

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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The report titled "Groundwater that glows yellow-green in U.P." published in The Hindu highlights severe Hexavalent Chromium—Cr(VI)—contamination across Uttar Pradesh's industrial belts (Kanpur, Unnao, and Ranipet-style tanneries/chemical zones). The yellow-green coloration of handpump water directly stems from unregulated industrial effluent dumping, posing acute environmental and public health risks.

SPOTLIGHT

Nikhil M. Babu

Patches of earth streaked a fluorescent greenish-yellow flank National Highway 19 that connects Kanpur Nagar and Fatehpur districts in Uttar Pradesh. Off the highway, a culvert also has yellow leaching on it. On the dirt road towards Chhiwari village in Fatehpur, the markings persist. They lead to Daya Devi's home, down a mud path. Part of the concrete roof of 40-year-old Devi's two-room house is falling in. That's not her only problem though. The mother of two children is more worried about her stomach pains and digestion. "The doctor told me it is a liver infection. That was a month ago, and I'm still taking medicines," she says, touching her abdomen. "My stomach doesn't feel alright and I have to use the toilet about three times a day." She also has rashes running along the length of both her hands, which she says "itch a lot". Many others in the village have similar health problems.

In the inner courtyard of Devi's house, her son works a handpump. Fluorescent yellow water flows into a white plastic bucket. "Yahan poori chemical ki aata hai (here, only a chemical flows)," a woman outside Devi's house says. She and Devi blame the

water for their health conditions.

In about a dozen areas of three districts of Uttar Pradesh – Fatehpur, Kanpur Dehat, and Kanpur Nagar – the groundwater has been contaminated by the chemical chromium (VI) or hexavalent chromium, as per State government data.

Over the last five years, the government has collected blood samples from people living in the affected areas. A 2025 government report on these tests reveals that 73-96% have above-permissible levels of chromium (VI).

Chromium is a naturally occurring hard greyish metal found in rocks and soil. But chromium (VI) compounds are produced by the chemical industry and are used in a wide range of applications like in electroplating and wood preservation. Hexavalent chromium is bright yellow-green and highly reactive.

Factories manufacture chromium sulphate in the area, which is used by tanning industries to make leather stronger. Kanpur and surrounding areas have had tanneries since the 19th century.

Green tribunal orders

In 2005, the U.P. Pollution Control Board identified six factories in Kanpur Dehat that were dumping polluting waste, untreated or improperly treated sludge and run-off. The units were shut down that year, as per an NGT order. In 2017, the

Groundwater that glows yellow-green

Decades of industrial waste dumping have contaminated groundwater with chromium (VI) across parts of three Uttar Pradesh districts, exposing villagers to unsafe water and serious health risks



Chemical in garb of water: Heavily contaminated water coming out of a hand pump in Chhiwari village of Uttar Pradesh's Fatehpur district. SHASHI SHERKAR KASHAP

NGT passed an order for the removal of chromium dumps in Kanpur Nagar.

While the government has been adding areas impacted by the chromium contamination to the list of places where environmental action is needed, the prompts often come only after the NGT orders.

About 15-20 years ago, the factories started sending *mitti* (sand) out to villagers in Chhiwari. "They would ask people if they wanted to fill their fields to build houses or if we needed cattle shed, and would dump the *mitti* for free. Many villagers used it to fill their land," Devi says. "Back then, we had no idea that it was poisonous."

Devi's neighbour, Pottal Pal, 60, says he had filled his land using the *mitti* that the factories dumped.

"But after some time we started to notice that the skin on our buffaloes' legs was getting burnt and our children's nails were also getting affected. That is when we realised that

there was something wrong with the *mitti*, and we stopped them from supplying it," he says.

At the time, they didn't realise that the chemical was seeping into the groundwater. "About five-seven years back, we started seeing a faint yellow in the water, but we continued to drink it for about a year. Then we couldn't drink it any more. It tasted too bitter," she says.

Now, water comes home through pipelines laid by the government. "The pipelines are damaged and many times we get sewage-mixed water. We have even seen *keeda* (worm) in the supply water, and now we use it only after straining it," she says. "But when there is no supply, we are again dependent on handpumps."

The houses in the neighbourhood have handpumps that spew water with different intensities of the yellow-green colour. Devi's village, Chhiwari, is not part of government-identified areas as chromium-affected.

The earliest and largest chromium dump came up around 1976 in Rania, Kanpur Dehat, say NGT reports. As much as 62,225 metric tons of chromium waste was found there. It was removed only about a year ago, following NGT orders and missed deadlines. There are still patches of yellow-green at the site. There is an NGT direction to erect a boundary wall

around it to minimise the dust from flying out, but it is open. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified chromium (VI) as a carcinogen when inhaled.

About 500 metres from the dump, in Shivnath Purwa village, a village identified by the government as affected, Roshni Devi, 30, who has four children, still remembers the day about six years ago when she drank the water from the handpump.

"I vomited immediately. It tasted really bad even though it was not as yellow as it is now," she says. "I never drank it again. Now, even petrol will fail in front of it," she says. Her father, who is visiting, is washing his clothes with the fluorescent water from the handpump. "We use water from our relatives' borewell, which is deeper, for drinking. But we still use this water for washing and bathing," she says.

Raj Kumar Yadav, 50, says that the government should at least supply safe piped drinking water to the village. His house was also built with chemical-laden soil from the factory. Pointing to the faint yellow tint on the walls, he says, "If you wash it, the water will still be yellow even after all these years."

While Yadav pays ₹20 every day to buy a 20-litre bottle of RO water every morning, many labourers who work in the factories nearby are not able to afford that. "We drink water directly from handpumps," says Rajesh Kumar, 42, who earns ₹10,400 a month, working at a factory manufacturing railway coaches.

"If you keep the water for a while, it turns light yellow. I can drink it as we are used to it. But anyone from the city won't be able to drink it."

Dr. Anurag Sachan, who runs a hospital in Aung village, Fatehpur district, says he gets 15-20 patients a month from the villages with contaminated water, many more compared to other areas.

Health threats

He says that over the last 10 years the number of patients coming to see him with skin and gastro issues has more than doubled.

Manoj Kumar Tiwari, Associate Professor at IIT Kanpur, who is heading a team that the government has roped in to do a comprehensive study to map the affected areas in the three districts, says that cleaning up the affected areas is not an easy task. The study has just started, and the first phase of mapping areas is expected to take six months.

He says that if contamination is stopped, groundwater in the aquifers can purify itself, but it can take tens to hundreds of years, depending on the nature of the aquifer and level of contamination.

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Core Issue & Analysis

- Pollutant Profile:** Industrial waste containing Hexavalent Chromium Cr(VI), a highly toxic, carcinogenic, and soluble heavy metal pollutant.
- Primary Source:** Decades of unmanaged discharge from tanneries, chemical plants, and chrome-plating units without primary or secondary effluent treatment.
- Environmental Impact:** Severe degradation of shallow aquifers, bioaccumulation in crops through contaminated irrigation, and destruction of local soil microbial ecosystems.
- Health Hazards:** Long-term consumption leads to chronic kidney failure, skin lesions, gastrointestinal disorders, and elevated cancer rates among local populations.
- Governance Gaps:** Lapses in enforcement by the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), lack of zero-liquid discharge (ZLD) compliance, and delayed remediation of legacy waste dumps.

Static Dimensions

- Environment & Pollution:**

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Daily News Analysis

- Water pollution dynamics, industrial waste management, and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) norms.
- **Governance & Health:**
 - Fundamental Right to clean drinking water under Article 21 (Right to Life).
 - Implementation gaps in Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and national water quality monitoring programs.
- **Legal & Regulatory Framework:**
 - **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** Mandates statutory penalties for unauthorized effluent discharge.
 - **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** Provides powers for immediate factory closure and site remediation.
 - **Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991:** Mandates compensation for toxic exposure victims.
- **Judicial Precedents:**
 - Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum Case (1996): Enforced the **Precautionary Principle** and the **Polluter Pays Principle** in industrial tannery pollution.

Key Recommendations

- **Legacy Remediation:** Immediate application of bioremediation (microbial/fungal chrome reduction) and pump-and-treat systems for contaminated aquifers.
- **Strict Regulatory Enforcement:** Mandatory installation of real-time Effluent Monitoring Systems (EMS) and continuous monitoring of Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs).
- **Safe Drinking Water Provision:** Accelerate piped water supply under Jal Jeevan Mission to affected villages to eliminate dependence on shallow handpumps.
- **Community Health Audits:** Conduct systematic epidemiology surveys and set up specialized healthcare centers in heavy metal-affected zones.

Conclusion

The occurrence of yellow-green groundwater is a stark reminder of ecological degradation driven by industrial neglect. Transitioning from reactive cleanup to proactive environmental governance—anchored in the Polluter Pays Principle—is essential to safeguard public health and uphold constitutional guarantees under Article 21.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Which of the following industrial activities is most directly associated with chromium contamination?

- A. Tanneries and electroplating industries
- B. Cement manufacturing alone
- C. Solar photovoltaic generation alone
- D. Food-grain storage

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Discuss the environmental and health implications of Hexavalent Chromium contamination in groundwater. What measures should be adopted for prevention and remediation?(10 Marks, 150 Words)

A comprehensive ecological assessment by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai, has revealed that the sinking of the container ship **MSC Elsa 3** off the Kerala coast on May 25, 2025, caused **no measurable ecological or socioeconomic damage** to the Lakshadweep archipelago. The study was conducted following directives from the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which took suo motu cognizance of risks reported by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).

MSC Elsa 3 sinking caused no significant impact on Lakshadweep islands: study

G. Krishnakumar
KOCHI

A comprehensive assessment carried out by the Chennai-based National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management on the potential environmental impact on the Lakshadweep islands following the sinking of the container vessel *MSC Elsa 3* off the Kerala coast on May 25, 2025 has found that the shipwreck did not result in measurable ecological or socioeconomic damage to the archipelago.

However, the incident has underscored the inherent vulnerability of remote island ecosystems to maritime accidents and highlighted the impor-



MSC Elsa 3, a container ship carrying hazardous cargo, sinks off the Kerala coast in the Arabian Sea on May 25, 2025. AP

tance of strengthening maritime incident preparedness through early warning systems, island-specific contingency planning, coordinated inter-agency response mechanisms and sustained environmental monitoring to enhance resilience against future spill risks, according to the research based on

field surveys, analysis, remote sensing, numerical spill trajectory modelling and stakeholder consultations.

The study was carried out as per the directives issued by the National Green Tribunal after it took *suo motu* cognizance of the report titled "Containers from sunken ship likely to

drift towards Alappuzha, Kollam Coasts in 48 hours: INCOIS" published in *The Hindu*.

A report prepared by the NCSCM on the potential environmental and socio-economic risks of the incident on the Lakshadweep islands said that multiple lines of evidence indicated that physiochemical parameters of seawater and sediments remained within the natural baseline ranges characteristic of coral atoll environments. Biological assessments confirmed the absence of stress or degradation in plankton communities, benthic assemblages, coral reefs, seagrass meadows and associated lagoonal habitats, it said.

Core Issue & Key Findings

- **Incident Profile:** Sinking of *MSC Elsa 3*, a vessel carrying hazardous cargo, in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Kerala on May 25, 2025.
- **Environmental Baseline Intact:** Field surveys, remote sensing, and numerical spill trajectory modeling showed that seawater and sediment physicochemical parameters remained within baseline ranges typical of coral atolls.

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- **Marine Life Unaffected:** Biological assessments confirmed zero stress or degradation across plankton communities, benthic assemblages, coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and lagoon habitats.
- **Zero Socioeconomic Impact:** No recorded disruption to local fisheries, island livelihoods, or coastal tourism across the Lakshadweep archipelago.
- **Methodology:** Integrated multi-line evidence approach using field sampling, satellite tracking, numerical spill trajectory modeling, and local stakeholder consultations.

Static Dimensions

- **Environment & Disaster Management:**
 - **Marine Pollution & Spill Risks:** Vulnerability of fragile coral atoll ecosystems to hazardous maritime cargo.
 - **Institutional Mechanisms:** Role of coastal research bodies (NCSCM, INCOIS) and environmental courts (NGT suo motu powers).
- **Governance & Maritime Policy:**
 - **Inter-Agency Coordination:** Collaborative emergency response involving the Indian Coast Guard, State Disaster Management Authorities, and environmental researchers.
 - **Judicial Oversight:** Environmental jurisprudence via NGT enforcement under the Precautionary Principle.
- **Relevant Conventions & Frameworks:**
 - **MARPOL Convention:** International Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.
 - **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958:** Provisions for maritime casualties, spill containment, and liability.
 - **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) & Island Protection Zone (IPZ) Notification 2019:** Legal protection for eco-sensitive island habitats.

Key Recommendations for Resilience

- **Island-Specific Contingency Plans:** Formulate localized response protocols tailored to fragile coral atoll structures.
- **Enhanced Early Warning Systems:** Upgrade real-time spill modeling and drift forecast integration between INCOIS and the Coast Guard.
- **Inter-Agency Preparedness:** Conduct routine joint drills involving maritime, environmental, and defense agencies to handle hazardous cargo accidents.

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- **Sustained Environmental Monitoring:** Maintain long-term baseline tracking of marine biodiversity along sensitive shipping corridors.

Conclusion While Lakshadweep escaped damage in this instance, the MSC Elsa 3 event highlights the ongoing threat posed by international shipping lanes bordering fragile marine ecosystems. Institutionalizing robust, real-time response mechanisms is vital to safeguard marine biodiversity and ensure sustainable coastal management.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) primarily deals with:

- A. Criminal offences involving maritime piracy.
- B. Civil cases involving environmental protection and conservation, subject to its statutory jurisdiction.
- C. Constitutional disputes between the Union and States.
- D. International maritime boundary disputes.

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Marine pollution disasters require an ecosystem-specific response rather than a uniform national contingency framework." Discuss with reference to India's coral-island ecosystems. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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In an op-ed titled "How AI can be optimised for better healthcare", Suneeta Reddy (Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals) highlights how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can democratize access to medical expertise, bridge rural-urban healthcare divides, and streamline hospital operations. Connecting recent global milestones with India's digital infrastructure, the article presents a case for leveraging AI as a catalyst for socio-economic development and human capital enhancement.

How AI can be optimised for better healthcare

Modern medicine has built an extraordinary depth of knowledge. However, how much of that knowledge can reach the patient who needs it now? The answer has traditionally depended on the number and distribution of trained clinicians, the institutions in which they work, and the systems that connect them to patients. All three are difficult to expand quickly. For India, which is still expanding its healthcare capacity while its disease burden becomes more complex, the question of how far health expertise can reach is particularly consequential.

Here, Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces a new dimension. It offers a way of taking the accumulated knowledge and making more of it available at the point of care. The change is visible across major health systems. In January 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it had authorised more than 1,000 AI-enabled medical devices. These include tools used in radiology, cardiology, and other areas of diagnosis. In the U.K., the NHS issued a guidance in April 2025 for the use of AI-enabled ambient scribing. By January 2026, the country was developing a national programme to support wider adoption, with early evidence suggesting that the technology could give doctors up to a quarter more time with their patients.

These examples point to a wider change. AI is moving out of innovation teams and into consultations, diagnostic workflows, and hospital operations. The real work now lies in making it dependable enough for routine use.

The economic benefits

India has its own set of challenges. Specialist care remains concentrated in larger cities, while chronic conditions require patients to be monitored over many years. Hospitals are also managing rising volumes without being able to increase clinical



Suneeta Reddy
Managing Director,
Apollo Hospitals
Enterprise Ltd.

capacity at the same pace.

An AI tool that helps prioritise a radiology scan, alerts a care team to a deteriorating patient or supports a physician handling a complex case in a smaller city can make existing capacity work more efficiently.

The country has already built much of the digital foundation required for this shift. By May 2026, more than 100 crore health records had been linked to the Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts, twice the number recorded in February 2025. A July 2026 government update reported that the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) Scan and Share service had reduced outpatient registration waits at participating hospitals from around an hour to between two and five minutes. These improvements did not require a dramatic reinvention. It came from removing friction from a familiar hospital process. AI can extend the same principle to appointment scheduling, clinical documentation, claims, inventory planning, and discharge management. Each task takes time away from care if handled poorly.

Additionally, the financial benefits from using AI is becoming harder for healthcare providers to ignore. A January 2026 McKinsey analysis estimated that applying AI across healthcare revenue-cycle operations could reduce the cost to collect by 30% to 60%. For hospitals, these gains can free resources for clinical teams, equipment and capacity. They can also reduce administrative work that contributes to staff fatigue.

There is yet another part related to the business side that receives less attention. AI can help providers offer services that were previously difficult to deliver at scale. Remote monitoring can extend care beyond discharge. Risk-based preventive programmes can identify people who need attention before symptoms become severe. Virtual specialist support can connect smaller hospitals with expertise located elsewhere. Diagnostics can

be taken closer to communities, while hospitals maintain an ongoing relationship with patients managing diabetes, cardiac disease or cancer.

Judicious use

These models create revenue, but their value does not come from selling more technology. It comes from reaching patients earlier and avoiding preventable deterioration. This is also where restraint matters. A system that performs well in one hospital or population may not work equally well across India's States, disease patterns, and care settings. Clinical validation, representative data, and human oversight also need to be seriously considered. The FDA's September 2025 call for better methods to evaluate AI-enabled devices in real-world settings reflects a concern that every health system will have to confront. The tools' performance at launch does not guarantee performance over time.

Healthcare does not need AI everywhere. It needs it where delays can be reduced, clinicians can make better-informed decisions, and more patients can receive appropriate care. As India marks another year of Independence, there is a larger dimension to this conversation. The economic strength of a nation ultimately rests on the capabilities of its people. Healthcare therefore belongs within the architecture of economic development. India has built considerable physical and digital infrastructure over the decades; the next phase of development will depend increasingly on the health, longevity and productivity of its population. AI can contribute by making expertise widely available and by shifting healthcare towards earlier detection and continuous management.

The economic return on AI in healthcare will be measured not by the number of systems deployed, but by the number of lives touched and its impact on human life and happiness.

A January 2026 McKinsey analysis estimated that applying AI across healthcare revenue-cycle operations could reduce the cost to collect by 30% to 60%

Core Issue & Detailed Analysis

- **Bridging Expertise Gaps:** Tackles the concentration of specialist care in Tier-1 cities by making clinical knowledge accessible at the point of care through AI-assisted diagnostics and virtual support.

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- **Operational & Capacity Optimization:** Reduces administrative friction in scheduling, inventory, discharge, and clinical documentation—freeing up clinician time for direct patient care (e.g., UK NHS ambient scribing saving ~25% physician time).
- **Revenue Cycle Efficiency:** Improves financial sustainability for providers. McKinsey estimates a **30% to 60% reduction in collection costs** through AI-integrated revenue-cycle operations.
- **Proactive & Preventive Care Models:** Enables continuous remote monitoring and early risk identification for chronic conditions (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer), shifting care from episodic treatment to preventive management.
- **Need for Restraint & Validation:** Emphasizes clinical validation, representative local datasets, real-world monitoring, and human oversight to prevent algorithmic bias across India's diverse demographic landscape.

Static Dimensions & Core UPSC Mapping

- **Governance, Social Justice & Health:**
 - **Digital Health Infrastructure:** Integration with the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)** and **ABHA** (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) linked records.
 - **Public Health Delivery:** Enhancing universal health coverage (UHC) and reducing out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE).
 - **Constitutional Provision:** Realizing the **Right to Health** under Article 21 (Right to Life).
- **Technology, Economic Development & Human Capital:**
 - **AI Governance:** Alignment with **NITI Aayog's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (#AIforAll)** and ethical AI deployment.
 - **Human Capital & Productivity:** Protecting demographic dividend by improving population health, longevity, and economic productivity.
 - **Regulatory Compliance:** Establishing real-world evaluation frameworks akin to global standards (e.g., US FDA guidelines on AI medical devices).

Key Recommendations

- **Strengthen Data Representative Quality:** Train AI models on diverse Indian demographic and epidemiological data to avoid diagnostic biases.
- **Leverage ABDM Ecosystem:** Expand AI applications across the 100+ crore linked ABHA health records for population-level predictive health analytics.

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- **Ensure Robust Human-in-the-Loop Oversight:** Retain mandatory clinician supervision for high-risk diagnostic and therapeutic decisions.
- **Establish Real-World Evaluation Protocols:** Build continuous post-market surveillance mechanisms to monitor AI device performance over time.

Conclusion AI optimization in healthcare is not merely a technological upgrade but an economic imperative that safeguards India's human capital. By combining digital infrastructure with prudent regulatory oversight, AI can shift healthcare from reactive hospital visits to proactive, accessible, and continuous care for all.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following best explains algorithmic bias in healthcare AI?

- A. AI systems becoming slower when processing large datasets.
- B. AI producing systematically different or inaccurate outcomes for certain demographic groups because of limitations or biases in training data or model design.
- C. Doctors refusing to use AI-based systems.
- D. Excessive use of digital health records.

Ans:B)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question:"Digital health infrastructure can convert AI from a private-sector innovation into a public-good multiplier." Examine with reference to India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

In the article titled "The federal dilemma of delimitation", Rangarajan R. (former IAS officer and polity expert) unpacks the intense friction between democratic representation and federal stability. As the post-2026 delimitation timeline nears, the debate centers on how to implement fresh seat allocation and women's reservation without politically marginalizing States that successfully implemented national population control policies.

The federal dilemma of delimitation

The Centre made an oral assurance while introducing the Bill to increase Lok Sabha seats that each State's share would increase by 50% on a pro-rata basis. However, the increase could weaken the Rajya Sabha's role as a check on the Lower House, while the Lok Sabha's limited sitting days would leave MPs with less time to raise issues

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly has passed a resolution urging the Centre to permanently freeze the number of Lok Sabha seats at the existing number of 543 and maintain the present State-wise distribution of those seats. It also advocated the preservation of current ratio of 2.21 between Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha seats. It sought the implementation of one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha from the 2029 election onwards, without linking it to any future census or delimitation.

Defining delimitation

Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of the territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. This 'Delimitation process' is performed by 'Delimitation Commission' that is set up under an act of Parliament. The last time when the number of seats were determined was on the basis of 1971 census population.

'Democracy' means 'rule or government by the people'. It follows that the government is elected by a majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'. Article 81(2) of the Constitution provides that the ratio between the number of seats and population of a State, shall as far as practicable be same for all the States. The number of seats in the Lok Sabha based on 1971 census was fixed at 543, when the population was 54.8 crores. This broadly translated to an average population of 10.1 lakhs per constituency. However, it has been frozen as per 1971 census in order to encourage population control measures so that States with higher population growth do not end up having higher number of seats. This was done through the 42nd Amendment Act till the year 2000 and was extended by the 84th amendment act till 2026. This number will have to be readjusted based on the first census after 2026 which would be the next census in 2027. In 2023, through the 106th Constitutional Amendment, the Parliament had provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. This would be through delimitation based on the census in 2027.

The issues involved

The population explosion that happened in our country during the last five decades has been uneven, with some States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan witnessing a greater increase than States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The ratio between the current number of seats and the projected population of States as of 2026 does not satisfy the core democratic principle of 'one person-one vote-one value' (Table 1). On the other hand, the increase in the number of seats among various States based on the current population (to 848) is provided in Table 2. So, smaller States, smaller states in the North Eastern States, are bound to be at a disadvantage when compared to large north Indian States in such a scenario. This would be against the federal principles of our country. It also goes against the philosophy for freezing the seats as per 1971 census with the States

Representation imbalance

The redistribution of seats based on current population could put smaller and less populous States at a disadvantage



Table 1: Value of vote of each citizen based on estimated population as of 2026

State	Number of seats at present	Projected population as of 2026 (in crore)	Projected population per Lok Sabha seat (in lakh)	Value of 1 vote*
Uttar Pradesh	80	25.7	32.1	0.56
Bihar	40	13.5	33.8	0.53
Rajasthan	25	8.4	33.6	0.54
Madhya Pradesh	29	9.1	31.4	0.57
Tamil Nadu	39	7.8	20	0.9
Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	9.3	22.1	0.81
Kerala	20	3.6	18	1
Karnataka	28	6.9	24.6	0.73
Punjab	13	3.2	24.6	0.73
Himachal Pradesh	4	0.8	20	0.9
Uttarakhand	5	1.2	24	0.75

* Kerala calculated as 1 and States' values derived on this base

that have been better at controlling the population losing out on their political significance.

Current proposal by the Centre

The Union government had introduced the Constitution 131st Amendment Bill in April 2026 to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from existing 550 to 850. The Home Minister made an oral assurance in the Parliament that the number of seats in each State/Union Territory would be increased by 50% on a pro-rata basis. However, this bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha. There are expectations that the government may introduce the bill again, in the near future with explicit provisions for 50% increase in seats for all States/Union Territories on a pro-rata basis.

The larger implications

There are two main arguments in support of the proposal for 50% pro-rata increase. First, it would not alter the current proportion of representation of various States/Union Territories in the Lok Sabha. Second, it would enable seamless reservation of one-third seats for women with the additional 272 seats being reserved for women out of the enlarged house of around 816 seats.

However, such an increase has its share of challenges. Firstly, the current strength of Rajya Sabha is 245 that results in a ratio of 2.21 between the total strength of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. An increase in Lok Sabha seats by 50% without altering seats in Rajya Sabha would skew this ratio to 3.31.

In the event of disagreement between the two houses on any bill, there is a mechanism for Joint Sitting under the Constitution to resolve the deadlock. Though used rarely in the past (only 3 times since Independence), this increased strength in the Lok Sabha runs the risk of rise in such joint sittings to push through Bills. In such a scenario, it would diminish the role of the Rajya Sabha as an effective check and balance on the Lok Sabha. Secondly, considering that the Lok Sabha sits for only around 60 days in a year, there would hardly be any meaningful time for each MP to raise their issues in the house. The purpose of the house would then be reduced to mere numerical representation rather than meaningful deliberation.

Finally, the increased cost to the exchequer because of additional MPs including allocation for the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds needs to be

borne in mind.

Harmonious reconciliation

The issue arises as the democratic and federal principles seem to be at loggerheads in the delimitation exercise as currently envisaged. However, they can be harmoniously reconciled by giving equal importance to both. The main work of a Member of Parliament is to legislate on the 'Union List' subjects such as defence, external affairs, railways, telecommunication, taxation etc. and hold the Central government accountable. A majority of the schemes of the Central Government are implemented only by the State governments. Hence, the number of MPs in Lok Sabha may be frozen at the present number of 543, which would ensure no disruption to the current representation of various States. This would maintain and uphold the federal principle. One-third reservation for women can be provided out of the existing 543 seats. The number of MLAs in each State may be increased in line with the current population to address the democratic representational requirement. (Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. He currently trains at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.)

THE GIST

The Union government introduced the Constitution 131st Amendment Bill in April 2026 to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from the existing 550 to 850.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly recently passed a resolution urging the Centre to permanently freeze the number of Lok Sabha seats at 543 and maintain the present State-wise distribution of seats.

The ratio between the current number of seats and the projected population of States as of 2026 does not satisfy the principle of 'one person, one vote, one value'. However, increasing the number of seats based on current population would put smaller and less populous States at a disadvantage.

Core Issue & Detailed Analysis

- **Democratic Principle vs. Federal Balance:** Article 81(2) prescribes that the ratio between Lok Sabha seats and population across States should be uniform (one citizen, one vote, one value). However, decades of uneven demographic growth mean pure population-based reallocation would heavily favor northern States while penalizing southern and eastern States.
- **The Legislative Freeze:** Lok Sabha seats were frozen based on the 1971 Census via the **42nd Amendment Act (1976)** and extended through the **84th Amendment Act (2001)** until the first census post-2026, primarily to avoid disincentivizing population control measures.
- **Flaws of the 50% Pro-Rata Proposal:** A proposed 50% proportional expansion (raising seats to ~816) preserves existing State seat proportions and simplifies the **106th Constitutional Amendment** (1/3rd women's reservation). However, it introduces key structural issues:
 - **Distorted Bicameral Ratio:** Increases the Lok Sabha to Rajya Sabha strength ratio from **2.2:1 to 3.3:1**, severely weakening the Upper House's check during potential Joint Sittings.
 - **Reduced Deliberative Capacity:** Dilutes the time available per MP in a House that sits for only ~60 days annually, shifting focus from quality debate to mere numerical headcount.
 - **Exchequer Strain:** Substantially increases fiscal costs related to MP allowances and local development funds (MPLADS).

Static Dimensions & Core UPSC Mapping

- **Polity & Governance:**
 - **Constitutional Mandate:** Article 81 (Composition of Lok Sabha), Article 82 (Readjustment after each census), and Article 170 (State Assemblies).
 - **Bicameralism & Check-and-Balances:** Role of the Rajya Sabha as a federal chamber protecting State interests against Lower House dominance.
 - **Electoral Reforms:** Impact of the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act (Women's Reservation Bill / Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam).
- **Federalism:**
 - **Asymmetric & Cooperative Federalism:** Navigating demographic divergence without creating a political rift between Northern and Southern States.

Key Recommendations

- **Freeze Lok Sabha Seats at 543:** Cap Parliamentary seats at current levels to preserve inter-State political equilibrium and uphold federal harmony.
- **Decouple Women's Reservation:** Implement 1/3rd reservation for women immediately within the existing 543 Lok Sabha seats rather than waiting for structural seat expansion.

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- **Expand State Legislative Assemblies (MLAs):** Increase MLA seats proportionately within States based on fresh census data to ensure local democratic representational needs are met.
- **Empower Local Bodies:** Focus on fiscal and administrative devolution to Panchayats and Municipalities (73rd & 74th Amendments) to strengthen grassroots democratic engagement.

Conclusion Delimitation cannot be treated purely as a mathematical exercise based on demographic counts. Harmonizing democratic equality with federal stability requires preserving the voice of all constituent States, ensuring that national population goals do not compromise federal harmony.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: The post-2026 delimitation exercise may create a tension between demographic representation and federal stability. Examine the constitutional and political dimensions of this tension. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

In the article titled "Indian bonds: weathering the storm amid the West Asia conflict, El Niño", Shriram Ramanathan and Achala Jethmalani (HSBC Mutual Fund) analyze the remarkable resilience of the Indian bond market amidst global turbulence. Despite external headwinds—including high global yields, geopolitical tensions in West Asia, and monsoon risks from El Niño—Indian 10-year sovereign bond yields moved up by a modest **8 basis points (bps)**, compared to sharp yield surges across major developed and emerging economies.

Indian bonds: weathering the storm amid the West Asia conflict, El Nino

For now, India's inflation drift relative to its target and the underlying inflation trends have been less alarming which, coupled with steady growth, supports a neutral hold on rates; all put together, macro factors and the steps have bought the MPC something crucial in a turbulent world: Time

NEWS ANALYSIS

Shriram Ramanathan
Achala Jethmalani

Indian bond markets have remained relatively calm despite choppy global developments. As a reference point, 10-year benchmark yields have moved higher across most major economies over the past six months (as of August 14): U.S. +60 bps, Japan +66 bps, U.K. +56 bps, South Korea +72 bps, Indonesia +78 bps, and Philippines +61 bps.

However, the Indian 10Y yield is weathering the storm moving up by a modest 8 bps.

On one side are the external forces – a protracted conflict in West Asia and the lingering worries over rainfall precipitation due to El Niño.

On the other side are the offsetting forces – India's benign inflation trajectory, resilient economic growth, a steady outlook on the Centre's fiscal finances and, thanks to the RBI's forex measures, an improved external sector.

Calm demeanour

In the face of the West Asia conflict and energy price pressures, India's policy-makers have maintained a calm demeanour – especially the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) which,



Steady gait: The MPC's path to policy pivot remains calibrated and data-dependent. REUTERS

amid the emerging market (EM) rate hike 'peer pressure', maintained neutral hold for three straight meetings. To compare, in a span of three months, many EMs hiked rates either to contain inflationary pressures or currency movements. For India, it has been a different story.

Favourable mix

The divergence reflects a relatively favourable inflation-growth mix. Supply-side steps and improved management of second-round effects helped contain the spillover of energy price shock into broader inflation and activity.

When we compare inflation levels across economies in the last six months, India's average inflation deviation from its target (up-



India's softer inflation trajectory, especially the step to exclude food and fuel has provided the MPC with the much-needed wiggle room to pause and assess

per bound of 6%) is far smaller. Compared to peer nations that saw inflation overshoot following the West Asia conflict, India's softer inflation trajectory, especially the measure to exclude food and fuel components, has provided the MPC with the much-needed wiggle room to pause and assess, rather than pivot to hikes from pause, es-

pecially in the last three months.

Targeted steps

The RBI chose to lean more on targeted market measures than policy rate action. It stepped up targeted FX measures such as attracting dollar inflows via borrowing – namely the NRI deposit FCNR(B) scheme, external commercial borrowings and overseas foreign currency borrowings. Together, these measures have attracted around \$56.8 billion between June 8 and August 13. The bulk of the inflows was via the FCNR(B) scheme, at \$52.3 billion. Given the sizeable FCNR (B) flows, the RBI decided to keep the swap facility window open only till end-August, rather than end-Septem-

ber as initially planned. The dollar inflows of this order have had other collateral benefits. At an aggregate level, system deposits have ticked up, credit demand is being funded without banks resorting to market borrowings (mainly certificate of deposits or CDs) and CD issuances have dropped.

At the same time, the flows have infused liquidity into the banking system, which averaged a surplus of ₹3.2 lakh crore during August 1-13, versus ₹1.3 lakh crore during the same window in July. The easy liquidity conditions have pushed overnight rates below the repo rate towards the lower end of the policy corridor (4/25 bps from the repo rate).

For now, India's inflation drift relative to its target and the underlying inflation trends have been less alarming which, coupled with steady growth, supports a neutral hold on rates. All put together, the macro factors and these measures have bought the MPC something rare and crucial in a turbulent world: Time.

We believe the MPC's path to policy pivot remains calibrated and data-dependent – the West Asia developments, El Niño/monsoon risks, and the U.S. Fed policy actions remain key swing factors. Contrary to the expectations of three rate hikes,

we are in the camp of 1-2 hikes, that too in the latter half of FY27 (December or February policy).

The pull and push factors have shaped sentiments over the past few months. The most recent being the government's tax exemption for foreign debt investors alongside the RBI's efforts to streamline the investment restrictions and widen the scope of investible securities. These steps led to debt inflows to the tune of \$5.6 billion in June – the highest monthly inflow since January 2020.

However, the deferment of the inclusion of India government bonds in the Bloomberg's Global Aggregate Index was announced on July 31 evening, which dented the positive sentiments around foreign debt inflows. While the immediate gains from inflows due to index inclusion are delayed, we believe it's just a matter of time before Indian bonds are included.

Overall, on rates, we think a lot of the negatives are largely priced-in, and even as risks remain a few countervailing forces may play out favourably, which is why our outlook on rates is less gloomy than the broad street expectations.

(*10-year yield data as of August 14, 5:30 pm)

(Shriram Ramanathan, CIO - Fixed Income, HSBC Mutual Fund, Achala Jethmalani, Economist, HSBC Mutual Fund)

Core Issue & Detailed Analysis

- **Global Yield Surge vs. Indian Divergence:** Over a six-month period, global 10-year benchmark yields spiked significantly—US (+60 bps), UK (+56 bps), Japan (+66 bps), South Korea (+72 bps), Indonesia (+78 bps), and Philippines (+61 bps). In contrast, Indian bond yields rose by just 8 bps due to strong domestic macroeconomic buffers.
- **External Pressures vs. Internal Offsets:**

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Daily News Analysis

- External Drag: Ongoing conflict in West Asia pushing up energy prices, lingering El Niño risks affecting crop yields, and high interest rates maintained by the US Federal Reserve.
- Domestic Anchors: Softer core inflation (excluding food and fuel), steady GDP growth, fiscal deficit consolidation, and prudent forex intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- **Calibrated MPC Demeanor:** The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) maintained a neutral stance for three consecutive meetings, resisting peer pressure from other Emerging Markets (EMs) that engaged in rapid rate hikes.
- **Targeted FX & Liquidity Interventions:** Rather than raising key policy rates, the RBI utilized liquidity and capital inflow channels:
 - Attracted **\$56.8 billion** in foreign inflows (June–August), primarily via the **FCNR(B)** scheme (\$52.3 billion).
 - Inflows generated **surplus banking system liquidity** averaging ₹3.2 lakh crore, lowering overnight rates toward the bottom of the corridor.
 - Reduced dependence of commercial banks on costly Certificate of Deposits (CDs), bolstering deposit stability.
- **Foreign Inflow Triggers & Setbacks:** Tax exemptions for foreign debt investors drove a multi-year high inflow of \$5.6 billion in June. However, sentiment faced a temporary setback on July 31 due to the deferred inclusion of Indian government bonds in Bloomberg's Global Aggregate Index.

Static Dimensions & Core UPSC Mapping

Indian Economy & Monetary Policy:

- **Bond Market Dynamics:** Yield curve behavior, relationship between bond prices, interest rates, and inflation.
- **RBI's Monetary Policy Framework:** Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT), policy rate corridor (Repo, SDF, MSF), and liquidity management (LAF, OMOs).
- **External Sector Management:** Foreign Currency Non-Resident (FCNR) accounts, External Commercial Borrowings (ECB), and management of foreign exchange reserves.

Macroeconomic Stability:

- **Imported Inflation & Food Security:** Energy price transmission from West Asia tensions and supply-side shocks caused by El Niño weather patterns.

Key Recommendations

- **Data-Dependent Rate Trajectory:** Maintain a calibrated monetary stance with 1–2 rate adjustments contingent on monsoon performance, West Asia stability, and US Fed policy shifts.

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- **Deepen Domestic Debt Markets:** Broaden the investor base and streamline regulatory norms for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to buffer against index inclusion delays.
- **Sustain Supply-Side Inflation Management:** Deploy targeted fiscal measures (such as import duty adjustments on fuel and food staples) to prevent second-round inflationary spillovers.

Conclusion India's bond market stability demonstrates the efficacy of using targeted foreign exchange and liquidity management tools over blunt rate hikes. Supported by solid macroeconomic fundamentals, the RBI's strategy has bought valuable time, insulating domestic economic growth from global financial volatility.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: With reference to government securities, consider the following statements:

1. Bond prices and bond yields generally move in opposite directions.
2. A rise in market interest rates generally reduces the price of existing fixed-rate bonds.
3. Longer-duration bonds are generally more sensitive to changes in interest rates than shorter-duration bonds.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: D)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Why do bond prices and yields move in opposite directions? Explain its significance for monetary policy transmission in India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

India is losing West Asia, but it is not too late

India is losing West Asia, one country at a time. Even as the region undergoes a once-in-a-generation shift in its security architecture and political battle lines, it is unclear what India's strategy is...or whether New Delhi has one at all.

It was not supposed to be this way. Just 10 years ago, India was rapidly remaking its footprint in West Asia. In 2016, Saudi Arabia awarded India's Prime Minister its highest civilian honour. In 2021, the I2U2 agreement was signed binding India, Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) together. In 2024, Iran leased Chabahar to India. All these successes though are now memories from the past.

Pakistan's new diplomatic moment

In the last four months, the U.S.-Israel war with Iran has escalated into a catastrophic regional conflict with Iran attacking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Saudis hitting Iraqi militias, Houthis attacking Saudi ships and Israel carrying out strikes in multiple countries. Now, the Gulf countries are rethinking the efficacy of the U.S. security umbrella. They see a threat from both Iran and Israel.

Among the Gulf countries there is a schism on how to handle this threat – through engagement (as the UAE is doing) or through deterrence (as the Saudis are contemplating).

In this context, Pakistan's role as mediator in the U.S.-Iran conflict is gaining it reputational benefits in the region. Irrespective of Pakistan's motives, analysts in the region see that Pakistan waded into the conflict at a time when it seemed that no one could bring U.S. President Donald Trump and the Iranians to the table despite efforts by Türkiye, Qatar and Egypt.

The latest collective defence pact in Mecca between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan comes in this context. This pact may mean less in shaping the U.S.-Iran war as none of these



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West Asia is changing rapidly and India must act before its influence fades

countries is likely to directly take on Iran alongside the U.S. The pact is thus aimed less at Iran and more at deterring Israel. All three countries see themselves as the next target of Israel after Iran. They thus want to pool Saudi capital, Pakistan's military strength, and Türkiye's technological advances.

This is a challenge for India. A future war between Israel and Pakistan will inevitably draw in India given the close partnership between Israel and India. Similarly, even greater Turkish support for Pakistan in a future conflict that Pakistan might have with India cannot be ruled out

The choices before India

What then is India's strategy? It appears to be confident of Israel's victory in its various battles in the region given its proximity to the U.S. But U.S. politics are changing rapidly, with both 'Make America Great Again' Republicans and Democratic Socialists questioning the once-unquestioned U.S. support for Israel. Can Israel then emerge triumphant alone?

India has cultivated a special relationship with the UAE given the importance of remittances from Indian expat workers in the country, the investments by the Indian elite in the UAE and the UAE's strategic investments in India. But the UAE's mounting differences with Saudi Arabia are a cause for concern, as are its positions against UN-recognised governments in conflicts as far as Sudan. Can the UAE emerge unscathed in all these conflicts?

India can choose to sign military alliances with Israel and the UAE. But this would hurt what is left of India's relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia. India can choose to do nothing as it is doing now. And its merchant mariners may keep getting killed in the Strait of Hormuz while more Indian ships may sink in the Bab-el-Mandeb.

A great power in the making risks appearing humbled and hobbled in its immediate maritime neighbourhood.

Or, India can pick a third way. It can devise an active regional political strategy. Re-engage the Saudis with whom it has no explicit differences.

It can start playing a role of rebuilding trust between the Arab countries and Iran, starting with the UAE-Iran relationship. It can engage in Jordan's security offering Jordan defensive technologies at a time when U.S. munitions are running low. It can engage in the future UN peacekeeping role in Lebanon, which is now under a cloud, with the forecast being an end to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). It can even run a back-channel with Türkiye sharing its red lines about its relationship with Pakistan. If India cannot join the new Saudi-led maritime force for the Red Sea, it can work with Egypt on a parallel effort to safeguard India-bound shipping, from the Suez Canal to Bab-el-Mandeb. It can look into setting up a military presence in the Red Sea region whether in Somaliland or Socotra. Building on current military training exchanges, it can start drills and military exercises with a range of countries in the region.

Think of bridge-building

India can also appoint a new Special Envoy for West Asia – not one focused on the Israel-Palestine peace process necessarily, but one who can draw all the threads together to secure India's interests in the region at a time of unprecedented turbulence. All of this can be part of one pro-active vision for India to support a new security architecture for West Asia – one that does not draw new battle lines but instead contributes to trust-building.

India cannot afford to be a stranger to West Asia. India has both the capacity and the responsibility to help restore peace and predictability in the region.

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "India's West Asia policy has evolved from ideological positioning to pragmatic multi-alignment." Discuss the major drivers of this transformation. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Context : West Asia is currently witnessing a historic realignment driven by escalating regional conflicts, shifting security umbrellas, and new security alliances. Over the past decade, New Delhi successfully built a robust footprint in the region—marked by high civilian honours from Saudi Arabia (2016), the creation of the I2U2 grouping (2021), and securing operational rights at Iran's Chabahar Port (2024). However, an emerging security vacuum, combined with India's passive approach, risks eroding these long-standing strategic gains.

Key Arguments & Core Themes

1. Escalating Regional Conflict & Security Realignment

- The U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict has metastasized into a wider regional crisis, directly dragging in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and maritime trade choke points.
- Gulf monarchies are questioning the reliance and efficacy of the U.S. security umbrella, perceiving security threats from both Iranian actions and Israeli military overreach.

2. The Rise of the Saudi-Türkiye-Pakistan Trilateral Pact

- **Context:** Signed in Mecca, this pact brings together Saudi capital, Pakistani manpower/military strength, and Turkish defense technology.
- **Objective:** Designed primarily as a deterrent against Israeli overreach rather than a direct offensive front against Iran.
- **Impact on India:** Re-establishes Pakistan's diplomatic and military leverage in West Asia, threatening to isolate India in critical regional forums.

3. Dilemmas in India's Present Policy

- **Over-reliance on "Wait-and-Watch":** Inaction leaves Indian merchant mariners and critical trade lines exposed in the Bab-el-Mandeb and Strait of Hormuz.
- **Risks of Rigid Alliances:** Formally aligning with an Israel-UAE block risks alienating vital bilateral ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Strategic Roadmap: "The Third Way" for India

- **Proactive Diplomacy:** Re-engage Saudi Arabia independently to maintain strategic equilibrium.
- **Mediator Role:** Facilitate trust-building between Arab nations and Iran (starting with the UAE-Iran relationship).
- **Defence Cooperation:** Supply defensive military capabilities to regional partners like Jordan and explore anti-piracy/maritime security arrangements with Egypt.
- **Maritime Infrastructure:** Secure strategic entry points or bases near critical choke points like Somaliland or Socotra.

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- **Special Envoy:** Appoint a Special Envoy for West Asia to coordinate New Delhi's regional strategy.

Static Dimensions & Syllabus Linkages

- **Energy Security:** Over 60% of India's crude oil imports originate from the Gulf region.
- **Diaspora & Remittances:** Approximately 8.5 million Indian expats reside in GCC countries, contributing over \$40 billion annually in remittances.
- **Strategic Choke Points:** Safeguarding trade flows through the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal is essential for economic stability.
- **Neighborhood First & Extended Neighborhood:** West Asia forms the primary pillar of India's Western maritime architecture.

Conclusion

India cannot remain a passive observer to the structural shifts unfolding in West Asia. To secure its diaspora, maritime trade, and energy interests, New Delhi must transcend transactional bilateralism and embrace a multi-vector, trust-building regional strategy. Engaging with key players—including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Türkiye—will allow India to protect its core security priorities and retain its stature as a rising global power.

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