from a surge in imports.
- **Agricultural Sensitivity and the 'Fact Sheet' Controversy:** Agriculture remains a politically sensitive domain for both nations. A recent "fact sheet" released by the White House erroneously claimed India would cut tariffs on "certain pulses," leading to a political furor in India. Although the U.S. subsequently retracted the reference, the underlying pressure for market access in the pulses segment continues to be a major hurdle in reaching a consensus.
- **Judicial Shift and New Trade Tools:** Following a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) was unlawfully applied for "reciprocal tariffs," the Washington administration is shifting toward other legislative tools. This includes the use of "Special 301" investigations and Section 122 of the U.S. Trade Act to justify and impose tariffs, complicating the bilateral negotiation landscape.
- **Special 301 Investigations:** The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has launched fresh Special 301 probes against multiple countries, including India. These investigations ostensibly target "excess manufacturing capacity" and "forced labor" concerns. Such probes allow the U.S. to impose additional duties on top of the universal 10% tariff rate currently in place, acting as a leverage point in trade talks.
- **E-commerce and Digital Trade Divergence:** A long-standing friction point remains the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions. India advocates for the right to impose tariffs on digital products like software downloads and digital music to protect domestic revenue, whereas the U.S. seeks a permanent ban on such duties to facilitate its Big Tech exports.
- **Universal Tariff Implications:** The U.S. has applied a temporary 10% tariff under Section 122, citing balance of payments issues. While there are discussions about raising this to 15%, doing so would complicate existing reciprocal agreements with partners who currently enjoy lower rates. This creates a volatile environment for Indian exporters who rely on predictable tariff regimes.

### Key Definitions

- **Special 301 Report:** An annual review by the USTR that identifies trade barriers to U.S. companies and products due to the intellectual property laws or other "unfair" trade practices of other countries.
- **Staging:** The scheduled timeline or phases over which tariff reductions are implemented after a trade agreement is signed.
- **Section 122 (Trade Act of 1974):** A provision allowing the U.S. President to impose temporary import surcharges (up to 15%) to deal with a serious balance of payments deficit.
- **Interim Trade Deal:** A limited-scope agreement that addresses immediate trade concerns and provides early harvests before a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is finalized.





## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to the exercise of rights, authority, and jurisdiction treaty-making power, which includes signing international trade deals.
- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** Trade and commerce with foreign countries; import and export across customs frontiers fall under the **Union List (Entry 41)**.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** India utilizes this to regulate the price and supply of pulses, which often conflicts with U.S. demands for unregulated market access.
- **Section 11 of the Customs Act, 1962:** Empowers the Indian government to prohibit or restrict the import or export of goods for the protection of the domestic economy.

## Additional Key Points

- **Trade Volume Disparity:** Unlike smaller economies (e.g., Ecuador) that recently signed deals with the U.S., India's massive trade volume makes negotiations high-stakes and technically complex.
- **Reciprocal Tariffs:** The concept involves a country matching the tariff rates of its trading partner; the U.S. administration's attempt to re-establish these via new legislative routes is a key development to watch.

## Conclusion

The India-U.S. trade relationship is currently characterized by a "push-pull" dynamic between strategic necessity and domestic protectionism. While both nations recognize the importance of an interim deal to stabilize economic ties, the use of aggressive domestic trade laws (like Special 301) by the U.S. and India's defensive stance on agriculture and e-commerce suggest that the "final mile" of negotiations will require significant political compromise.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** India-U.S. bilateral relations, impact of U.S. domestic policies on India, and global trade governance.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** External sector, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices.
- **Prelims:** Understanding of USTR, Special 301, Section 122, and the significance of pulses in India's agricultural import-export basket.

## 11. India-Bangladesh Relations: Diplomatic Reset and Strategic Outreach

- **High-Level Bilateral Reset:** The upcoming visit of Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman in April 2026 marks the first high-level engagement since the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) took office following the February elections. This visit is viewed as a "reset" to thaw bilateral ties that remained largely stagnant during the 15-month tenure of the previous interim government.
- **Addressing Energy Insecurity:** Bangladesh is facing a severe energy crisis exacerbated by global market volatility and the conflict in West Asia. Fuel rationing has become a necessity, prompting urgent requests for Indian petroleum products. India's recent supply of high-speed diesel on March 10 underscores its role as a regional energy partner and its commitment to the "Neighbourhood First" policy.



- **Ganga Water Treaty Renewal:** A critical agenda item is the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty, which reaches its 30-year maturity in December 2026. Negotiating a fair water-sharing formula is essential for agricultural stability in Bangladesh's delta region and for maintaining long-term transboundary river cooperation.
- **Strategic Convergence in the Indian Ocean:** Minister Rahman's subsequent visit to the Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius highlights the growing importance of maritime security. Both nations are increasingly collaborating on the "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative to ensure a stable and rules-based order in the Bay of Bengal.
- **Shared Historical Memory and Justice:** India has officially reiterated its support for Bangladesh's quest for justice regarding "Operation Searchlight" (1971). By condemning the atrocities and mass sexual crimes committed by the Pakistani military, New Delhi is reinforcing the foundational "blood-bond" that defines the Indo-Bangla relationship.
- **Security Cooperation:** Building on Khalilur Rahman's previous engagement as NSA in 2025, the talks are expected to deepen cooperation on counter-terrorism, border management, and the prevention of radicalization, ensuring that Bangladesh's soil is not used for anti-India activities.



### Key Definitions

- **Operation Searchlight:** The planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army on March 25, 1971, to curb the Bengali nationalist movement, leading to widespread genocide and the eventual independence of Bangladesh.
- **Ganga Water Treaty (1996):** A 30-year bilateral agreement between India and Bangladesh that established a formula for sharing the surface waters of the Ganges at the Farakka Barrage.
- **Neighbourhood First Policy:** India's foreign policy priority of fostering stable, friendly, and mutually beneficial relations with its immediate neighbors.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Directs the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament 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.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List):** Entry 10 (Foreign Affairs) and Entry 14 (Entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries) provide the Union government exclusive power over these bilateral negotiations.

### Additional Key Points

- **Connectivity Projects:** Discussions may include the expansion of the Akhaura-Agartala rail link and the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports to boost North-East India's economy.



- **The "Tarique Rahman" Factor:** The transition to a BNP-led government necessitates a nuanced diplomatic approach from India to ensure that the progress made in the previous decade is maintained and expanded.

### Conclusion

The visit of Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman signifies a pragmatic transition in Indo-Bangla ties. While energy and water sharing remain immediate functional priorities, the underlying theme is the restoration of political trust. By supporting Bangladesh's demand for historical justice and addressing its economic vulnerabilities, India is positioning itself as a reliable "all-weather friend" in a changing South Asian political landscape.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** India and its neighborhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India.
- **GS Paper I (History):** Post-independence consolidation (1971 Liberation War).
- **Prelims:** Details of the Ganga Water Treaty, geography of transboundary rivers (Teesta, Ganga, Kushiyara), and the "SAGAR" initiative.

## 12. Political Transformation in Nepal: The Elevation of Balendra Shah

- **Generational Shift in Leadership:** Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old structural engineer and cultural icon, has been sworn in as the youngest Prime Minister in Nepal's recent history. His rise marks the culmination of the "Gen Z protests" that dismantled the traditional political establishment, signaling a transition from an aging, patronage-heavy leadership to a tech-savvy, youth-oriented administration.
- **Mandate for Structural Reform:** Leading the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) to a near two-thirds majority, Shah's victory reflects a deep-seated public desire for clean governance and accountability. The RSP has set ambitious economic targets, including more than doubling the GDP to \$100 billion and increasing per capita income to \$3,000 within five years.
- **Immediate Economic Headwinds:** The new government faces an urgent crisis triggered by the West Asia conflict. With cooking gas rationed and fuel prices surging, the administration must stabilize domestic commodity prices while managing the impact on tourism and the vital remittance flow from the 1.5 million Nepalis working in the Gulf region.
- **Institutional Challenges:** Analysts warn that while the leadership is new, the delivery mechanisms remain rooted in the "old system." The defining test for the Shah administration will be resisting "institutional capture"—the tendency of established bureaucratic and political networks to stifle reform—while managing the outsized expectations of a restless electorate.
- **Nationalist and Cultural Identity:** Shah's "rapper-turned-politician" persona and his release of nationalist music (e.g., "Jay Mahakali") emphasize a brand of "undivided Nepali" identity. This cultural resonance served as a potent tool for mass mobilization during the campaign and continues to define his unconventional political communication style.





- **Geopolitical Balancing Act:** Situated between India and China, and with the U.S. as a key development partner, Nepal's foreign policy remains a delicate tightrope walk. The Shah government must navigate these complex ties to secure investment and energy security without becoming a theatre for great-power competition.

### Key Definitions

- **Institutional Capture:** A form of political corruption that occurs when a government agency, created to act in the public interest, instead advances the commercial or political concerns of special interest groups that dominate the industry or sector it is charged with regulating.
- **Remittance Economy:** An economy heavily dependent on the transfer of money by foreign workers to their home countries. In Nepal, remittances are a primary driver of the national GDP.
- **Structural Engineer:** A professional trained to design the "bones and muscles" of buildings and infrastructure; Shah's background is often cited as a metaphor for his intent to "rebuild" Nepal's governance.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Constitution of Nepal (2015):** The foundational document that established Nepal as a federal secular parliamentary republic. Shah's appointment by President Ram Chandra Poudel follows the parliamentary procedures outlined therein.
- **Article 76:** Governs the constitution of the Council of Ministers and the appointment of the Prime Minister based on majority support in the House of Representatives.
- **Federalism:** Nepal's transition from a unitary state to a federal structure remains a work in progress; the new government's ability to empower local and provincial tiers is a key constitutional mandate.

### Additional Key Points

- **Energy Targets:** The RSP's goal to raise electricity generation to 15,000 MW is critical for Nepal's ambition to become a regional energy exporter, particularly to India and Bangladesh.
- **Digital Governance:** Given the "Gen Z" roots of the movement, there is an expected push for e-governance to reduce physical touchpoints for corruption in basic service delivery.

### Conclusion

The swearing-in of Balendra Shah is not merely a change in personnel but a potential "paradigm shift" in Himalayan politics. While the RSP holds a massive mandate, the path forward is obstructed by global economic shocks and an entrenched domestic political culture. Success will depend on whether Shah can translate his campaign's "nationalist fervour" into concrete policy outcomes that reach the common citizen.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** India and its neighborhood-relations; Political developments in neighboring countries and their impact on India's strategic interests.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Role of youth in politics, institutional reform, and challenges of "clean governance" in developing democracies.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Impact of global conflicts on small, landlocked economies and the significance of remittances in South Asia.