



WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Coverage of

10th Apr. - 16th Apr., 2026

★★ Useful for ★★

**UPSC ESE, PSUs,
RRB, SSC, Banking &
State Services Exams**

Islamabad Talks 2026

The **United States** and **Iran** failed to negotiate a peace deal.



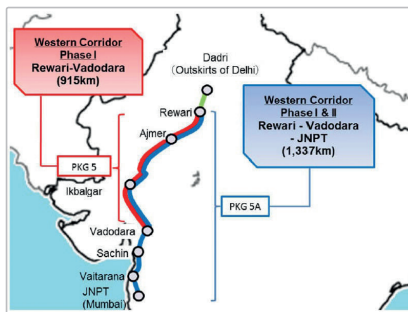
10th APRIL 2026

Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)

- **Context:** The Ministry of Railways has completed the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC), marking a major milestone in India's freight logistics modernisation.

About Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)

- The Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) is a flagship initiative aimed at separating freight traffic from passenger lines to improve efficiency and capacity.
- The project was conceived in 2005, and two DFCs - Eastern DFC (EDFC) and Western DFC (WDFC) were approved by the Cabinet in 2008.
 - **Eastern DFC (EDFC):** 1,337 km, from Ludhiana (Punjab) to Sonnagar (Bihar); Completed and operational.
 - **Western DFC (WDFC):** 1,506 km, from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Terminal (Maharashtra) to Dadri (Uttar Pradesh); Recently completed.
- It is implemented by the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL).



Significance

- **Faster Freight Movement:** Trains can run at speeds of 100 km/h for freight compared to 50-60 km/h on conventional tracks.
- **Decongestion of Rail Network:** Frees existing passenger lines, improving punctuality and efficiency.
- **Economic Impact:** Expected to handle 100+ freight trains per day on WDFC, boosting industrial corridors and port connectivity.
- **Cost and Energy Efficiency:** Reduces logistics cost by around 20-25% and carbon emissions, supporting India's net-zero goals.

- **Support for Exports and Imports:** Connects major ports like JNPT and Mundra, improving cargo movement efficiency.

Challenges

- **High Capital Cost:** Total project cost estimated at ₹80,000 – ₹90,000 crore for both DFCs.
- **Land Acquisition:** Especially challenging in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Punjab.
- **Integration Issues:** Need seamless interface with existing railway network and private logistics.
- **Maintenance and Technology:** Electrified double-stack container corridors require modern signaling, monitoring, and skilled workforce.
- **Operational Risks:** Managing safety and scheduling challenges while integrating high-speed freight trains with existing passenger services on connected rail networks.

Government Initiatives

- **DFCCIL Implementation:** Central Government entity responsible for planning, construction, and operation.
- **Modern Technology:** Indian Railways has achieved over 90% electrification of its broad-gauge network and is moving towards 100% electrification. Implementation of Kavach (indigenous Automatic Train Protection system) helps prevent collisions and ensures safe operations.
- **Integration with Industrial Corridors:** Linked with Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), Eastern and Western ports.
- **Public-Private Partnership (PPP):** India has promoted PPP in railways by encouraging private participation in freight terminals, logistics parks, wagon investment schemes, and station redevelopment projects.
- **PM Gati Shakti Integration:** The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan provides a GIS-based integrated platform for coordinated infrastructure planning. It ensures multi-modal connectivity across rail, road, ports, and logistics.

Repo Rate

- **Context:** The Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25%.

Key Highlights

- The Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate remains at 5 per cent and the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate at 5.5 per cent.
- The real GDP growth for 2026-27 is projected at 6.9%, with Q1 at 6.8%; Q2 at 6.7%; Q3 at 7.0%; and Q4 at 7.2%.
- The inflation is projected for FY27 to be at 4.6 percent, with 4.0 percent in Q1, 4.4 percent in Q2, 5.2 percent in Q3, and 4.7 percent in Q4.

REPO RATE



About Repo Rate

- The repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends short-term money to commercial banks. It is the key policy tool used by the RBI to control liquidity, inflation, and economic growth.
- A lower repo rate means banks can borrow from the RBI at cheaper rates. This encourages banks to lower lending rates, leading to:
 - Easier access to credit for consumers and businesses.
 - Boost in investment, consumption, and economic activity.
 - Increased liquidity and money supply.
 - This can stimulate growth, especially during economic slowdowns.

About Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

- The MPC is a statutory body established under the RBI Act, 1934 (amended in 2016).
- It is responsible for fixing the benchmark interest rate (repo rate) to maintain price stability while keeping growth in mind.
- It consists of 6 members:
 - 3 from the RBI (including the Governor as Chairperson).
 - 3 external members appointed by the Government.

- **Functioning:** It meets at least four times a year (usually bi-monthly) and the decisions are made by majority, and each member has one vote. In case of a tie, the RBI Governor has the casting vote.
- **Flexible Inflation Targeting Framework (FITF)**
 - India adopted a Flexible Inflation Targeting Framework (FITF) in 2016.
 - Under this, the government, in consultation with the RBI, sets an inflation target every five years.
 - Under this framework, the Government sets the inflation target every five years in consultation with the RBI. The current mandate, effective until March 31, 2026, specifies a CPI inflation target of 4%, with a tolerance band of $\pm 2\%$, i.e. between 2% and 6%.

Central Armed Police Forces

- **Context:** The Centre has notified the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Act, 2026, which creates a unified legal framework to regulate the recruitment, deputation, promotion, and conditions of service for officers.



Key Facts

- India maintains seven armed police organisations collectively known as Central Armed Police Forces, all functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- These are the Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, National Security Guard, and Seema Suraksha Bal.
- The Assam Rifles is unique because it is under dual control. While the MHA handles its administration (salary, infrastructure), its operational command rests with the Ministry of Defence.
- Each force is commanded by an officer of the Director General of Police (DGP) rank.

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UNFCCC COP33

- **Context:** India has withdrawn its candidature to host COP33 (2028) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.

Possible Reasons for Withdrawal

- **Administrative Burden:** Hosting a COP event requires substantial infrastructure, security, and financial expenditure. Preparations for other large-scale international events, such as the proposed 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, will require similar administrative and financial resources.
- **Political Timing:** The year 2028 falls close to the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, which is a period marked by intense administrative, political, and logistical engagements.

Impact of India withdrawal

- India's withdrawal from hosting COP33 results in the loss of an important global platform to project itself as a leader of the Global South in climate negotiations.
- India loses an opportunity to highlight its progress in renewable energy, energy transition, and sustainable development initiatives before the global community.
- The decision may limit global attention on the climate vulnerabilities of South Asia, which is one of the most climate-sensitive regions.
- Hosting such global events helps in mobilising climate finance, technology transfer, and international collaborations, which may now be relatively constrained.

About Conference of Parties (COP)

- The Conference of Parties (COP) is the annual supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
 - It brings together nearly 200 countries to negotiate global climate action, climate finance, and emission reduction commitments.
 - The first COP session was held in Berlin, Germany, in March 1995.

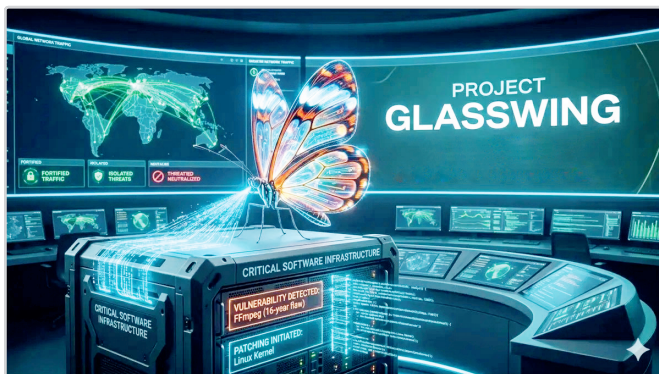
- The COP meets every year, unless the Parties decide otherwise.
 - The COP Presidency rotates among the five recognized UN regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe and Others.
 - The COP meets in Bonn, unless a Party offers to host the session.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

- UNFCCC is one of the three Rio Conventions, which were adopted at the Earth Summit 1992 alongside the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
- The convention entered into force in 1994.
- The primary objective of the UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that prevents dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.
- **Secretariat:** The UNFCCC secretariat is headquartered in Bonn, Germany.
- **Major Instruments:** It is the parent treaty to two major legal agreements:
 - **Kyoto Protocol (1997):** Set the emission targets for developed countries.
 - **Paris Agreement (2015):** A landmark universal agreement aiming to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels.
- **Financial Mechanisms:** Manages and coordinates funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Adaptation Fund to assist developing nations.
- **Recent COP Meetings**
 - **COP27:** Held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt (2022).
 - **COP28:** Held in Dubai, UAE (2023), resulting in the "UAE Consensus" focused on transitioning away from fossil fuels.
 - **COP 29:** held in Baku, Azerbaijan (2024)
 - **COP 30:** Held in Belém, Brazil (2025)
 - **COP 31:** Scheduled for Antalya, Türkiye (2026)

Project Glasswing

- **Context:** Anthropic has launched Project Glasswing, a global cybersecurity initiative linked to its advanced AI model Claude Mythos.



About Project Glasswing

- Project Glasswing is a global cybersecurity initiative led by Anthropic.
- It is a consortium of around 40 global technology firms and open-source contributors aimed at securing critical digital infrastructure, using advanced Artificial Intelligence.
- The project provides early access to the Claude Mythos model to selected partners. It is backed by;
 - \$100 million in AI usage credits
 - \$4 million support for open-source security
- **Major participating firms include:** Amazon Web Services, Apple, Google, Microsoft, NVIDIA etc.

Role of Claude Mythos

- Claude Mythos is an advanced Large Language Model (LLM) with exceptional coding and vulnerability detection capabilities.
- It can:
 - Detects zero-day vulnerabilities (previously unknown flaws).
 - Identify decades-old bugs in widely used systems.
 - Combine vulnerabilities to gain system-level control.

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Islamabad Talks, 2026

- **Context:** The marathon 21-hour talks in Islamabad between the US and Iran ended without a deal, failing to convert a fragile two-week ceasefire into a lasting peace.

About The Islamabad Talks

- The Islamabad Talks were a high-stakes, direct diplomatic negotiation aimed at de-escalating the US-Israeli war on Iran that began in February 2026.
- It represented the first direct, highest-level engagement between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent embassy crisis.



Host and Mediator

- **Host:** Islamabad, Pakistan.
- **Mediator:** The Government of Pakistan, which desperately sought to prevent a regional spillover and stabilize global oil supplies.
- **Nations Involved:**
 - **United States:** Represented by Vice President JD Vance.
 - **Iran:** Represented by senior negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.
 - **Pakistan:** Acted as the diplomatic bridge and host.
- **Aim:**
 - To turn a fragile two-week ceasefire into a permanent peace agreement.

- To resolve the standoff over the Strait of Hormuz, which has been largely closed since late February.
- To address Iran's nuclear enrichment program and obtain a commitment against seeking nuclear weapons.
- To secure a wider regional de-escalation involving the Axis of Resistance.

Key Features and Stumbling Blocks

- **The Nuclear Red Line:** The US demanded a total halt to uranium enrichment; Iran dismissed these as excessive and unreasonable demands, maintaining their right to civilian nuclear power.
- **The Hormuz Leverage:** The US demanded the immediate reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran refused to yield this leverage without significant relief from economic sanctions and security guarantees.
- **The Lebanon Factor:** Iran demanded a cessation of Israeli strikes in Lebanon as a prerequisite. However, Israel maintained that the US-Iran ceasefire did not apply to its operations against Hezbollah.
- **Hostile Rhetoric:** Talks were held under the shadow of President Trump's maximalist threats, which Tehran viewed as coercion rather than diplomacy.
- **The Toll Proposal:** A unique friction point emerged over a proposal for a joint venture to collect tolls from ships passing through the Strait, which Iran rejected in favor of their sovereign control.

Outcomes

- **No Deal:** The 21-hour marathon ended with both sides retreating to their original positions.
- **Increased Fragility:** The failure has left the existing ceasefire in a precarious state, with experts warning of a return to intensified military strikes.
- **Asymmetric Advantage:** Analysts suggest Iran emerged with a slight edge, showing it can endure economic pain longer than the US can tolerate disrupted global oil flows.

Justice Yashwant Varma Resigned

- **Context:** Recently, Justice Yashwant Varma, an Allahabad High Court judge submitted his resignation to the President of India.

About Judiciary in India

- India has a single unified judiciary (unlike the US dual system).
 - **Supreme Court of India (Top level);** Articles 124–147
 - High Courts (State level); Articles 214–231
 - Subordinate Courts (District and lower courts); Articles 233–237
- This structure ensures uniform interpretation of law across the country.

Key Features of Indian Judiciary

- Independence of Judiciary (basic structure doctrine)
- Judicial Review, as it can strike down unconstitutional laws
- Separation of Powers
- Rule of Law



High Court Judges

- High Court judges are governed mainly by:
 - **Article 214:** High Courts for States
 - **Article 216:** Constitution of High Courts
 - **Article 217:** Appointment and conditions of office
 - **Article 218:** Application of provisions of removal (same as SC judges)
 - **Article 219:** Oath or affirmation
 - **Article 220–224:** Other provisions (practice restrictions, additional judges, etc.)
- **Appointment of High Court Judges [Article 217(1)]:** By the President of India, after consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Governor of the State, and Chief Justice of the High Court (for other judges).
- **Qualifications:** A person must be a citizen of India. Held judicial office for 10 years, or been an advocate of a High Court for 10 years.
- **Tenure (Term of Office):** Holds office until age of 62 years (Article 217(1))
- **Oath or Affirmation (Article 219):** Judge must take oath before the Governor of the State; Oath includes upholding Constitution, and performing duties without fear or favour.

Removal of High Court Judges

- **Grounds:** Proved misbehaviour and Incapacity.
- **Procedure (Impeachment-like):** Motion introduced in Parliament; supported by special majority (majority of total membership, and 2/3rd of members present and voting), address sent to President and President orders removal.
- **Resignation:** Judge may resign by writing to the President of India.

Keytruda

- **Context:** Recent investigations exposed a dangerous counterfeit market for Keytruda in India, fuelled by hospital-level supply chain breaches.

About Keytruda

- Brand name for Pembrolizumab, a revolutionary immunotherapy / checkpoint inhibitor drug for advanced and aggressive cancers.
- Manufactured by Merck & Co. (USA) known as MSD outside the US and Canada.
- Unlike traditional treatments that attack tumours directly, Keytruda empowers the body's own immune system to identify and destroy cancer cells.



About Immunotherapy

- Immunotherapy is a type of medical treatment that uses the body's own immune system to fight diseases.
- While chemo and radiotherapy directly kill cancer cells and some healthy cells along with it, immunotherapy pushes the body's own immune system to recognise and kill cancer cells. Being highly targeted, immunotherapy spares healthy cells.
- These therapies have been shown to extend life even in patients with aggressive forms of cancer.

Other Types of Immunotherapy:

- CAR-T cell therapy involves collecting a patient's own T cells, engineering them to create chimeric

receptors, multiplying these modified cells, and returning them to the patient. These engineered T cells can then identify, attach to, and destroy cancer cells that would normally evade immune detection.

- mRNA vaccines for cancer are currently under development.
 - Unlike vaccines for infections given to healthy individuals, cancer vaccines are administered to patients who already have certain cancers to prevent relapse.
 - These vaccines train the immune system to identify proteins called neoantigens found only in cancer cells.
 - Once recognised, the immune system remembers these markers for years, continuing to fight cancer and prevent recurrence.

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Startup India Fund of Funds (FoF 2.0)

- **Context:** The Government of India has notified Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 (FoF 2.0) with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore to mobilize capital for startups.

About Startup India Fund of Funds (FoF 2.0)

- It is a government-backed fund designed to indirectly invest in startups through SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).
- **Total corpus:** ₹10,000 crore, to be deployed over 16th and 17th Finance Commission cycles.
- It builds upon the earlier Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS 1.0) launched in 2016 under the Startup India Action Plan.
- **Objectives:** It aims to enhance access to venture capital for startups across sectors and stages. It seeks to provide a focused thrust on innovation-driven manufacturing and the development of long-gestation technologies, which typically face funding constraints.

Governance and Monitoring Mechanism of FoF 2.0

- **Selection of AIFs:** A Venture Capital Investment Committee (VCIC) will screen and recommend eligible Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).

- **Implementation Agency:** Small Industries Development Bank of India, will be the primary Implementation Agency (IA) for FoF 2.0.
- **Oversight Mechanism:** An Empowered Committee (EC) will be constituted under the chairmanship of the Secretary of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to monitor implementation and performance of the scheme.

Startup Ecosystem of India

- India is the world's third-largest startup ecosystem (after the US and China), featuring over 120 unicorns (valued >\$1 billion) and over 157,000 government-recognized startups.
- The startup ecosystem is growing at ~12–15% annually, with some years witnessing even higher growth (~30%).
- **Key Sectors:** Dominant sectors include Fintech, E-commerce, Supply Chain, and Health-tech.
- **Regional Hubs:** Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Delhi-NCR.
- **Job Creation Engine:** Startups have generated over 21 lakh jobs, making them a major employment driver.
- **Funding Landscape:** Startups raised around \$10–11 billion in 2025, maintaining India's position as a top funded ecosystem.

9th Indian Ocean Conference

- **Context:** The External Affairs Minister (EAM) addressed the 9th Indian Ocean Conference, which was centered on the theme "Collective Stewardship for Indian Ocean Governance."



Five Key Priorities for Indian Ocean Nations

- **Need for Stability:** The Indian Ocean is not merely a geographic space but a living ecosystem that sustains economies, livelihoods, connectivity, resources and shared cultural heritage.
- **Historical Ties:** Countries of the region must continue efforts to overcome historical barriers and deepen regional cooperation and stress the importance of stronger economic linkages, improved connectivity and the revival of traditional ties.
- **Changing Global Order:** EAM highlighted the changing nature of the global order, noting that the world has become more competitive, inward-looking and fractured, prompting countries to seek more reliable partnerships and greater resilience.
- **Concern over Choke Points:** He pointed to the growing concern over "choke points," both physical and conceptual.
- **Deeper Cooperation:** EAM called for deeper cooperation among Indian Ocean nations, describing the region as a "Global South Ocean" facing shared challenges.

About Indian Ocean Conference

- It was started in 2016 by India Foundation in association with think tanks and institutions from the region, with participation from 30 countries.
- In the last 8 years, the Conference has emerged as the flagship forum for countries to discuss and deliberate on issues of mutual interest.
- Over the years, the Conference has been addressed by over a 100 Ministers from 55 countries.
- The Conference provides a platform to deliberate upon the prospects of regional cooperation for Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

Significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

- The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean, linking the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.
 - It is home to crucial maritime chokepoints i.e. Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Malacca Strait, Lombok Strait which together handle a bulk of global energy and trade flows.

- The IOR acts as a bridge between the East and the West, making it a central theatre for power competition among India, China, the U.S., and other major players.
- The region carries nearly 50% of global container traffic and 80% of seaborne oil trade. It is a hub of blue economy activities: shipping, fisheries, seabed mining, and tourism.
- The IOR is the lifeline of global energy flows: oil and gas from West Asia transit to East Asia via its sea lanes. Countries like India, China, Japan, and South Korea are energy-import dependent, making stability of the IOR vital.
- The IOR offers opportunities in fisheries, seabed minerals, renewable energy, and tourism - requiring secure seas for sustainable exploitation.

14th APRIL 2026

Project HIM SAROVAR

- **Context:** Project Him Sarovar has been launched in Ladakh.



Key Facts

- **Aim:** The project aims at scientific snow harvesting and the creation of water bodies to address the pressing challenge of water scarcity in Ladakh.
- The project will build storage ponds to collect melting snow and glacial water. These ponds will support irrigation and rural water needs.
- The initiative also aims to develop a local model for climate-resilient water management.

- As valleys in Ladakh rely on snowfall and glaciers for their water needs, unpredictable weather changes are leading to water scarcity, severely affecting the livelihood of villagers.
- The project has received support from the Indian Army, ITBP, BRO, and local communities.

Significance

- This will help boost local livelihoods and agriculture in the region.
- It will address water scarcity, boost irrigation, and enhance climate resilience in region.

National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)

- **Context:** The e-NAM portal reflects increasing market integration, with the number of connected mandis rising from 1,389 in 2024 to 1,656 as of March 2026, spanning 23 States and 4 Union Territories.

About National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)

- Pan-India electronic trading portal for agricultural commodities.
- Integrates APMC mandis into a unified national market.
- Operated by the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) under the Ministry of Agriculture.

Objectives

- 'One Nation, One Market' for agricultural produce;
- Better price discovery, transparency, and competition.

Key Features

- **Online Trading Platform:** Farmers can sell produce electronically across markets; and removes geographical barriers.
- **Quality Assaying:** Scientific quality testing ensures fair pricing.
- **Transparent Bidding System:** Reduces middlemen/cartelization; and promotes competitive price discovery.
- **Unified License:** Traders can operate across multiple mandis.
- **Online Payment System:** Direct payment to farmers reduces delays and exploitation.

About e-NAM Portal

- **Single-Window Service:** Commodity arrivals, quality assaying, bidding, payment, all on one platform.
- **Unique Lot ID Tracking:** Each lot tracked from gate entry to final sale via mobile.
- **Live Price Dashboard:** Real-time commodity prices, mandi arrivals, trade volumes, publicly accessible.
- **12-language Interface:** Hindi, English, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Bengali, Tamil, Odia and others.
- **Secondary Sale Module:** Enables resale of already-purchased lots within the platform.
- **Inter-state Trade Facility:** State Unified License enables traders to bid across State boundaries.

15th APRIL 2026

BRICS and Quad Groupings

- **Context:** India is going to host major diplomatic meetings including the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting and the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting.

About BRICS

- BRIC was formally launched at a Foreign Ministers' meeting during the UN General Assembly in New York in 2006, with its first summit held in Russia in 2009. In 2010, South Africa was added, expanding the group to BRICS and joining its first summit in 2011.
- It brings together eleven major emerging markets and developing countries of the world.
- Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and United Arab Emirates.
- In 2025, several countries — including Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam — joined as BRICS partner countries.



- It serves as a useful platform for consultation and cooperation on contemporary issues having global as well as regional significance, and issues of global political and economic governance.
- The BRICS meeting will be especially significant as it will bring together officials from Iran and the UAE face-to-face for the first time since the recent Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict began. India currently chairs BRICS, and the summit of leaders is expected in September 2026.

About Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

- It is an informal strategic grouping of India, the US, Japan, and Australia aimed at supporting a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- It began after the 2004 tsunami as a disaster relief coordination effort and was later formalised in 2007 by Japan's then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
 - However, it lost momentum due to limited cohesion and concerns it was anti-China.
 - The grouping was revived in 2017 with broader goals beyond maritime security.
- **Secretariat:** Unlike organisations such as NATO or the EU, the Quad has no secretariat or formal decision-making structure and does not include mutual defence commitments.

UNDP Report on Middle East

- **Context:** Recently, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a report titled 'Military Escalation In The Middle East: Human Development Impacts Across Asia And The Pacific'.

Key Findings

- **Global Levels:** Military escalation in West Asia/Middle East is worsening human development pressures across Asia-Pacific.
 - Higher fuel, freight, and input costs are reducing purchasing power, increasing food insecurity, straining budgets, and weakening livelihoods.
 - Across Asia-Pacific, the economic impact could reach up to \$299 billion.

- Globally, up to 8.8 million people could be pushed into poverty under severe scenarios.
- **Poverty:** India's poverty increase ranges from about 4 lakh to 2.5 million people, depending on the scenario.
 - In the most severe estimate, about 24.6 lakh people may be pushed into poverty.
 - Poverty rate may rise slightly from 23.9% to 24.2%.
 - Total people in poverty could rise from about 35.15 crore to 35.40 crore.
- **Human Development Index (HDI) impact:** India may lose around 0.03 to 0.12 years of human development progress, while neighbouring countries like Nepal and Vietnam may also see smaller losses of about 0.02 to 0.09 and 0.02 to 0.07 years respectively. Iran, however, could face a much sharper decline equivalent to about 1 to 1.5 years of HDI progress, whereas China's impact is relatively limited.
- **Energy and trade dependence:** India depends heavily on imports for its energy and fertilizer needs, with over 90% of its oil requirements coming from abroad, mainly West Asia. The region supplies more than 40% of India's crude oil imports, around 90% of LPG imports, and over 45% of fertilizer imports, while domestic urea production is also significantly reliant on imported LNG.
- **Economic effects:** West Asia is an important trade partner for India, accounting for about 14% of its exports and 20.9% of imports. India's non-oil exports to the region, worth around \$48 billion, include products like basmati rice, tea, gems and jewelry, and apparel, while countries such as Bangladesh and India also face disruptions in shipments and logistics.
 - Rising LNG prices are pushing some countries (including India) toward higher coal usage.
 - Trade disruptions affect 25 of 36 countries in the region, due to freight surcharges, insurance costs, and supply chain delays.
- **Food security and agriculture:** Food insecurity may worsen due to rising costs and reduced remittances from Gulf countries.
 - India may face timing risks during the Kharif (monsoon) cropping season.
 - Urea stocks (6.11 million tonnes) provide only a short-term buffer.
- **Remittances and labour impact:** Around 9.37 million Indians live in GCC countries, and remittances from the Gulf make up about 38-40% of India's total inward remittances. A slowdown in Gulf economic activity could therefore reduce these inflows and negatively affect household incomes across South Asia.
- **Employment and MSMEs:** About 90% of India's workforce is informal, making it highly vulnerable to economic shocks.
 - MSME sectors such as hospitality, construction, gems, and manufacturing may face higher costs, supply shortages, job losses, and reduced working hours, with migrant and informal workers being the most affected.
 - Additionally, sectoral pressures include rising raw material costs for medical devices by around 50% and a 10-15% increase in medicine wholesale prices.

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Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026

- **Context:** The Union Government has proposed the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill to enable redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the 2011 Census.

Present Distribution of Seats in Lok Sabha

- **Total Strength:** The maximum strength of the Lok Sabha is 550 seats (530 from States, 20 from Union Territories) as per the Constitution. At present, the effective strength is 543 elected members.
 - 530 members from States.
 - 13 members from Union Territories.

- **Basis of Distribution:** The allocation of seats among States is based on the 1971 Census and the division of constituencies within States is based on the 2001 Census.
- The freeze on the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha is valid until the first census conducted after 2026.
- **Correcting Historical Distortions:** The reforms seek to remove imbalances created due to reliance on outdated Census data, particularly the continued use of the 1971 population figures.
- **Reflecting Demographic Shifts:** The redistribution acknowledges significant inter-State population changes over decades, ensuring that rapidly growing regions receive proportionate representation.

Key Features of the Proposed Bills

- The Bills propose to remove the constitutional freeze on inter-State seat allocation.
- The Delimitation Commission will be required to reallocate seats based on the latest Census figures (2011).
- The maximum strength of the Lok Sabha is proposed to be increased from 550 to 850 seats. Out of the total seats, 815 will be allocated to States and 35 to Union Territories.
- The proposals also indicate a possible uniform increase of around 50% in seats for each State, with assurances that no State will lose its existing proportional share.
- **Enabling Women's Political Representation:** The proposals facilitate the implementation of long-pending 33% reservation for women by linking it with delimitation, thereby promoting gender inclusivity in legislatures.

Arguments Against

- **Threat to Federal Balance:** There are apprehensions that reforms may disproportionately favour States with higher population growth particularly in Northern areas, thereby reducing the relative political weight of southern States and disturbing federal equilibrium.
- **Weakening of Bicameral Balance:** The expansion of the Lok Sabha to around 850 members without a corresponding increase in the Rajya Sabha may tilt institutional balance in favour of the Lower House.
- **Reduced Legislative Effectiveness:** A much larger Lok Sabha may dilute individual participation of Members of Parliament. It may adversely affect the quality of debates, deliberation, and overall legislative functioning.

About Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam

- The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 also known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam provides 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- The Act states that women's reservation can be implemented only after two steps are completed.
 - First, a national Census must be conducted.
 - Second, a delimitation exercise must be carried out based on that Census.
- The proposals are linked to the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

Arguments in Favour

- **Ensuring Democratic Equality:** The proposed delimitation aligns political representation with current population realities, thereby strengthening the principle of equal representation for equal population.
- **About Delimitation**
 - Delimitation refers to the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
 - It also includes determining the seats to be reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses.
 - Article 82 and 170 of the Indian Constitution provide that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies as well as its division into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted after each Census.

- This process is performed by the 'Delimitation Commission' that is set up under an act of Parliament.

AZEC Plus and Maritime Security

- **Context:** India, raised concerns over disruptions in maritime energy routes at the AZEC Plus meeting, amid tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.



About AZEC Plus

- The Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) is a Japan-led initiative launched in 2023 to promote decarbonisation, clean energy transition, and energy security in Asia.
- It provides an alternative, Asia-centric model of energy transition, recognising diverse developmental needs of Asian economies.
- AZEC focuses on:
 - Facilitating technology transfer in clean energy (hydrogen, ammonia, renewables).
 - Supporting carbon neutrality goals while maintaining economic growth.
 - Strengthening energy supply chain resilience in the region.
- AZEC Plus is an expanded framework that includes more Asian countries and global institutions such as Asian Development Bank and International Energy Agency.

