

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral engagements with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Bishkek highlight India's commitment to **strategic autonomy** and **multi-alignment**. Amid escalating regional instabilities—from conflicts in West Asia affecting energy security and maritime transit to the ongoing Black Sea crisis impacting global supply chains—India's diplomatic position emphasizes dialogue, peace, and the protection of global commons.

PM calls for 'end of war' at meeting with Putin

The two leaders discuss conflicts in West Asia and Black Sea region, impact on maritime trade and safety of Indian seafarers; Putin highlights positive trends in Moscow-New Delhi economic ties

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Bishkek and said the world "must move from endless war to end of war for the benefit of humanity".

The External Affairs Ministry said the two leaders discussed conflicts in West Asia and in the Black Sea region, where, in recent months, Indian seafarers have been attacked by both Russian and Ukrainian forces.

"Had extensive discussions with President Putin. Discussed the full range of the India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. It is gladdening to see significant progress across various sectors in recent years. Focus areas for India-Russia friendship remain energy, innovation, space, fertilisers, and people-to-people linkages," said Prime Minister Modi.

In a statement, the External Affairs Ministry said,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin during a meeting in Bishkek on Monday. AP

Number of Indian students in Russia increased almost seven-fold in a decade, says Putin

"They also shared perspectives on key regional and global issues of mutual interest, including the conflicts in West Asia and the Black Sea region which have impacted maritime trade and the safety and security of Indian seafarers. Prime Minister reiterated that dialogue and diplomacy was the way forward in

resolving conflicts." The upcoming BRICS summit featured prominently in the discussion, and Mr. Modi said he "looks forward to welcoming President Putin in India for the 18th BRICS summit on 12-13 September".

80th anniversary of ties The Bishkek meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Putin featured in talks during External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to the Kremlin on August 24, when Mr. Putin had indicated that he would meet Prime Minister Modi in

Kyrgyzstan and also at the BRICS summit in Delhi.

"This time, our meeting is taking place on the eve of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit - an organisation that works to deepen contacts among the countries of the Global South and East, promotes the region's socioeconomic and cultural development, and contributes to building a just multipolar world," said President Putin in his remarks, reminding that next year will mark the 80th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between New Delhi and Moscow.

Mr. Putin noted that the number of Indian students in Russia has increased almost seven-fold in a decade, and currently 40,000 Indians are studying in Russia.

President Putin said trade and economic cooperation between Russia and India is showing positive trends, with trade turnover increasing by more than 2%. He noted the growth in tourist exchange between the two countries, with a 16% increase in 2025.

Ensure peace, freedom of navigation, PM urges Iran

Modi meets Iran President on sidelines of SCO summit, calls for stability in West Asia; Pezeshkian requests India to use its 'extensive contacts' to help with the dialogue process, blames U.S. for war

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

In the first top-level meeting between Iran and India since the beginning of the war on Iran in February, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek and urged him to ensure peace and stability in West Asia and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Mr. Pezeshkian blamed Israel and the U.S. for the conflict and requested Mr. Modi to "use India's extensive contacts with various parties" and help the dialogue process.

After the meeting that took place on the sidelines of the SCO summit, Mr. Modi said on X, "Reiterated our commitment to strengthening India's long-standing friendship with Iran across diverse sectors. We want to expand and diversify our trade basket in the times to come. We had



Strategic meet: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on Monday. PTI

a discussion on the prevailing situation in the region. India will continue to support all efforts aimed at ensuring lasting peace." The Ministry of External Affairs said Mr. Modi called for freedom of navigation and commerce.

"Civilians and civilian infrastructure, including commercial shipping and seafarers must not be harmed under any circumstances," he said.

Mr. Modi said he looked

forward to welcoming Mr. Pezeshkian to India for the upcoming BRICS summit.

President Pezeshkian said his country had a "responsibility" to defend the Iranian people "from danger and insecurity and to create conditions necessary for them to achieve peace, tranquillity and security". He said Iran was "focused on ensuring peace and security and resolving issues through dialogue and negotiations."

Mr. Pezeshkian blamed Israel and the U.S. for creating "restrictions and obstacles" before Iran and said that "Despite the pressures and restrictions being imposed in an attempt to obstruct Iran's relations with other countries, Tehran is ready to expand its cooperation with India."

He referred to the talks with the U.S. on a ceasefire and said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has remained committed to the obligations it has undertaken within the framework of the agreements, but unfortunately, the American side has failed to fulfil its commitments."

In June, Mr. Pezeshkian had invited Mr. Modi to the funeral of the slain Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that was held in July. India was represented by a team that included the Governor of Bihar Lt. Gen. Syed Ata Hasnain (retd.).

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Key Analysis of the Editorial Topics

• Strategic Autonomy & Strategic Balancing:

- India maintains robust ties with traditional partners (Russia, Iran) while balancing its strategic convergences with Western nations.
- Inviting both leaders to the upcoming 18th BRICS Summit reinforces India's role as a bridge between the Global South, Eurasia, and the West.

• Freedom of Navigation & Maritime Security:

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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Daily News Analysis

- Security in the **Strait of Hormuz** and the **Black Sea** is critical for Indian seafarers, energy imports, and bilateral trade.
- PM Modi's stance that civilian seafarers and commercial infrastructure must remain unharmable aligns with international maritime law (UNCLOS).
- **Economic and Trade Diversification:**
 - Expanding trade baskets with Iran and targeting \$50 billion+ bilateral trade targets with Russia reflect pragmatic economic diplomacy despite international sanctions regimes.
- **Diplomatic Mediation & Conflict Resolution:**
 - Moving from an "**endless war to the end of war**" signifies India's preference for constitutional mechanisms, diplomacy, and de-escalation over unilateral geopolitical aggression.

Static Dimensions (UPSC Core Integration)

- **GS Paper II: Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings involving India**
 - **SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation):** Multilateral regional framework focusing on regional security, counter-terrorism, and Eurasian connectivity.
 - **BRICS:** Global South platform for reforming global governance institutions and economic cooperation.
- **GS Paper II: Strategic Importance of Geopolitics**
 - **Strait of Hormuz:** A vital choke point connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, handling ~20% of global petroleum.
 - **Chabahar Port Project:** Strategic gateway connecting India to Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
- **International Law & Conventions:**
 - **UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea):** Guarantees freedom of navigation and innocent passage in international waters.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy approach, as showcased in Bishkek, proves that non-alignment has evolved into dynamic **multi-alignment** based on national interest. By advocating for peaceful negotiation, protection of maritime supply lines, and expanded economic partnerships, New Delhi reinforces its credibility as a "**Vishwa Bandhu**" (**Global Friend**) and an indispensable power for international stability.

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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: With reference to India's foreign policy, consider the following statements:

1. Strategic autonomy implies the ability of a state to take foreign-policy decisions based primarily on its national interests.
2. Strategic autonomy necessarily requires complete neutrality in all international conflicts.
3. Multi-alignment allows a country to simultaneously pursue partnerships with different powers on different issues.
4. India's contemporary foreign policy can involve cooperation with countries having competing geopolitical interests.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 3 and 4 only
- C. 2 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Maritime security is inseparable from India's energy and economic security." Discuss with reference to the Strait of Hormuz and other critical sea lanes. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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India's categorical rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's (PCA) ruling at The Hague regarding the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) underlines a major shift in New Delhi's approach to cross-border water sharing and national security. Following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, India placed the 1960 treaty in abeyance, asserting that state-sponsored terrorism and international treaty obligations cannot coexist seamlessly. India's assertion of non-jurisdiction highlights the friction between international arbitration mechanisms and national sovereign rights during security crises.

Key Analysis of the Editorial Topics

• Procedural Violations & Dual Track Dispute:

- India contends that the World Bank breached the IWT framework by simultaneously appointing a **Neutral Expert** (at India's request) and establishing a **Court of Arbitration** (at Pakistan's request) to address disputes over hydro-electric projects like Kishanganga and Ratle.
- India maintains that the treaty requires a graded, sequential dispute resolution mechanism, making the PCA's constitution legally flawed.

• National Security & Treaty Abeyance:

- Placing the IWT in abeyance reflects India's principle that **"blood and water cannot flow together."**
- India treats cross-border terrorism as a fundamental change of circumstances under international law, justifying the suspension of treaty obligations to safeguard national security.

• Sovereignty vs. External Arbitration:

- India's stance that the PCA has "no jurisdiction" reinforces that domestic

India rejects Hague court's Indus Waters Treaty ruling, says it has no jurisdiction

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Hours after the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague said the Indus Waters Treaty remains "fully in force" and called on India to "observe its obligations", the External Affairs Ministry rejected this, saying that the "very establishment of this alleged arbitral body" was a "grave violation" of the treaty.

"This so-called Court was constituted by the World Bank in patent breach of the terms of the Treaty, and India categorically rejects its so-called award," the Ministry said on Monday.

It went on to say that India had "never recognised the existence in law of this illegally-constituted and so-called Court of Arbitration, and has consistently maintained that the very establishment of this alleged arbitral body constitutes a grave violation of the Indus Waters Treaty".

"Accordingly, India has never appeared before this body and has refused to take any cognisance of its earlier pronouncements," the Ministry said.

India had placed the In-



India had placed the treaty in abeyance following the Pahalgam terror attack.

Indus Waters Treaty "in abeyance" following the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025, and the Ministry, in its response on Monday, reiterated its position. "India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance remains in force," it said.

The Ministry also said that "this so-called Court of Arbitration has no jurisdiction whatsoever to pronounce on India's sovereign decisions".

It added that the court's pronouncements, "now or in the future, will have no effect on India's actions in connection with the projects being undertaken by India".

Earlier, the arbitration body, considering Pakis-

tan's plea, examined the reasons under which India placed the treaty "in abeyance" and said that "none of these grounds could justify suspension or termination of the Treaty".

Issuing an "award" on the 'Status of the Indus Waters Treaty and Order on Interim Measures concerning the Ratle Hydro-Electric Plant (RHEP)', the Permanent Court of Arbitration said, "Accordingly, the Indus Waters Treaty remains fully in force, and India must observe its obligations under the Treaty, including those relating to the design and operation of its hydro-electric projects on the Western Rivers."

It had also considered Pakistan's plea on imposing measures on India regarding the RHEP, saying, "In a unanimous decision, the Court decided to impose measures prohibiting India from concreting the RHEP dam wall and power intake structure above certain levels until 90 days after the Neutral Expert's final decision, which is expected in July 2027."

The Court of Arbitration is chaired by Prof. Sean D. Murphy of the U.S.

Daily News Analysis

infrastructure projects (e.g., Ratle Hydro-Electric Project) on the Western Rivers are central to regional energy needs and non-negotiable under illegally constituted forums.

- **Implications for Regional Water Diplomacy:**

- The impasse weakens the institutional framework of one of the world's most enduring transboundary water-sharing agreements, signaling a shift toward realpolitik in South Asian hydro-diplomacy.

Static Dimensions (UPSC Core Integration)

- **GS Paper II: Bilateral Relations & International Institutions**

- **Indus Waters Treaty (1960):** Brokered by the World Bank; allocated the Eastern Rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) to India and Western Rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan, while allowing India limited non-consumptive uses (e.g., run-of-the-river hydro projects).
- **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA):** An intergovernmental organization based in The Hague providing dispute resolution services, distinct from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

- **GS Paper II: International Law Principles**

- **Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT):** Articles on Rebus Sic Stantibus (fundamental change of circumstances) and treaty suspension due to material breach or security threats.

- **GS Paper III: Security & Infrastructure Development**

- Strategic infrastructure development along border rivers as a tool for regional economic development and energy security in Jammu & Kashmir.

Conclusion

India's refusal to recognize the PCA award reinforces its long-standing position that bilateral mechanisms—free from third-party intervention and terror threats—are the only valid paths for resolving regional disputes. By upholding strategic clarity over hydro-resources, New Delhi balances domestic developmental requirements with a firm international message on cross-border security.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Which of the following constitute the Eastern Rivers under the Indus Waters Treaty?

- A. Indus, Jhelum and Chenab
- B. Ravi, Beas and Sutlej
- C. Ravi, Chenab and Sutlej
- D. Beas, Jhelum and Sutlej

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "The Indus Waters Treaty has historically demonstrated that functional cooperation can survive even in conditions of deep political hostility." Examine its significance and emerging challenges. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**



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- Upcycling hard-to-recycle materials (e.g., converting multi-layered plastics into paver blocks) mitigates long-distance freight costs and supports local circular economy loops.

Static Dimensions (UPSC Core Integration)

- **GS Paper II: Governance & Public Policy**

- **Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II:** Focuses on Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) and visual cleanliness in villages.
- **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (11th Schedule):** Mandates Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) with sanitation and solid waste management responsibilities.

- **GS Paper III: Environmental Pollution & Degradation**

- **Solid Waste Management Rules (SWM), 2016:** Enforces source segregation, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and localized processing.
- **Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules:** Focuses on phasing out single-use plastics and regulating multi-layered packaging.

- **GS Paper III: Disaster Management & Ecological Fragility**

- **Himalayan and Riverine Ecosystems:** Waste dumping in rivers like the Brahmaputra worsens marine plastic pollution, aquatic biodiversity loss, and microplastic contamination.

Conclusion

The models of Majuli and Tawang prove that rural waste management does not require expensive, capital-intensive urban infrastructure. Instead, it relies on community mobilization, behavioral change, robust segregation, and localized financial sustainability mechanisms. Scaling these decentralized frameworks across India's Panchayats is essential to fulfilling national sustainability targets, preserving fragile ecosystems, and achieving the objectives of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen).

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following is the most appropriate rationale for decentralised waste processing in geographically isolated rural areas?

- A. It completely eliminates behavioural challenges
- B. It reduces transportation requirements and allows waste to be processed closer to its source
- C. It makes segregation unnecessary
- D. It transfers all waste-management responsibilities to the Union Government

Ans:B)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "The success of rural waste management depends more on community ownership than on the mere availability of infrastructure." Critically examine. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

While chemical toxicity—specifically non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like diclofenac—historically caused catastrophic declines in Indian vulture populations, expanding power infrastructure has emerged as a major physical threat. Recent studies, including research published in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, emphasize that electrocution risks posed by medium- and high-voltage transmission lines could drive local raptor populations to extinction. Protecting these apex scavengers requires combining infrastructure retrofits with smarter spatial planning for carcass disposal.

Key Analysis of the Editorial Topics

- **Transition in Threat Dynamics:**

- **Historical Threat:** Diclofenac and other NSAIDs (aceclofenac, ketoprofen) caused a ~99.5% population crash between the 1980s and 2007 by inducing renal failure in vultures.
- **Emerging Threat:** Proliferation of unsafe power transmission networks, wide wingspans bridging energised conductors, and perching habits on elevated utility structures lead to electrocution.

- **Socio-Economic & Health Cascades:**

- Loss of natural scavengers leaves animal carcasses unconsumed, driving increases in feral dog populations and subsequent rabies outbreaks.
- Economic studies (e.g., American Economic Review, 2024) link vulture decline to a 4% increase in human mortality, costing India an estimated \$69.4 billion annually.

- **Ecological Vulnerability & Habitat Loss:**

- 2025 survey data indicates vultures nest at only 50% of their historic nesting sites, demonstrating high population fragility.
- Carcass dumping sites near electrical installations create "ecological traps," drawing large aggregations of raptors into high-risk zones.

- **Mitigation Strategies:**

- **Spatial Interventions:** Relocating carcass dumps away from high-tension power corridors (e.g., moving dumps >2 km away).
- **Engineering Interventions:** Insulating conductors, expanding spacing between energised lines/grounded components, and installing bird-safe perches or diverters.

Static Dimensions (UPSC Core Integration)

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Deadly span

India's power infrastructure is emerging as a big threat to vultures

Whereas for many decades the chief concern about vulture safety was centered on chemical threats, the threat of electrocution posed by India's expanding power infrastructure may supersede it. In the 1990s, India's vultures suffered one of the world's worst population crashes, nosediving 99.5% by 2007 from a high of around four crore in the 1980s; the white-rumped, Indian, and slender-billed vultures were nearly wiped out. The culprit was diclofenac, a painkiller for cattle that wrecks vulture kidneys. The government banned the use of diclofenac, with additional bans in 2023 to mitigate threats posed by aceclofenac and ketoprofen, among some other NSAIDs. The birds' decline left carcasses exposed for longer, supporting feral dog populations and leading to rabies outbreaks; a 2024 study in *American Economic Review* estimated that human mortality thus rose 4% and the associated damages cost India \$69.4 billion a year. While electrocution has not become as deadly as NSAIDs have been, the fragility of the vulture population and the proliferation of unsafe power infrastructure warrant early action. One official survey reported in 2025 that vultures were nesting at only 50% of their historic nesting sites. It is no trivial detail that the raptors' wide wingspans mean a large individual can contact two conductors at once. They also have a habit of perching on elevated structures, are attracted to open landscapes, and have incentives to congregate where the availability of food is predictable, a risk enhanced by people dumping food waste around electrical installations.

As *The Hindu* reported based on a recent study in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, "relocating a livestock carcass dump 2.4 km away from high-tension power infrastructure near Uttarakhand's Dehradun may have saved these large scavengers from ... electrocution". An assessment prepared for the State Climate Resilient Power System Development Project also noted an Egyptian vulture and some steppe eagles had been electrocuted on medium-voltage, rather than high-voltage, lines. Research has noted that persistent mortality due to electrocution alone could render a local population extinct. Avian electrocution is also likely under-documented in India since dead birds can be removed by humans or scavenged. As the study indicated, one inexpensive solution is to separate vulture feeding sites from power infrastructure. Other measures to protect raptors, and even other birds, especially near settlements, include insulating conductors, increasing the gap between energised and grounded components or otherwise preventing a bird from bridging them – non-trivial considering vulture wingspans – and installing safe perches.

- **GS Paper III: Biodiversity & Conservation**

- **Critically Endangered Species:** White-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), Indian vulture (*Gyps indicus*), Slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*).
- **Action Plan for Vulture Conservation (2020–2025):** National framework aiming to eliminate toxic NSAID use, establish Vulture Safe Zones (VSZ), and expand conservation breeding programs.

- **GS Paper III: Environment & Infrastructure Intersections**

- Sustainable linear infrastructure development balancing power grid expansion with wildlife corridor protection.

- **GS Paper II/III: Public Health & One Health Concept**

- Demonstrates the **One Health** model: ecological disruptions directly impact public health and human longevity through zoonotic vector changes (feral dogs/rabies).

Conclusion

Mitigating avian electrocution requires proactive coordination between power distribution companies, forestry departments, and local municipal bodies. Implementing low-cost spatial fixes alongside targeted grid insulation will prevent further population collapse, safeguarding both biodiversity and public health.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: How can India reconcile rapid expansion of electricity transmission infrastructure with protection of vulnerable bird populations?(10 Marks, 150 Words)

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Page 10:GS II : Governance / Preliminary Examination

The legislative transition from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar & Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAM G) Act has reignited a fundamental constitutional debate regarding the 'Right to Work' in India. Coupled with recent Supreme Court observations on rural minimum wages, the discussion highlights the tension between fiscal consolidation, progressive socio-economic rights, and decentralized rural governance.

Key Analysis of the Editorial Topics

Constitutional Foundations & Judicial Evolution:

DPSPs vs. Fundamental Rights:

Framers of the Constitution placed the right to work under **Article 41** (Directive Principles of State Policy) due to initial resource constraints, balancing aspirational goals with financial viability.

Article 21 & Precedents: Judicial expansion in cases like Olga Tellis

(1985) linked the right to livelihood directly with the right to life. Furthermore, Sanjit Roy (1983) established that paying wages below minimum wage thresholds constitutes forced labor under **Article 23**.

Doctrine of Non-Retrogression:

Applied in Navtej Singh Johar (2018), this doctrine mandates that once a state expands social rights through progressive legislation, it cannot enact policy rollbacks that dilute those realized rights.

Fiscal Decentralization & State Capacity:

- Shifting financial burdens onto State governments under the VB-GRAM G Act creates operational bottlenecks, especially for States operating under strict Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) borrowing ceilings.

The broken promise of right to work

The replacement of MGNREGA with the VB-GRAM G Act has weakened the rural right-to-work framework; restoring a meaningful right to work through adequate funding, living wages and stronger local institutions would advance constitutional aims while also supporting rural demand and economic growth

ECONOMIC NOTES

Rajendran Narayanan
Vijay Ram S.

On August 21, a three-judge Supreme Court Bench led by the Chief Justice of India dismissed a petition and sought a fresh one in a case on minimum wages in rural employment guarantee programmes. The Bench lauded MGNREGA's role in rural development. It probed whether the 'Right to Work' should be treated on par with Article 21, the fundamental right to life, sparking an important discussion on the constitutional foundations of this right.

A guarantee under strain
Despite its limited scope of only 100 days of work per rural household and chronic underfunding, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was the only law anchored in the core principle of the right to work. In December 2025, the Union government replaced MGNREGA with the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar & Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAM G) Act, and its implementation began on July 1. About 3.44 crore households worked for about 44 crore person-days under MGNREGA in July and August, on average, over the previous five years (Table 1). There has been a 68% decrease in employment in July and August this year compared with the average of the preceding five years. Notwithstanding the proverbial 'teething issues', the dismantling of MGNREGA's demand-driven right-to-work framework and the disproportionate fiscal burden that the new law places on States are likely to be major factors behind the dramatic fall in employment under the VB-GRAM G Act.

The impact of taking away even this limited right to work is therefore palpable. Discussions around the recent Supreme Court observations on the right to work can be traced back to the Constituent Assembly debates. While most members agreed that a right to work was vital, the debate centred on whether it should be a fundamental right or be part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). The DPSPs do not automatically constitute rights but are meant to serve as prompts for governments to formulate laws and policies. This became the basis of the differences in perspective.

Professor K.T. Shah had strongly advocated recognising the right to work as a fundamental right, arguing that the State needed a constitutional and positive legal mandate to guarantee socio-economic security to its citizens. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, among others, held that while the right to work was an essential goal, its immediate universal enforcement was not fiscally and institutionally viable in a newly independent India that had been hollowed out of its resources. The placement of the right within the Directive Principles, rather than among the fundamental rights, thus reflected a deliberate constitutionalism of aspiration, rather than an abandonment of the welfare ideal. As scholars Anjan Kapoor and Manu Bhargava have written in their essay 'Ambedkar and the anti-isolation of Fellowship', "the constitution does not establish a nation, but rather provides the tools to help achieve it."

Therefore, Article 41 of the DPSP states: "The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development,

A shrinking safety net

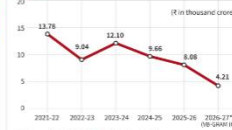
The shift from MGNREGA to VB-GRAM G has sharply reduced rural employment and earnings

Table 1: The number of households (HH) employed, person-days of work generated and average daily wages paid in July and August

Financial year	HH provided employment (in crore)	Person-days of work generated (in crore)	Average daily wage paid (in ₹)
2021-22	4.79	50.14	210
2022-23	3.13	40.14	225.5
2023-24	3.62	49.13	246.5
2024-25	3.04	27.36	219
2025-26	2.44	29.78	272
2026-27* (VB-GRAM G)	1.39	14.04	202.5

Sources: MGNREGA and VB-GRAM G MIS reports. *Data as on 31st August 2026 for 17,208.21

Figure 1: Estimated household earnings in July and August



*Data as on 31st Aug 2026. (Note: HH=household earnings = sum of average wage rate paid x person-days of work generated in July and August)



make effective provision for securing the right to work." Embodying stronger progressive concentrations, Articles 30, 42 and 43 call for the "right to an adequate means of livelihood, equal pay for equal work for both men and women, just and humane conditions of work" and to "secure to all workers a living wage and decent standard of life."

From aspiration to a statutory right
The Supreme Court, in *Olga Tellis vs Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985), ruled that the right to livelihood was a necessary condition for the fundamental right to life, giving a judicial fillip to the right to work. Spurred by the collective efforts of activists and rural workers, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed in 2005. Although limited in scope, it made a pan India right to work law a reality for the first time. The State had to ensure its statutory obligation to provide employment at minimum wages.

In 2009, MGNREGA wages were delinked from the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Over time, MGNREGA wages barely kept pace with inflation and continued to remain lower than the minimum agricultural wages in most States. Low wages and an inadequate budget for generating employment have resulted in a steep decline in household earnings, with estimated total household earnings halving in July and August this year compared with the same months last year (Figure 1).

During the recent hearing, the Supreme Court Bench remarked that if financial resources remained the same, having a minimum wage threshold could reduce the number of workers who could

be provided employment. This remark, which appears to align with the Union government's approach to employment guarantee, merits scrutiny on at least two counts.

First, it vitates the judgment in *Sanjit Roy vs State of Rajasthan* (1983) where the Supreme Court observed that payment of wages below minimum wages violates Article 23 of the Constitution and is akin to 'forced labour'. Second, it rests on a misleading economic logic that financial resources to implement a welfare programme must remain unchanged and constrained.

In reality, higher wages for rural workers increase their purchasing power, enhance their freedoms, and improve human development outcomes. These, in turn, increase effective demand for goods and services, creating a positive multiplier effect, resulting in higher economic productivity. Therefore, higher government spending on an employment guarantee programme at increased wages can yield a mutually reinforcing cycle between development and growth.

A retreat from the right to work
By putting an arbitrary cap on funds for the VB-GRAM G Act and not linking it with minimum wages, the very notion of employment guarantee stands delegitimised. States are already grappling with fiscal constraints and curtailed borrowing limits under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework. The increased burden of funding the VB-GRAM G Act will prevent States from generating employment. The sharp drop in employment and earnings is a reflection of this change.

The VB-GRAM G Act also contains provisions to identify certain areas and exclude them from the scheme, thereby limiting the universality of MGNREGA's right to work.

Lawyer Parvathi Chakraborty highlights how the Supreme Court has affirmed the doctrine of non-retrogression in *Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India*. The doctrine implies that once the State has achieved a certain level of progressive legislation and enforceability of a right, it cannot implement measures that deliberately undo it. Non-retrogression operates as a check on State power, ensuring that rights, once realised, are not diluted later. The replacement of MGNREGA with the VB-GRAM G Act appears to be in violation of this doctrine.

Rural wages have been stagnant for a decade, while women are increasingly employed as 'unpaid family workers'. In such light, the minimal requirements for affirming the commitment to the right to work are: linking MGNREGA wages to living wages, timely payment of wages, a focus on social audits by empowering local institutions to be partners in mitigating corruption, and giving more powers to Panchayat Raj institutions. All these measures could be implemented within a legal framework of the right to work. The VB-GRAM G Act, unfortunately, is silent on most of them. Reinstating the right to work would therefore not only be a legal course correction advancing constitutional aims, but would also be sound economics. (The authors are affiliated with the Centre for the Study of the Indian Economy, Azim Premji University. The views expressed are personal)

THE GIST

The Supreme Court's recent observations have revived the Constituent Assembly-era debate over whether the right to work should be a fundamental right or remain under the directive principles.

Keeping employment guarantee budgets constrained and wages below minimum wages can undermine both the constitutional promise of the right to work and rural household earnings.

Higher wages and greater public spending on employment can boost workers' purchasing power, stimulate demand for goods and services, and support wider economic growth.

Daily News Analysis

- Fiscal constraints combined with non-demand-driven caps degrade universal access to work, leading to sharp declines in rural person-days and household earnings.
- **Macroeconomic Multiplier Effect:**
 - Stagnant real rural wages and underfunded employment guarantees diminish rural purchasing power.
 - Counter-cyclical public spending on rural wages boosts effective aggregate demand, generating a positive economic multiplier that stimulates rural consumption, industrial production, and overall GDP growth.
- **Governance & Grassroots Empowerment:**
 - Effective employment guarantees depend on strengthening **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**, ensuring living wages indexed to inflation, enabling timely disbursements, and institutionalizing social audits to curb leakage.

Static Dimensions (UPSC Core Integration)

- **GS Paper II: Indian Constitution & Rights**
 - **Part III vs. Part IV Balance:** Interplay between Fundamental Rights (Articles 21, 23) and Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 39, 41, 42, 43).
 - **Doctrine of Non-Retrogression:** A key tool of transformative constitutionalism protecting accrued social and economic rights.
- **GS Paper II: Governance & Local Self-Government**
 - **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act:** Role of Gram Sabhas and PRIs in planning, executing, and auditing rural welfare schemes.
- **GS Paper III: Indian Economy & Employment**
 - **Rural Labor Markets:** Trends in real wages, unpaid family labor (particularly among rural women), and informal sector absorption capacity.
 - **Fiscal Policy:** Managing welfare expenditure against statutory deficit targets (FRBM limits).

Conclusion

Restoring a legally robust, demand-driven rural employment guarantee is essential for aligning national policy with constitutional aspirations. By treating rural employment security not as a fiscal burden but as an investment in human capital and aggregate demand, India can reconcile fiscal prudence with social justice, ensuring sustainable economic growth across its rural hinterland.

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following best describes counter-cyclical fiscal policy?

- A. Increasing government expenditure during an economic downturn to support aggregate demand
- B. Cutting all public expenditure during a recession
- C. Maintaining government expenditure at exactly the same level irrespective of economic conditions
- D. Increasing taxes exclusively during periods of high unemployment

Ans: A)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "Employment guarantees are not merely poverty-alleviation programmes; they are instruments of social protection and economic stabilisation." Examine. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

The Baltic Way — Gandhi's imprint on Baltic freedom

August 23, 2026, marked the 37th anniversary of the Baltic Way, the historic 1989 human chain that became a watershed moment in the Gandhian-inspired Singing Revolution in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, culminating in the restoration of Baltic independence in 1990-91. Conversations across the Baltic states revealed powerful personal reflections on the Baltic Way and Gandhian non-violence: "We studied India's freedom struggle and chose Gandhian non-violent resistance to reclaim our national freedom from Soviet rule." "We watched the film *Gandhi* on Lithuanian national television, telecast for 24 hours." "It was thrilling to join a non-violent protest against the Soviet army at Vilnius Cathedral Square; even as a bullet passed near my ear, I stood firm." "Baltic Way matters a lot for us today."

A turning point

The Singing Revolution (1986-91), shaped by songs and non-violence during Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost, reached a turning point with the Baltic Way, when two million people formed a 675-kilometre human chain from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius, demanding freedom from Soviet rule. It remains a powerful symbol of unity, solidarity, and freedom. The Baltic Way was organised on the 50th anniversary of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to expose its secret protocol, which divided Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence, and paved the way for the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in 1940. Having gained independence in 1918, the Baltics lost it after 22 years. The Baltic Way exposed Soviet-era repression, leading to the Soviet Union's acknowledgement of the secret protocol's existence and the Baltic states' re-independence in 1991. Its global media coverage drew international attention, while its inscription in



K.B. Usha

Associate Professor,
School of
International Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru
University, New Delhi

The Mahatma's principles of non-violence have forged enduring bonds between the Baltics and India

UNESCO's Memory of the World Register and Guinness World Records recognition reinforced its international legacy.

An enduring influence

Gandhi's ideas travelled globally, inspiring movements from the American civil rights struggle to South Africa and beyond. Today, the Baltic Way reflects the enduring relevance of his principles of non-violence, truth, and human dignity, while echoing the non-cooperation and civil disobedience of his 1930 Dandi March.

Gandhi showed that moral authority could outweigh military power through ahimsa, satyagraha, civil resistance, mass mobilisation, and the principle that a nation's rule depends on people's consent and cooperation. The Baltic Way and the Singing Revolution stand as a testimony to the success of people's power and civilian-based defence drawn from the Gandhi-led Indian freedom movement.

The Singing Revolution's leaders drew on global traditions of non-violent resistance. Latvian scholar Maija Küle noted that, lacking local theorists, they turned to Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.; Latvia's earlier cultural links with India may also have encouraged this attraction to Gandhian ideas. Lithuania, too, played a key role in developing non-violent civilian-based defence inspired by Gandhi.

In a 2012 conversation with this writer, the late Prof. Gražina Miniutaitė, a leading ideologue of Lithuania's Singing Revolution, recalled that non-violence was widely understood from the outset as essential. The December 1990 "Republic in Danger" declaration urged adherence to "non-violence and non-cooperation with the occupational authorities".

Unlike other thinkers of non-violence, Miniutaitė regarded Gandhi as the most successful in both theory and practice, demonstrating that non-violent struggle could

effectively resist foreign rule. Richard Attenborough's 1982 film *Gandhi* was broadcast on Lithuanian national television to educate citizens about non-violent resistance. Confronting Soviet troops, people repeated: "We won't fight," "We follow Gandhi," and "We are peaceful people."

Building closer ties

Since 1992, the Baltic states have drawn on Gandhian and cultural ties to deepen relations with India, expanding cooperation in technology, sustainability, the blue economy, and culture. The Government of India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry estimates show that India's total bilateral trade with Lithuania reached \$490.61 million; with Latvia, \$475.66 million, and with Estonia, \$219.69 million in 2025-26.

Baltic political discourse reflects Gandhian influence through Gandhi's Lithuanian-born Litvak "soulmate" Hermann Kallenbach; Vydušas's engagement with Gandhian thought; Antanas Poška's meetings with Gandhi; Sonja Schlesin's secretaryship; and Estonian translations of Gandhi by Linnart Hall. These ties continue through annual commemorations of the 2015 Gandhi-Kallenbach monument in Kallenbach's birthplace, Rusnė, most recently in July 2026; the Kallenbach Memorial Lectures; and the India-Lithuania Friendship Award (this year, it honoured the people of Goa during the 400th anniversary of missionary Andrius Rudamina). India has also gifted Gandhi memorials to the Baltics, including a bust unveiled in Latvia in 2019 and a statue installed in Estonia in 2025.

The Baltic Way endures as a chain of freedom and ideas, linking courage with conscience. Its contemporary significance is multifaceted: a model of non-violent resistance, a site of contested memory, a narrative in Russia-West tensions, and ultimately, a tribute to Gandhi and India.

GS Paper I: Modern Indian History

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "Gandhian methods of resistance transcended the geographical boundaries of India's freedom struggle." Discuss with reference to the Baltic freedom movement. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Context :

Focusing on the 37th anniversary of the 1989 **Baltic Way** (a 675-km human chain of two million people), the author illustrates how Gandhian principles of civil disobedience inspired the **Singing Revolution (1986–91)** to peacefully dismantle Soviet annexation. It bridges historical soft-power dynamics with contemporary diplomatic and economic engagements between India and the Baltic region.

Key Analytical Pillars of the Article

- **Philosophical Transference of Satyagraha:** Baltic freedom leaders explicitly adopted Gandhian non-violence to strip the Soviet regime of its operational consent, drawing direct structural parallels to India's 1930 Dandi March.
- **Media and Cultural Education:** Mass media, notably the broadcast of Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi, served as a tactical tool for civilian non-violent defense education during Soviet aggression.
- **Historical Rectification:** The Baltic Way served as a peaceful protest to expose the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which had illegally annexed the Baltics into the Soviet sphere.
- **Evolution into Strategic Partnerships:** Shared historical and intellectual links (such as Hermann Kallenbach and Antanas Poška) have translated into robust contemporary trade (\$1.18+ billion total trade in 2025–26) and diplomatic ties in green technology and the blue economy.

UPSC Static Dimensions & Relevance

1. General Studies Paper I: Modern Indian History & World History

- **Global Footprint of Gandhian Ideology:** Demonstrates how satyagraha transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, serving as a template for anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian movements globally (e.g., US Civil Rights, South African Anti-Apartheid, Baltic Freedom Struggle).
- **Interwar Diplomacy & World War II:** The legacy of the 1939 **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** highlights secret diplomacy, territorial annexations, and the erosion of national sovereignty in 20th-century Europe.

2. General Studies Paper II: International Relations & Governance

- **Soft Power Diplomacy & Cultural Track-1.5:** Educational and cultural linkages (monuments to Gandhi and Kallenbach in Rusnė, statues in Latvia and Estonia) strengthen India's diaspora outreach and soft power projection in Northern Europe.

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Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Daily News Analysis

- **India–Nordic–Baltic (NB8) Engagement:** The Baltic states serve as crucial nodes for India's multilateral engagement in the European Union, enhancing economic cooperation across technology, sustainability, and maritime security.

3. General Studies Paper IV: Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

- **Moral Authority vs. Physical Might:** Illustrates the ethical concept that non-violent resistance grounded in truth (satya) can disarm aggressive military state power by eroding the oppressor's moral legitimacy.
- **Civilian-Based Defence:** Ethical application of non-cooperation and peaceful civil disobedience as a legitimate defense mechanism for national self-determination.

Key Takeaways & Analytical Points

- **Civilian Resistance Strategy:** The Lithuanian 1990 Declaration of Republic in Danger codified non-violence and non-cooperation as state policy against occupational forces.
- **Historical & Intellectual Bridges:**
 - Hermann Kallenbach: Lithuanian-born architect and Gandhi's close associate in South Africa.
 - Antanas Poška & Vyduėnas: Lithuanian scholars who promoted Indian philosophy and Gandhian thought.
- **Trade Overview (2025–26):**
 - India–Lithuania: \$490.61 million
 - India–Latvia: \$475.66 million
 - India–Estonia: \$219.69 million

Conclusion

The Baltic Way stands as an enduring testament to the global efficacy of Gandhian non-violence, proving that moral cohesion and peaceful mass mobilization can overcome formidable authoritarian powers. For modern Indian diplomacy, this shared heritage provides a strong ethical foundation to expand strategic, economic, and technological ties with the Baltic region. Integrating soft power with contemporary economic convergence ensures that India's civilizational principles continue to shape global democratic discourse.



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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com**