

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE**  
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**Edition : International Table of Contents**

<p><b>Page 01</b> Syllabus : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Iran grants India, 4 others Hormuz passage India eyes local currency payments for West Asian oil</p>
<p><b>Page 02</b> Syllabus : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Toothless ban: single-use plastic rules 84% of surveyed sites in 4 cities</p>
<p><b>Page 04</b> Syllabus : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Jaishankar, French counterpart discuss Iran, Hormuz at G7 meet</p>
<p><b>Page 07</b> Syllabus : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Why do we need a living will?</p>
<p><b>Page 09</b> Syllabus : GS II : Indian Polity &amp; Governance / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Should men get paternity leave in India?</p>
<p><b>Page 08 : Editorial Analysis</b> Syllabus : GS II : International Relations</p>	<p>The key to India's multi-domain deterrence, capabilities</p>

**Page 01 : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam**

The West Asian landscape has shifted into a high-intensity conflict zone following the outbreak of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran on February 28, 2026. At the heart of this crisis is the Strait of Hormuz, a maritime chokepoint through which nearly one-third of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) and 20% of its oil pass. In a significant display of "sovereign signaling," Iran has transitioned from a total blockade to a managed transit system, granting exclusive passage to "friendly nations"—India, China, Russia, Iraq, and Pakistan—while maintaining a strict embargo on "hostile" Western interests.

### Iran grants India, 4 others Hormuz passage

Ships from India, China, Russia, Iraq, and Pak. can pass through the Strait, says Iran Foreign Minister | Minister thanks India, Sri Lanka for transferring naval ships facing U.S. threat to a safe location | President Trump has said Iran should 'get serious before it's too late, after that there's no way back'

**Stanly Johny**

India and four other "friendly nations" were allowed to move their ships through the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said, adding that Tehran has established its "sovereignty" over the waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

He also thanked India and Sri Lanka for their "significant help" after an Iranian vessel, *IRIS Dena*, was sunk in a U.S. attack in the Indian Ocean during the conflict and said no talks were being held with Washington.

"We permitted passage through the Strait of Hormuz for friendly nations including China, Russia, India, Iraq, and Pakistan," Mr. Araghchi said in an interview with the Iran News Network that was broadcast on Wednesday night.

"The Strait of Hormuz is located in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman, and Iran's sovereignty is established there. After the war, we will also have new arrangements for passing through the Strait," he said.

"In the incident of the *Dena* ship, which was unfairly attacked without any warning, I must thank Sri Lanka and India for their significant help in transferring two other ships to a safe location," he added.

"The Iranian frigate was attacked and sunk by a U.S. Navy submarine on March 4 off the coast of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean while returning from exercises in Visakhapatnam. At least 87 sailors were killed in the attack.

*IRIS Lavan* and *IRIS Bushahr*, which also came to the region to take part in the drills, have now docked in Kochi and Sri Lanka's Trincomalee, respectively.

The tanker *Apollo Ocean* unloads cargo collected from the vessel *Shivolk* in Mangaluru on Thursday. *Shivolk* is one of four Indian ships which crossed the Strait of Hormuz recently. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Strait of Hormuz, through which more than a hundred ships passed daily before the war, has seen traffic plunge to single digits since the conflict began.

At least four India-flagged ships — *Jag Vesant*, *Pine Gas*, *Shivolk*, and *Nanda Devi* — have transited the strait since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28.

Mr. Araghchi, who was Iran's chief negotiator with the U.S. before the war, also said no talks were being held with the U.S.

"I state firmly that there has been no negotiation with the U.S. However, in recent days, the American side has begun sending various messages through different intermediaries, and we have responded by stating our positions. It is simply an exchange of messages through friends," he said.

"At present, our position is to continue resisting, continue defending our country. We have no intention of negotiating."

India eyes local currency trade for West Asian oil

**K.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
 NEW DELHI

The Centre is "experimenting" with conducting trade with the West Asian countries in local currencies, in a bid to mitigate the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials in the government.

Another objective is to save on currency conversion costs.

If this fructifies, it would mean India would be paying for about 80% of its oil imports using local currencies rather than the U.S. dollar. "India is working out a mechanism to pay for imports from the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries in local currencies," a senior government official said.

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said "indirect talks" between the two sides are taking place through messages being relayed by Pakistan.

"The U.S. has shared 15 points, being deliberated upon by Iran. Brotherly countries of Turkey and Egypt, among others, are also extending their support to this initiative," Mr. Dar wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump on Thursday said Iran should "better get serious soon" in talks, "before it's too late, because once that happens, there is no turning back". U.S. media have reported that the Pentagon is sending more troops to West Asia in preparation for a possible ground offensive against Iran.

**AT AN IMPASSE**  
 » PAGE 14

**India has oil for 60 days, LPG supplies for one month: govt.**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
 NEW DELHI

In a bid to end speculation about India's energy stocks amid the escalating tensions in West Asia, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) on Thursday said that India has so far arranged a month of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies through imports, with constant additional procurement ongoing.

A statement said that India has reduced its reliance on imports for LPG, with the country producing "much more" than it needs to import.

On crude oil, the government said Indian oil companies have secured supplies that would suffice for the next 60 days, while the country already holds stocks enough for 60 days.

These 60 days of current stocks, which include crude, diesel and petrol, are an increase over the 50 days of total stocks the government had said it had at the start of the war.

Cumulatively, India currently has a total reserve (storage) capacity of 74 days of fuel stocks, including crude oil, petrol, and diesel.

"Local production up" — "Nearly two months of steady supply is available for every Indian citizen regardless of what happens globally," the Ministry said.

"Next two months of crude procurement has also been secured. India is completely secure for the next many months and the quantity in strategic cavern storage becomes secondary in such a supply situation."

While emphasising that there is no LPG shortage in the country, the government said that India was now producing more LPG than it needs to import. It said that, since the LPG control order issued earlier, domestic refinery production has been ramped up by 40%. This, it said, has brought the daily output to 50,000 tonnes, which is more than 60% of domestic requirements.

Additionally, with respect to imports, the government said that 8,00,000 tonnes of LPG cargoes are en route to India from the United States, Russia, Australia, and other countries.

"Approximately one full month of supply is firmly arranged, with additional procurement being finalised continuously," it stated.

Earlier in the day, Vikas Kaul, managing director at state-owned Hindustan Petroleum said, "Over the past two days, sales have increased by more than 15% on an all-India basis... our supply chains remain strong, our outlets are fully stocked."

**'Cargo-charge waiver draws more tankers'**

**MANGALURU**  
 With the New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPPA) waiving cargo charges for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and crude oil tankers to attract vessels for trading over geopolitical crisis in West Asia, more vessels are sailing into the port. » PAGE 12

**The Geopolitics of the Strait of Hormuz**

**Strategic Signaling by Tehran**

By allowing Indian and Chinese vessels to pass, Iran is utilizing the Strait as a tool of hybrid warfare.

**Dividing the Opposition:** By exempting major Asian powers, Iran seeks to prevent a global consensus against its blockade, effectively isolating the U.S. and Israel.

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**Daily News Analysis**

**Reward for Neutrality:** India's inclusion is a diplomatic dividend for its refusal to join Western-led sanctions and its historical "strategic autonomy."

**The "Tollbooth" Strategy:** Iran's parliament is reportedly drafting legislation to impose transit fees, potentially turning a global common into a revenue-generating sovereign corridor.

**Economic Implications: The "Double-Hit" on India**

India's economy is facing a dual challenge that threatens its macroeconomic stability:

**Surging Oil Prices:** The Indian basket of crude has spiked to \$123.15 per barrel (up from \$69 in February).

**Currency Depreciation:** The Rupee has touched an all-time low of ₹94.1/\$1, driven by capital outflows and a ballooning import bill.

**India's Pivot to Local Currency Trade**

To counter this, the Indian government is experimenting with Local Currency Settlement (LCS) mechanisms with GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries.

Feature	Impact/Benefit
<b>Import Coverage</b>	Could cover 80% of oil imports.
<b>Cost Saving</b>	Saves 5–6% in currency conversion fees.
<b>De-dollarization</b>	Reduces reliance on the USD-based SWIFT system.
<b>Risk</b>	Threatened with 100% tariffs by the U.S. administration for bypassing the dollar.

## India eyes local currency payments for West Asian oil

Move aimed at mitigating the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials; another objective is to save on currency conversion costs

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

The Centre is "experimenting" with conducting trade with the West Asian countries in local currencies, in a bid to mitigate the fiscal double-hit of surging oil prices and a depreciating rupee, according to two senior officials in the government. Another objective is to save on currency conversion costs.

If this fructifies, it would mean India would be paying for about 80% of its oil imports using local currencies rather than the U.S. dollar. "India is working out a mechanism to pay for imports from the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries in local currencies," a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

**Triggers for alternatives**  
The triggers for this move, he explained, were the upward spiral of oil prices and the downward spiral of the rupee.

**Cost cutting**  
With a local currency mechanism, India will see a drastic reduction in currency conversion charges, says an official

- Each conversion costs about 1-2% of the total transaction value
- About 5-6% will be saved if we just deal in local currencies
- India pays for Russian oil in a combination of local currencies and dirhams



The price of the Indian basket of oil – which is a weighted average of the prices of various types of oil from Oman and Dubai and of Brent crude – stands at \$123.15 per barrel currently, as per government data. This is up from an average of \$69 per barrel in February 2026.

Simultaneously, the rupee touched an all-time low of ₹94.1 against a dollar earlier this week, before settling slightly higher. The exchange rate was at about ₹91.3 per dollar before the Iran war broke out.

A combination of these two factors has meant that Indian importers have had to pay much more for each import transaction conducted in the U.S. dollar, especially for oil.

According to another official in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the other advantage India will see through such a local currency mechanism, is a drastic reduction in currency conversion charges.

"It is an experiment on which we are working," the second official said. "Primarily to save on the cost of currency conversion at several stages.

Each conversion costs about 1-2% of the total transaction value, and so about 5-6% will be saved if we just deal in local currencies, which is a lot when it comes to high value transactions," he added.

India currently already pays for Russian oil using a combination of local currencies and dirhams. Russia accounted for 30.4% of India's oil imports in the April 2025 to January 2026 period.

The GCC countries account for another 49%.

Moving away from using the dollar for such high value transactions might, however, attract American ire. The U.S. President Donald Trump has in the past threatened a 100% tariff on countries looking to adopt alternate currencies to the dollar.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision might have removed this threat, but Mr. Trump's determination to use tariffs as a compulsion tool remains.

### Challenges to India's Energy Security

Despite the "friendly" status, India's energy security remains precarious:

**Supply Chain Fragility:** While ships like the Shivalik and Nanda Devi have transited, the volume is insufficient to meet India's total demand.

**Naval Vulnerability:** The sinking of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena by the U.S. near Sri Lanka highlights that the conflict is spilling into the Indian Ocean, threatening India's Extended Neighborhood.

**The "Trump Factor":** The U.S. remains a vital partner for India in technology and defense, yet its aggressive tariff stance on de-dollarization creates a policy dilemma for New Delhi.

### Conclusion

For India, the current crisis is a test of its Multi-alignment policy. While the safe passage through Hormuz provides immediate relief, the long-term solution lies in strategic hedging. India must balance its "Special and Privileged" ties with Iran and Russia against its "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" with the U.S.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Which of the following best describes the concept of "Local Currency Settlement (LCS)"?

- (a) A system where countries peg their currency to the US Dollar
- (b) A mechanism to settle international trade in domestic currencies instead of a third currency like USD
- (c) A WTO-mandated policy for developing countries
- (d) A bilateral swap arrangement only for emergency liquidity

**Ans:** b)

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Examine how the ongoing West Asian conflict challenges India's policy of strategic autonomy. Suggest a balanced approach for India. **(150 Words)**

**Page 02 : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam**

This field report from Toxics Link (August 2025) provides a sobering look at the "implementation gap" in India's environmental policy. Despite the national ban on single-use plastics (SUP) being in place for three years, the study reveals that the law remains largely on paper in the informal sector.

**Toothless ban: single-use plastic rules 84% of surveyed sites in 4 cities**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
 GUWAHATI

About 84% of 560 locations surveyed across four cities – one each in eastern, north-eastern, northern, and western India – continue using single-use plastic items banned across the country three years ago.

Toxics Link, a New Delhi-based environmental research and advocacy organisation, conducted a field study at specific locations across Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Guwahati, and Mumbai between April and August 2025. Its report, released on Wednesday, highlighted major gaps in enforcement and called for nationwide urgent action to strengthen implementation.

The survey teams assessed the on-ground effectiveness of the ban across a wide range of establish-



**Environmental hazard:** Banned single-use plastic covers and other waste littered across the Juhu beach in Mumbai. FILE PHOTO

ments, including street vendors, juice stalls, markets, small restaurants, grocery stores, religious sites, railway platforms, and organised retail spaces.

According to the study, Bhubaneswar recorded the highest availability of banned single-use plastic

items at 89% of the survey locations, closely followed by Delhi at 86%, Mumbai at 85%, and Guwahati at 76%.

"The continued presence of banned plastic items in a majority of locations suggests that enforcement remains inconsistent. Unless implementation improves and the supply of

these products is controlled, the ban will not effectively address plastic littering and pollution," Ravi Agarwal, director of Toxics Link, said.

**High customer demand**

The study found widespread presence of banned single-use plastic items with sectoral variations: thin plastic carry bags, disposable plastic cutlery, cups, plates, and straws were widely found across informal markets and small commercial establishments.

Organised malls and larger retail outlets showed significantly better adherence to the ban compared to informal markets dominated by small vendors. The latter attributed it to a high customer demand and a higher cost of alternatives.

About 91% of the ven-

dors across the survey sites said customers asked for carry bags. Interactions with vendors also revealed that 55% customers brought their own bags, but many customers still expect vendors to provide free carry bags.

Satish Sinha, the associate director of Toxics Link, said that customer preferences partly influence vendors' reluctance to transition from plastics to alternatives, including paper cups and plates, wooden cutlery, steel utensils, aluminium foil containers, bagasse plates, cloth bags, and thicker reusable plastic bags above 120 microns.

"Customers perceive disposable plates and cutlery to be more hygienic than reusable items. Our survey found that this perception, along with the cost

advantage of single-use plastics, continues to drive their use among small and local vendors, although the intensity of this preference varies between rural and urban areas," he said.

**Stronger steps sought**

The report called for stronger national action by all stakeholders – government, single-use plastic manufacturers, retailers, and consumers – in line with the discussions at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution held in Geneva, Switzerland in 2025.

It recommended more robust enforcement and monitoring mechanisms with regular inspections, coordinated action among regulatory agencies, and consistent penalties to ensure compliance with the ban on single-use plastics.

**Analysis: The "Toothless" Plastic Ban**

**1. Statistical Snapshot of Non-Compliance**

The survey of 560 locations across four representative cities shows a near-uniform failure in enforcement:

**Bhubaneswar (89%):** Highest availability of banned items.

**Delhi (86%) & Mumbai (85%):** High density of informal markets sustains the supply chain.

**Guwahati (76%):** Shows slightly better compliance but still fails in three-quarters of surveyed sites.

**2. The Informal vs. Formal Divide**

A critical takeaway is the **socio-economic split** in adherence:

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**Organized Retail:** Malls and large outlets show high compliance, likely due to easier regulatory oversight and brand reputation risks.

**Informal Sector:** Street vendors and local markets remain the primary hubs for SUP. The "cost of alternatives" and "customer demand" are cited as the two pillars of resistance.

### 3. The "Hygiene Paradox" & Consumer Behavior

The report identifies a psychological barrier to the ban:

**The Hygiene Myth:** Many consumers perceive disposable plastic as "cleaner" than reusable steel or glass utensils, particularly in post-pandemic street food culture.

**Convenience Culture:** 91% of vendors reported that customers still actively ask for plastic carry bags, indicating that the behavioral shift toward "carrying your own bag" hasn't reached critical mass.

### Environment & Governance

#### Introduction

India generates approximately 3.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually. To combat this, the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021, mandated a phased ban on 19 identified SUP items. However, as the Toxics Link report suggests, legislative intent is being stifled by weak enforcement mechanisms and market externalities.

#### Key Challenges in Implementation

**Supply-Side Control:** The focus has been on penalizing small vendors rather than shutting down the manufacturing units producing thin films and low-micron bags.

**Economic Viability:** Alternatives like bagasse, wood, and high-micron cloth bags remain significantly more expensive than subsidized or illegally produced plastic.

**Jurisdictional Overlap:** Enforcement is often fragmented between State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), leading to "inspection fatigue" without consistent penalties.

#### Conclusion

The failure of the SUP ban is not a failure of law, but a failure of Circular Economy integration. For the ban to be effective, the government must move beyond "policing" and toward "incentivizing." This includes subsidizing plastic alternatives, implementing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) with more rigor, and launching aggressive behavior-change communication (BCC) campaigns. Without addressing the root cause—the cheap availability of plastic—the environmental hazard witnessed at sites like Juhu Beach will remain a permanent fixture of the Indian landscape.

**UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question**

**Ques: Which of the following best describes Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)?**

- (a) Consumers are responsible for recycling plastic waste
- (b) Producers are responsible for managing post-consumer waste
- (c) Government alone handles plastic waste disposal
- (d) Only importers are liable for waste management

**Ans: (b)**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:** Despite a nationwide ban, single-use plastics continue to dominate India's informal economy. Examine the reasons for this implementation gap. **(150 Words)**

**Page 04 : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam**

The visit of EAM S. Jaishankar to Abbaye des-Vaux-de-Cernay signifies India's status as a key "partner country" for the G7. Despite not being a member, India's presence—while simultaneously holding the BRICS Presidency—underscores its unique position in the "Global Strategic Pentagram." The talks centered on the volatile West Asian situation, specifically the maritime security of the Strait of Hormuz, following a major escalation in the Israel-Iran conflict.

**Key Analysis**

**1. Geopolitical Significance: The Strait of Hormuz**

The Strait of Hormuz is a "chokepoint" for global energy, with nearly 20% of the world's oil passing through it.

**The Trigger:** Israel's claim of eliminating IRGC Navy Commander Alireza Tangsiri (responsible for mining the Strait) has heightened the risk of a total blockade.

**India's Stake:** As a major energy importer, any disruption here leads to domestic inflation and energy insecurity.

**Collaborative Security:** The India-France agreement to "jointly ensure the security" of the Strait reflects a shift from passive observation to active maritime diplomacy.

**2. India as a Bridge: G7 and BRICS**

France's explicit mention of India's BRICS Presidency is significant.

**Strategic Autonomy:** India is one of the few nations capable of engaging with the G7 (Western bloc) while leading BRICS (often seen as a counter-weight).

**Multilateralism:** Jaishankar's call for UNSC Reforms at a G7 forum reinforces India's demand for a "new international order" that reflects 21st-century realities rather than 1945 post-war dynamics.

**3. Addressing the Global South's Concerns**

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**Jaishankar, French counterpart discuss Iran, Hormuz at G7 meet**

**Sriram Lakshman**  
LONDON

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar arrived in France on a two-day visit to represent India as a partner country at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the G7 (Group of Seven) advanced economies.

The Minister held bilateral talks with his French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot in Abbaye des-Vaux-de-Cernay on Thursday, which included an "in depth" discussion on West Asia as per the French government's readout of the meeting.

The two Ministers "agreed to continue their close coordination with a view to working jointly towards ensuring the security of the Strait of Hormuz," the readout said. The meeting comes just after Israel claimed to have killed Iranian commander Alireza Tangsiri, who Israel said was directly responsible for the closing of the Strait.

The participation of Mr. Jaishankar in the G7 meetings signified "the importance France attaches to closely associating India – currently holding the BRICS presidency – with its G7 presidency", the French government said.

**International links**  
The Ministers welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the G7 Summit, scheduled for June 15-17 in Evian, France and underscored India's contribution to the G7's work on addressing major macroeconomic imbalances and improving international partnerships, as per the readout.

Front and centre of the G7 agenda this week is the war in Iran and its impact on global energy and stock markets. Discussions on the Russia-Ukraine war and the reform of multilateralism are also on the cards.

"We will work to bring about a new international order and to build a more balanced and fairer system, underpinned by a renewed multilateralism. Reforming global governance and combatting cross-cutting threats require a collective commitment which extends beyond G7 members alone," Mr. Barrot said in a statement.

**Bilateral talks**  
Mr. Jaishankar also met bilaterally with the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Japan and South Korea. Talks with Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand focused on advancing the bilateral agenda and also dwelt on developments in West Asia, Mr. Jaishankar said on social media site X.

At a session on global governance, Mr. Jaishankar emphasised the urgency of UN Security Council reforms. India and several other countries have been seeking a permanent seat on the body.

The Minister also raised energy challenges and concerns around fertilizer supplies and food security impacting the Global South.

Friday's session on Iran will only be for G7 countries and a session on Ukraine will be in the G7 and Ukraine format.



**Close coordination:** Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar meets with France's Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noël Barrot on Thursday. AFP

# Daily News Analysis

India used the G7 platform to highlight "cross-cutting threats" that disproportionately affect developing nations:

**Food & Fertilizer Security:** The Iran-Israel and Russia-Ukraine conflicts have disrupted supply chains. India is positioning itself as the "Voice of the Global South," ensuring their needs are not sidelined by the "great power" wars.

**Macroeconomic Imbalances:** Collaborative efforts to stabilize global markets against the backdrop of the "War in Iran" and its impact on stock markets.

## 4. Bilateral Dynamics (Mini-laterals)

**India-France:** The relationship is being elevated to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership."

**Canada, Japan, & South Korea:** Meetings with these counterparts suggest that India is diversifying its "Indo-Pacific" and "West Asia" strategies through a network of bilateral ties rather than just large blocs.

## Key Facts for Prelims & Mains

Feature	Details
<b>G7 Members</b>	USA, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan (EU is a 'non-enumerated' member).
<b>Venue</b>	Abbaye des-Vaux-de-Cernay (Foreign Ministers); Évian (Upcoming Summit in June).
<b>Strait of Hormuz</b>	Connects Persian Gulf to Gulf of Oman/Arabian Sea; separates Iran and Oman.
<b>BRICS 2026</b>	India holds the Presidency.

## Conclusion

The Jaishankar-Barrot meeting confirms that India is no longer just an "invitee" to global high tables but a "shaper" of the agenda. By balancing its interests in the Middle East with its commitments to the G7 and BRICS, India is practicing a sophisticated form of multi-alignment. For India, the security of the Strait of Hormuz is not just a regional issue but a vital national interest, and its collaboration with France serves as a template for future maritime security partnerships.

**UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:** The term “Strategic Autonomy” in India’s foreign policy implies:

- (a) Alignment exclusively with Western countries
- (b) Independent decision-making based on national interest
- (c) Military neutrality in all global conflicts
- (d) Withdrawal from multilateral institutions

**Ans:** b)

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:** Analyze India’s role as a “bridge” between developed and developing worlds in the evolving global order. (150 Words)



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### Page 07 : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam

In India, the discourse on end-of-life care has shifted from a purely medical perspective to one rooted in fundamental rights. A Living Will is a legal document that allows a person to specify, in advance, the medical treatments they would like to refuse—such as ventilators or feeding tubes—should they reach a terminal or irreversible state where they can no longer communicate. By bridging the gap between medical technology and human dignity, the Living Will ensures that the "right to life" does not become a "right to forced suffering."

## Why do we need a living will?

Failing to plan ahead is often what separates a peaceful, dignified passing from a prolonged and distressing ordeal for the patient and their family: a living will might be all that humans have available to speak on our behalf when we no longer have a voice, in a life filled with unpredictability

Rajeev Jayadevan

**B**irth and death represent the two ends of a person's timeline. A disproportionate amount of preparation, attention and care is given in the first half—ranging from the anticipation of pregnancy, counselling and check-ups, to delivery and extravagant first birthday celebrations. Unfortunately, the same attention is rarely given to the opposite end—that is death. It is often left to chance, fuelled by the vague hope that "the right treatment decisions will somehow be taken at the right time by someone".

Therein lies the problem. No one—not even a doctor—knows exactly how their life will end, or whether they will be able to speak for themselves in their final days. It could be a relatively sudden event or a long-drawn-out process following a severe, irreversible illness. That choice isn't ours to make. Ultimately, failing to plan ahead is often what separates a peaceful, dignified passing from a prolonged and distressing ordeal for the patient and their family.

A living will is a legal document that safeguards the individual's treatment preferences for certain irreversible conditions, essentially taking the burden off relatives and doctors in deciding on treatments in specific situations. Not having one could sometimes lead to crucial treatment decisions that the patient would not have made by themselves, needlessly prolonging their suffering.

The focus of a living will is specifically for situations in which the person develops a medical condition that is terminal or irreversible. There will be no compromise in routine treatment measures for other illnesses. For instance, a college lecturer suffers a brain injury from hypoxia after a near-drowning incident in a river. The person is paralysed, opens their eyes but cannot recognise anyone or respond—a condition commonly referred to as a persistent vegetative state. This could also happen following head injury, choking on food, strangulation or a stroke.

In such situations, not only is recovery not generally possible, but the person may remain in that condition for prolonged periods—painful for the family to watch and also expensive in the long run. Another example is a person with metastatic cancer at a stage where further treatment offers no improvement, where the person may be better off receiving comfort care (palliative care) that remaining in the ICU receiving more rounds of chemotherapy that only diminish quality of life in the limited days that remain.

Most people would expect their family members or close friends to step in and take the right decisions along with the doctors. However, in reality, the situation can turn chaotic because of emotional conflict, guilt, differences of opinion and contrasting attitudes among several decision makers—at the end of which doctors will often take the easier route



The focus of a living will is specifically for situations in which the person develops a medical condition that is terminal or irreversible. Without a living will, many terminally ill patients spend their final days in the ICU, attached to numerous tubes, unable to speak, and cared for by strangers, 24/7

possible, containing every treatment measure prescribed in the books, without consideration for quality of life or prospects for recovery. In addition, our next of kin may not be alive or available to make these decisions for us in the distant future. A safer alternative is for individuals to document their preferences ahead of time, when they are still in good physical and mental health, and also discuss it in advance with family members so that there is no conflict if and when the time comes.

The living will does not need to be invoked for everyone who is dying, especially when the person is still able to discuss their wishes with their doctors. The danger of not preparing one is that sometimes, other people may end up making life-changing decisions on our behalf when we are not in a position to indicate our preferences.

For instance, if a person enters an irreversible persistent vegetative state, doctors may place a feeding tube that pierces the stomach wall—because the patient can no longer swallow. Such individuals can remain in a paralysed, bedridden state for several years, sometimes a decade or longer. This may not be what the person would have wanted. In contrast, if this person had previously made a living will (advance directives) stating they did not want artificial feeding in the event of an irreversible illness, the treatment plan could shift to comfort care. This gives the person a chance to pass away gradually, in peace, and surrounded by loved ones.

The Supreme Court legally recognised these "advance directives" in the Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018) case. More recently, in the case of Harish Rana—where no living will existed—the Supreme Court enabled doctors to stop artificial feeding by classifying it as a

treatment measure, while continuing comfort care until a natural death occurred.

Without a living will, many terminally ill patients spend their final days in the ICU, attached to numerous tubes, unable to speak, and cared for by strangers. This "disconnected" mode of dying not only results in poor quality of life for the patient but also causes profound emotional distress for the family left behind.

**Clarity on treatments**  
A living will typically specifies which life-sustaining treatments to withhold or withdraw—such as ventilators, feeding tubes, or CPR—only if the patient has no hope of recovery. It does not apply to routine hospitalisations, surgeries, or the treatment of common illnesses. For example, a person with metastatic cancer who has written a living will to avoid ICU care and artificial feeding for their underlying terminal illness will still receive full treatment for a limb fracture or appendicitis. In such cases, if they are temporarily unable to eat, they will receive artificial feeding and post-operative ICU care just like any other patient—to help them recover.

Artificial feeding is a life-saving tool for reversible conditions; it only becomes a point of concern when used to indefinitely prolong a state of irreversible suffering. Studies have shown that having a living will does not affect total survival. At the same time, it helps reduce unnecessary medical interventions and expenses.

Discussing one's preferences with close relatives and the family doctor is helpful to receive guidance and clarity while planning a living will. Guidelines for EOLC (End of Life Care) by The Indian Association of Critical Care Medicine and

the Indian Association of Palliative Care have been published. Templates available online can be customised—as each individual may have different viewpoints for end-of-life care.

For instance, one person may not want any form of artificial feeding if an irreversible illness is confirmed—that is, if they become unable to swallow or feed themselves. Others may agree to artificial feeding, but may not want to be attached to a ventilator if their breathing becomes weak. A third person may agree to ventilator care but will not want CPR, and a fourth may want everything possible to be done. Patient autonomy dictates that individuals have the right to decide the treatment measures they will receive—as long as these decisions are taken in a state of sound mind.

Once drafted, the document requires the signatures of two witnesses and that of a public notary or gazetted officer. A magistrate's signature is no longer a requirement in India, thus the process has been simplified.

A living will is not just for older people. Young adults may be involved in road accidents or other sudden catastrophic events and hence benefit from having one. They can always update their living will depending on any change in preferences as they get older.

To sum it up, a living will might be all that we have available to speak on our behalf when we no longer have a voice, in a life filled with unpredictability. Reserved for irreversible or terminal illnesses, it cannot be invoked for recoverable illnesses, and therefore will not affect routine medical or surgical care.

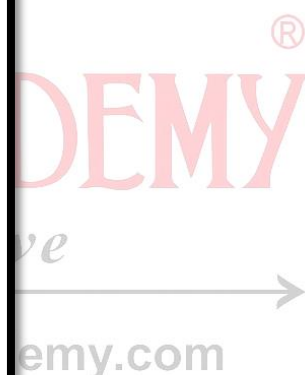
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### THE GIST

A living will is a legal document that safeguards the individual's treatment preferences for certain irreversible conditions, essentially taking the burden off relatives and doctors in deciding on treatments in specific situations

Studies have shown that having a living will does not affect total survival. At the same time, it helps reduce unnecessary medical interventions and expenses. Discussing one's preferences with close relatives and the family doctor is helpful to receive guidance and clarity while planning a living will

A living will is not just for older people. Young adults may be involved in road accidents or other sudden catastrophic events and hence benefit from having one



## News Analysis: The Case for a Living Will

### 1. Core Function and Applicability

**Terminal vs. Routine Care:** A Living Will is strictly for terminal or irreversible conditions (e.g., metastatic cancer or Persistent Vegetative State). It does not affect routine medical care for curable ailments like appendicitis or fractures.

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**Patient Autonomy:** It empowers the individual to remain the primary decision-maker even when incapacitated, preventing "strangers" or over-cautious medical protocols from dictating their final moments.

### 2. Legal Evolution in India

**Common Cause v. Union of India (2018):** The Supreme Court recognized the Right to Die with Dignity as a fundamental right under Article 21. It legalized passive euthanasia and sanctioned the use of Advance Medical Directives.

**2023 Simplified Guidelines:** To remove bureaucratic hurdles, the SC revised the process:

**Execution:** Now requires a signature before two witnesses and attestation by a Notary or Gazetted Officer (removing the mandatory Judicial Magistrate requirement).

**Medical Boards:** A two-tier board system (Primary and Secondary) must confirm the condition is irreversible, with a response time of 48 hours.

**Harish Rana Case (2026):** A recent landmark where, despite the absence of a living will, the SC allowed the withdrawal of life support for a patient in a long-term vegetative state, highlighting the court's lean toward quality of life over mere biological existence.

### 3. Socio-Ethical Importance

**Reducing Emotional Burden:** It relieves family members of the agonizing guilt associated with "pulling the plug," as the decision has already been documented by the patient.

**Avoiding "Disconnected" Dying:** Without a directive, patients often die in isolated ICUs attached to machines. A living will facilitates a transition to palliative (comfort) care, allowing a peaceful death surrounded by loved ones.

**Economic Relief:** Prolonged ICU stays for irreversible conditions can lead to catastrophic healthcare spending, often plunging families into debt for "futile" treatments.

### 4. Challenges in Implementation

**Lack of Awareness:** Despite legal recognition, many citizens and doctors are unaware of the procedure.

**Institutional Readiness:** Many hospitals lack the established Medical Boards required to validate these directives quickly.

**The "Legislative Vacuum":** While the SC has provided guidelines, India still lacks a comprehensive statutory law on euthanasia and end-of-life care.

### Conclusion

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A Living Will is a vital instrument for modern living, ensuring that individual values and dignity are respected until the very end. While medical science can often prolong life, it cannot always restore its quality. By documenting preferences early, individuals protect themselves and their families from the "chaotic" decision-making that often accompanies terminal illness. As India's legal framework matures, the shift toward a more compassionate, patient-centric approach to dying marks a significant milestone in the evolution of human rights.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Which of the following statements best describes Passive Euthanasia?

- (a) Administration of lethal drugs to end life
- (b) Withdrawal or withholding of life-support systems
- (c) Assisted suicide by a physician
- (d) Refusal of basic medical treatment by the patient

**Ans: b)**

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Discuss the significance of the Living Will in upholding the Right to Life under Article 21. **(250 Words)**

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In March 2026, the Supreme Court of India in *Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India* took a landmark step toward redefining parenting roles. While striking down discriminatory age limits for maternity leave in adoption cases, the Court urged the Union government to frame a formal law for paternity leave.

It observed that "parenthood is not a solitary function" and that the historical absence of fathers in early childcare is a form of "unintentional injustice" that reinforces gendered stereotypes. Currently, while central government employees enjoy 15 days of leave, the private and informal sectors—comprising the vast majority of India's workforce—remain largely unregulated in this regard.

## Should men get paternity leave in India?

**Ashwini Deshpande**  
is a Professor of Economics Department at Ashoka University. She specialises in development economics, including gender and labour issues

### PARLEY

**I**n a ruling on maternity leave for adoptive and surrogate mothers last week, the Supreme Court called on the Union government to examine the need for a formal law recognising paternity leave for all fathers, adoptive or biological.

It noted that though parenthood is not a solitary function, fathers are often relegated to the periphery of their children's lives, especially in infancy and early childhood, terming this "a kind of injustice". Should men be given paternity leave? Ashwini Deshpande and Sanjoy Ghose discuss this in a conversation moderated by Priscilla Jebaraj. Edited excerpts:

**Why does paternity leave matter? Who would it benefit?**

**Sanjoy Ghose:** The judgment in the *Hamsaanandini Nanduri* case sees the question not only from the viewpoint of the mother or the father, but most importantly, the child. It said that during the impressionable formative years, the child must have access to both parents as caregivers. The gendered roles that the child absorbs—that a mother's duty is to take care and the father's duty is to work at the workplace—stems from the fact that we as a society do not have paternity leave; we do not have equal sharing of the parental burden or responsibility.

**Ashwini Deshpande:** The Time-Use Survey data show that Indian women spend 10 times as many hours on domestic work, which includes childcare and elderly care, compared to men. When it comes to childcare, it almost exclusively becomes the responsibility of the mother, which prevents her from accessing work opportunities outside the home. It is absolutely important for the child to have both the mother and the father present. But the norm in India is that it is the woman's role. That needs to change.

**While India has no paternity leave law, there is a mandate for maternity leave. How well is that implemented?**

**AD:** Only 10% of India's workforce works in the formal sector. So for 90%, this is not applicable. Even in the formal sector, most establishments are so small that they cannot afford either paternity nor maternity leave.

Beyond the provision of maternity leave, though, there is often discrimination, where women are hired in fewer numbers or are nudged to leave when they become pregnant, or they are bypassed for promotions or relegated to lower-level decision-making.

It is a double whammy. You don't get help at



A woman labourer, who is busy plucking fruits in an orchard, arranges a soft bed for her child, near Chiravuru in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. G.N. RAO

home and at your workplace, you are discriminated against. And there is a motherhood penalty in wages. After the birth of the first child, the wage gap between couples increase, even in Scandinavian countries.

**SG:** We have a plethora of laws, legislation, and protections, which govern only this minuscule, highly regulated part of the economy, though many of the most vulnerable women who need this protection are in the informal sector.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides non-termination during the period of maternity leave. But employers and employees know that discrimination can be subtle. If promotions are delayed or denied, it is very difficult for a woman to prove in Court that this is directly related to her having had a child.

**The vast majority of Indian workplaces don't offer paternity leave. The Central government offers two weeks to its employees who become fathers. Some multinational companies offer up to three months. The global gold standard is Sweden, which offers 480 days of paid leave per child to be shared between parents, with 90 days each of non-transferable leave. Given this spectrum of policy options, what would be the most viable and useful in Indian workplaces? Let's start with the formal sector alone.**

**AD:** In India, 480 days won't work, but I think the principle underlying the Sweden model is correct. It should be called parental leave and not maternity or paternity leave. Let the couple sort it out. But some part of it should be non-transferable so that it is compulsory for the man also to take some leave. But I think it has to be accompanied by conversations about norms shifting. Both the father and the mother need to be equally involved in the process. How many days is optimal? Well, I don't see it going beyond



The gendered roles that the child absorbs—that a mother's duty is to take care and the father's duty is to work at the workplace—stems from the fact that we as a society do not have paternity leave

**SANJOY GHOSE**

the six months already being given for women. So, call the same six months parental leave and insist that both parents use it.

**SG:** But in that model, we are assuming that the wife is also working. In many cases, if the mother is a homemaker, it will be the father who is entitled to the full six months of parental leave. My fear is that a law enacted with good intentions could have unintended consequences. It might leave a woman not only responsible for caring for her child, but also expected to support a husband who is on a six-month paid leave and not sharing responsibilities equally.

This kind of leave for fathers will only be taken in sedentary jobs. It will not happen, say, in an asset management company because it is so competitive. There are so many factors which have to be worked out. I think it is very impractical to come with a general prescription of what should be paternity leave and how it should be administered.

**But we do have such a general prescription for maternity leave, don't we? However it is implemented, it is there as a right.**

**SG:** Maternity leave is seen as a much more genuine leave, though I'm not saying that there are no caregiving fathers. But given that we are still to evolve to that level of gender justice, and patriarchy is still so rampant, you cannot blindly equate paternity leave with maternity leave.

**AD:** In American universities, both men and women can apply for one year's extension in the tenure clock if you had a child during that time. But research shows that young male assistant professors who get that extension end up actually publishing another paper, whereas the mothers, the female assistant professors, actually struggle with both the job and the child. So, it is a very realistic scenario in India where somebody will just sit at home for six months and will order the wife to make tea in addition to taking care of the child.

There are no easy solutions, but I think the notion that it should be parental leave, not maternity, should be the starting point. And then you work out how it should be

implemented to minimise discrimination against women and to minimise misuse of that facility.

**Moving beyond the formal sector, what would it take to bring this kind of parental leave to all of working India?**

**SG:** The stated objective of the labour codes of 2020, which came into effect last November, is to bring more people into the formal economy, so that they can benefit from such policies. So, it is a long haul issue. But also, there is a patriarchal mindset which has to go. During an SC hearing on menstrual leave, there was an observation made that it might affect the careers of women if they insist on menstrual leave. Similarly, with the sexual harassment law, it was said this will discourage employing women. This attitude has to change—that these laws will make women an unattractive human resource in the job market. This bogeyman argument cannot be allowed to hold labour rights hostage. It's a long fight ahead.

**AD:** 90% of India's workers work in enterprises that employ between one and 10 workers.

Factories with more than 300 workers are 0.5% of total enterprises, so we are talking about an industrial structure where the average number of employees per firm is very small. If you think of a nano firm with three people, and if one of them is on parental leave, you have to also think of how that enterprise is going to function. So, I think increasing the size of enterprises is an absolute precondition for parental, caregiving, menstrual, or any other kind of leave.

Or think about a gig worker. Supposing they've signed up with a platform and then the woman is going to have a child. Can she continue to work? No. So she just drops out of the labour force.

I think we live in a world of segmented labour markets and this dualism is going to characterise our industrial structure and labour force for a while to come. In countries where fathers do take paternity leave, it does have a positive impact on women's labour force participation. But in India, the larger context is non-availability of productive jobs, both for men and women. That's a big picture problem within which all of these issues are located. Patriarchal norms on gender roles do need to go, but mindsets change when objective conditions change. So I think we need to figure out what it is that we can change at the ground level.



To listen to the full interview  
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### 1. The Rationale: Why Paternity Leave Matters

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The debate highlights that paternity leave is not just a "perk" for men but a structural tool for gender justice and child welfare:

**Child Development:** The Supreme Court emphasized that children need access to both parents during formative years for holistic emotional and psychological growth.

**Redistributing Care Work:** Indian women spend roughly 10 times more hours on domestic and care work than men. Formal paternity leave encourages a shift from the "provider" vs. "caregiver" dichotomy.

**Addressing the "Motherhood Penalty":** When only women take leave, they face hiring bias, wage gaps, and promotion delays. Making leave parental or gender-neutral levels the professional playing field.

### 2. Current Legal Landscape in India

**Public Sector:** Under the Central Civil Services (Leave) Rules, 1972, male government employees are entitled to **15 days** of paid leave.

**Private Sector:** No national mandate exists. While some MNCs (like Zomato or Microsoft) offer anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months, only about 13-14% of Indian companies provide formal paternity benefits.

**Labour Codes 2020 (Implemented Nov 2025):** While these codes modernize social security, they primarily focus on extending maternity benefits (e.g., to gig workers) but haven't yet codified a universal paternity leave.

### 3. Key Challenges and Implementation Hurdles

Despite the judicial push, experts identify several roadblocks:

**The "Tea-Maker" Syndrome:** As noted by Ashwini Deshpande, without a change in social norms, men might use leave for personal leisure or professional "upskilling" (e.g., publishing papers) while the mother continues to bear the double burden of chores and childcare.

**The Informal Sector Gap:** Nearly 90% of India's workforce is in the informal sector or small "nano-firms" (1-10 employees). These enterprises often lack the financial cushion to provide paid leave without government subvention.

**The Competitive "Bogeyman":** There is a fear that mandatory leave might make employees in hyper-competitive sectors (like finance or tech) feel "replaceable," leading to low uptake even if a law exists.

### 4. Comparative Perspective: The "Gold Standard"

The discussion often points to the Swedish Model:

**Total Leave:** 480 days per child.

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**Key Feature:** Each parent has 90 days of non-transferable "use-it-or-lose-it" leave. This "daddy quota" has been instrumental in forcing a cultural shift where fathers are expected to be primary caregivers.

### Conclusion

The Supreme Court's nudge marks a transition from viewing paternity leave as a "choice" to recognizing it as a social security benefit. However, for paternity leave to truly empower women and benefit children, legislation must be the starting point, not the end. A move toward Gender-Neutral Parental Leave, combined with incentives for small businesses and shifts in workplace culture, is essential. As India formalizes its labour market through the new Labour Codes, integrating shared parenting into the social security net will be a vital step toward achieving Substantive Equality under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Which of the following best reflects the concept of "Substantive Equality" under the Indian Constitution?

- (a) Equal treatment irrespective of circumstances
- (b) Formal equality before law only
- (c) Equality that accounts for social and structural disadvantages
- (d) Reservation only in public employment

**Ans:** c)

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Discuss the need for a statutory framework on paternity leave in India. (250 Words)



## The key to India's multi-domain deterrence, capabilities

China's military poses a serious challenge to India. New Delhi has no choice but to pursue a robust industrial strategy to offset China's military advantage. Otherwise, it risks the widening of the capability gap. But bridging this gap requires political expediency to make urgent, hard policy choices – what to buy, what to build, and the potential costs and benefits. The challenge is that technology is evolving faster than doctrine, making precise choices even more difficult. The question is how India should reconceptualise its doctrinal and technological choices and adopt a credible defence-industrial strategy to deter the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

### Hard choices, systemic vulnerabilities

There could be three contrasting ways to approach the issue. First, India could adopt a bold approach. It would imply betting on the right technological trends and investing in a completely new bundle of war-fighting technologies. The risk is if implementation fails, it can create acute capability vulnerabilities and further weaken the margin of deterrence with India's adversaries. Besides, India lacks the industrial heft to produce technologies at scale and speed to neutralise China's advantage. But, if successful, it could help reduce the capability gap.

Second, India could consider a more conservative strategy. This would entail integrating a wide range of emerging technologies with those in-service to make the existing force more effective. It would also entail enhancing India's cyber, space and electronic warfare capabilities to digitise the battlespace, to streamline and condense the kill chains. This is entirely doable, but it would not alter the balance of power. Perhaps, this strategy is more suited to fight a short war with Pakistan, not a protracted conflict.

Third, India could explore the middle path. While it continues to rely on legacy platforms, it invests in the creation and deployment of enabling layers, to enhance its ability to deter China. While, multi-domain operations (MDO) should be the obvious choice; India is not there yet for a mix of reasons. Besides, MDO as a concept is difficult to define, and even more difficult to operationalise. This would entail fielding a set of crucial enabling layers – of Command and Control (C2), Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), deep-strike, close-battle, infrastructure and logistics, which are critical to war outcomes. As these layers evolve, India's military would shape



**Harinder Singh**

A retired Lieutenant General and a former corps commander

A robust defence-industrial base will shape India's multi-domain deterrence and resilience, especially against China

into a syncretic, multi-domain force. Historically, military transformations have adopted well-known paths. It entails aligning research, development and industrial capacity, doctrines and structures and technology and tactics across institutions, and over time, to deter threats. National security institutions, including the military, have to work together to develop a common picture of the deterrence that the state wishes to create. Since India's margin of deterrence against China is uncertain, India's endeavour should be to analyse the factors that explain the systemic challenges to building a robust posture. Two aspects stand out. First, India's industrial challenges are well known. Its ability to translate its military requirements into industrial targets is doubtful. The issue is not its technological competence but its defence-industrial base, which is not structured to deliver at speed and scale. Missiles, munitions and drones are urgent industrial investments of the day, so are the ISR and C2 networks and shortfalls in legacy platforms. India needs to expand its defence-industrial base in conjunction with private industry; otherwise, it may continue to face constraints.

While there is no one-off solution to coordinating industrial capacity, technology and doctrine, incremental steps can generate benefits in the long term. Removing red tape, ensuring budgetary stability, and providing long-term contracts especially for specialised platforms could prove helpful. A mindset change recognising that private players can build military systems more efficiently than the government sector, is needed. It is never too late to shore up the system, but the window for industrial reform is clearly shrinking.

Second, India's procurement system has to focus on evolving and not constraining the fighting force. The system has to adapt faster and be rooted in an efficient defence-industrial base that can produce what an evolving force needs. India needs to spend more, but spend smarter by making hard choices in prioritising key deterrent capabilities. This will require the broadest possible debate and consensus on what needs to be done, and why. It is also the military's job to explain its roles and tasks to the political leadership, the costs of inaction and possible trade-offs, and how they impact the deterrence that India wishes to achieve.

### Fixing the enabling layers

Strengthening India's deterrence would mean altering China's military confidence, while preventing it from assuming that any single

capability could prove decisive. This is more so when India has no single capability which is exquisite enough to alter the military balance. By creating and operationalising the enabling layers – C2, ISR, deep-strike, close-battle and others – India can aspire to field a capable multi-domain force, to deter the Chinese.

India must have two top priorities. First, to identify those military vulnerabilities that present an advantage to China. Its fledgling C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) is one such concern. Dominating the C4ISR battle is key: the side that can see can continue to fight. India needs cheap ISR platforms, in numbers which it can afford to lose, yet maintain ISR capacity. It even needs superior cyber, space and electronic warfare capabilities to deceive and degrade the adversary's ISR platforms. A layered C4ISR – one that enhances one's ISR capacity, while limiting an adversary's ability – is vital.

There are other layers, as well. For instance, the integration of missiles, aircraft and drones as the strike layer to dislocate the enemy in depth. The coordinated employment of land-based platforms such as tanks, guns, and infantry vehicles as a layer to fight front-line battles is crucial. A robust logistic layer that integrates all rear-zone elements including logistic installations, supply chains, and infrastructure is essential for fighting a protracted war. Equally important, in India's case, will be its nuclear deterrent, and how much nuclear capability it needs to compensate for a lack of conventional deterrence to dissuade a nuclear adversary such as China.

Second, India needs to incentivise the right parts of the defence industrial base, by making one-off budgetary allocations in select capabilities. China has a sizeable missile inventory and has the industrial capacity to produce thousands more, during conflict. If a conflict erupts, it can use these against India, with devastating effect. Even if India were to withstand the initial PLA strikes, it would put severe pressure on India's surge capacity. This inventory gap is a risky bet. India has to incentivise defence production, in the absence of which, China might be tempted to drag India into a protracted fight.

India should, therefore, be spending less time admiring the service-specific acquisitions, and fix the critical enabling layers in the deterrence system. Besides, theatre-isation alone might not help create these layers, unless it is rooted in deep doctrinal convergence.

### GS Paper II: International Relations

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question:** Discuss the significance of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) in modern warfare. How is it different from traditional military doctrines? (150 Words)

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## Context :

The rapid evolution of military technology—specifically in the realms of AI, cyber, and space—has outpaced traditional military doctrines. For India, the challenge is not merely about matching China's "mass" (the number of tanks or aircraft) but about building a resilient industrial base and integrated enabling layers that can offset the PLA's technological advantages. Lt. Gen. Singh argues that India must move beyond service-specific acquisitions to adopt a "Whole-of-Nation" approach to deterrence.

## Key Strategies for Bridging the Capability Gap

Lt. Gen. Singh outlines three potential strategic paths for India's military modernization:

### 1. The Strategic Pathways

**The Bold Approach:** Investing heavily in "leap-frog" technologies (e.g., autonomous swarms, quantum communications). While high-risk, it is the only way to fundamentally close the gap.

**The Conservative Strategy:** Integrating new tech into existing "legacy" platforms. While practical, this is better suited for short-duration conflicts with Pakistan rather than a protracted struggle with China.

**The "Middle Path" (Recommended):** Maintaining legacy platforms while aggressively building enabling layers—the connective tissue that allows different military domains to work together.

### 2. Strengthening the "Enabling Layers"

To field a credible Multi-Domain Operation (MDO) force, India must prioritize several critical layers:

**C4ISR (Command, Control, Computers, Intel, Surveillance, Recon):** India needs "cheap and expendable" ISR platforms (drones) that can be lost in combat without crippling the overall network.

**Strike Layer:** Deep-strike capabilities involving the integration of missiles, manned aircraft, and drones to dislocate enemy forces.

**The Nuclear Layer:** Strengthening the nuclear deterrent to compensate for any temporary shortfalls in conventional capabilities.

### 3. Defence-Industrial Reform

The author emphasizes that India's industry is not currently structured to deliver at the speed and scale required for a major conflict.

**Private Sector Inclusion:** A mindset shift is required to treat private players as primary builders of military systems.

**Inventory Gaps:** India must urgently address its shortfall in missiles and munitions. In a high-intensity conflict, the side with the deeper industrial "surge capacity" typically wins.

## Analysis

### Relevance to GS Paper III (Security & Defence)

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## Daily News Analysis

**Deterrence Theory:** The shift from deterrence by punishment (nuclear) to deterrence by denial (multi-domain capabilities) is a key theme for 2026.

**Indigenization:** The article highlights that "Aatmanirbharta" (self-reliance) must move from assembly to "ecosystem maturity."

**Theatre Commands:** The author warns that "theatre-isation" alone is not a silver bullet; it must be backed by "deep doctrinal convergence."

### Critical Challenges

**Budgetary Constraints:** Making "hard choices" means prioritizing network-centric tools over expensive, high-visibility platforms like additional aircraft carriers or heavy tank divisions.

**The "Kill Chain":** Transitioning to "Intelligent Warfare" involves shortening the time between detecting a target and neutralizing it—a process currently hindered by bureaucratic red tape.

### Conclusion

Lt. Gen. Harinder Singh's analysis serves as a wake-up call: the window for military and industrial reform is shrinking. India's security in the late 2020s depends less on the total number of soldiers and more on the synergy between its cyber, space, and kinetic domains. Deterrence against China will only be credible when India can demonstrate the industrial capacity to sustain a protracted, high-tech conflict.

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