

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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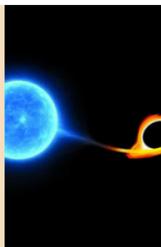
**Bihar is using night-time light to measure economic growth?**

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## One-time H-1B fee for new applicants: U.S.A

A day after U.S. President Donald Trump hiked H-1B visa fees to \$100,000, the White House clarified that the fee will not be an annual feature, but rather a “one-time” payment that will have to be made by companies for fresh H-1B visa applicants, starting with the “next upcoming lottery cycle”. The announcement eased the fears that had triggered a surge in last-minute flight bookings to the United States by Indian H-1B visa holders who are currently outside the country.



In its first response on September 20, the Ministry of External Affairs had cautioned that the order would have “humanitarian consequences” due to family disruptions. The External Affairs Ministry’s response to the White House action included a reiteration of the fact that “Skilled talent mobility and exchanges have contributed enormously to technology development, innovation, economic growth, competitiveness and wealth creation in the U.S. and India”. However, the fallout for Indian citizens can be contained if there is a proactive approach by the Government to bolster India’s infrastructure and undertake necessary reforms to improve the prospects for the Indian tech industry to make even greater strides than it has done so far. This might be achieved by capitalising on opportunities to develop new capabilities in the Artificial Intelligence space and exploring new markets across Asia, including China and Russia, and in parts of Europe.

### Celebration of flowers



**Bathukamma - The Unique Flower Festival of Telangana, a nine-day flower festival dedicated to Goddess Gauri.**



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**IAF's legendary workhorse MiG-21 to retire »page 3**



## How Bihar is using night-time light to measure economic growth?

### Night-time Light as Growth Indicator

- Bihar's government is using night-time light (NTL) captured via satellite images as a major indicator of economic growth, poverty, and inequality.
- The study, conducted with the Asian Development Research Institute, analyzed NTL from 2017 to 2023, finding a 351% increase in light density across the state, highlighting areas of strong economic development.

### Top Growth Districts

- Patna, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Gaya, and Begusarai are the top five districts for fastest economic growth, with the largest increase in illuminated area at night.
- Arwal, Jehanabad, Jamui, Banka, and Madhubani are identified as "emerging districts" with significant gains, many of which were previously affected by Maoist violence.

### Sectoral Insights and Employment

- Growth in night light correlates with expansions in construction, retail, agriculture, and animal husbandry—especially in previously less developed districts.
- Industrial electricity use and employment—particularly in food processing and healthcare—have risen notably; Patna shows concentration in general manufacturing and textiles.
- 51% of employment in Patna is now through startups in IT/ITES and e-commerce, though most startup units are in Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, and Bhagalpur, with emerging districts lagging but growing.

### Infrastructure and Policy Impact

- The state's electrification drive has greatly aided economic activity; industrial power consumers rose from 17,739 in 2012 to 186,254 by 2025.
- Electricity and lighting are seen as strong proxies for overall economic vibrancy, business activity, and industrial growth, affirming their use for economic tracking.

### Unique Takeaways

- Use of night-time light not only tracks economic growth but also reflects social change and enhanced safety.
- The method reveals substantial progress and new "emerging corridors" of industry outside traditional hubs, especially in districts that were once underdeveloped or affected by conflict.

## Sawalkote dam: Panel to weigh green nod for Chenab project

- The Sawalkote dam is a large hydroelectric project on the Chenab river in Jammu & Kashmir, forming part of India's efforts to tap hydropower potential in western rivers governed by the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- After the IWT was put in abeyance post the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, the Indian government prioritized projects like Sawalkote to enhance strategic control and energy security.
- Environmental clearance is pending, with debate over whether to wait for cumulative impact and carrying capacity studies (CIA and CCS) before granting fast-track approval.
- The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) noted that though guidelines on these studies were set in 2013, the Sawalkote project predates them (initiated in 1984) and may only need to prospectively apply the standards.
- The project will divert 846 hectares of forest and entail cutting over 222,000 trees, the largest being in Ramban district.
- The Environment Ministry mandates securing in-principle forest clearance if compensatory measures are not taken within 18 months and demands fresh primary environmental data if existing data is over three years old.

### Technical Design and Environmental Concerns

- Sawalkote is classified as a "run-of-river" project but features a substantial 192.5-meter-high concrete gravity dam and a 530 million cubic meter reservoir, leading to controversy over potential ecological and social impact.
- Hydrologists and environmentalists, particularly from J&K, criticized the project's environmental assessment, citing "misleading" use of the term "run-of-river" and inadequate consideration of cumulative river basin impact.
- The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) has recently collected new environmental data to address previous criticisms about outdated assessments.

### Policy and Geopolitical Context

- Strategic push is linked to the IWT's abeyance, as India seeks to assert rights over Chenab, Jhelum, and Indus rivers in response to political tensions with Pakistan.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Power have advocated for speeding up exemptions and clearances to avoid delays.

### Key Issues and Analysis

- The main questions revolve around balancing national strategic goals, energy needs, and environmental sustainability.
- The project's history—repeated delays since 1984—stem from regulatory, inter-ministerial, and international treaty complications.
- If cleared without thorough updated CIA and CCS studies, it could set precedents for fast-tracking other large hydropower projects, intensifying debate over India's environmental assessment protocols.

## IAF's legendary workhorse MiG-21 to fly into sunset on Sept. 26 after six decades of service

### MiG-21 Retirement Announcement

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) will retire its MiG-21 fighter jets on September 26, 2025, after nearly six decades of service.
- A ceremonial flypast and decommissioning event will be held at the IAF base in Chandigarh, attended by senior military leaders and veteran pilots.

### Service Legacy

- Inducted in 1963, the MiG-21 was India's first supersonic fighter jet, earning the nickname "First Supersonics".
- India has inducted over 700 MiG-21s of various models, with many built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.

### Operational Significance

- MiG-21s were the IAF's backbone until the mid-2000s, playing crucial roles in the 1965 and 1971 wars, the 1999 Kargil conflict, 2019 Balakot airstrikes, and Operation Safed Sagar.
- Notably, a MiG-21 piloted by Group Captain Abhinandan Varthaman downed a Pakistani F-16 in 2019.

### Broader Impact

- The MiG-21 supported India's indigenous aerospace industry and technological progress.
- As MiG-21 squadrons retire, IAF fighter squadron strength will fall to 29 squadrons.
- The IAF has commemorated the jet as the "warhorse that carried the pride of a nation into the skies".



## 'If cricket is allowed, why not pilgrimage to Pakistan'



### Background and Issue

- Sikh devotees and organizations are urging the Indian government to reconsider its decision to bar religious pilgrimages to Nankana Sahib, Guru Nanak's birthplace in Pakistan, especially after cricket matches between India and Pakistan were allowed.
- The Kartarpur Sahib corridor, which allows visa-free access for pilgrims to a key Sikh shrine in Pakistan, has been closed by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs since Operation Sindoor in May, citing security concerns.

### Reactions and Sentiments

- Approximately 1,900 devotees were affected by the government's advisory suspending applications for the 'jatha' (pilgrimage group).

### Organizational and Political Response

- The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and various political parties have requested both the reversal of the current ban and the reopening of the Kartarpur corridor.
- The SGPC, which manages Sikh shrines, has stated that it will suspend organizing pilgrimages until restrictions are lifted.

### Government Position

- The Ministry and Foreign Secretary stated that the restriction is due to the prevailing security scenario and that the suspension is indefinite, with no timeline announced for reopening or resumption of the pilgrimage.
- Public commentary questions the logic of allowing sporting events but not religious travel, especially considering the emotional and spiritual significance to the Sikh community.

## PRELIMS CORNER :

1. Macolin Convention, recently in news, is related to :

- (a) Cybercrime and data security
- (b) Reversing the decline in the health of the world's oceans
- (c) Private sector investment in infrastructure development
- (d) Manipulation of sports competitions

2. With regard to Kashmiri culture, the term "Raad" refers to :

- (a) Kahwa tea
- (b) Handicraft fair
- (c) Folk dance
- (d) Floating garden

3. The State of Inequality in India Report was released by

- (a) NITI Aayog
- (b) RBI
- (c) Economic Advisory Council to the PM
- (d) Ministry of Finance

4. Aegean dispute recently seen in news related is between :

- (a) United Kingdom and Argentina
- (b) Greece and Turkey
- (c) Ukraine and Bulgaria
- (d) France and Spain

## Embassy flags cases of illegal migration by Indian nationals

### Migration and Embassy Response

- The Indian Embassy in Guatemala has highlighted increasing cases of Indian nationals entering Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras illegally to reach Mexico and then the United States.
- This migration issue is described as "complex," with migrants often lacking proper visas or legal entry documents.

### Arrests, Detentions, and Embassy Role

- When Indian migrants are arrested in Central America, the Embassy provides interpretation, welfare support, and coordinates their release and return to India.
- Specific incidents include one Indian held in a Guatemala detention center for eight years on human trafficking charges (released in 2022) and another arrested in El Salvador in March 2023, who was released and deported in June 2023.

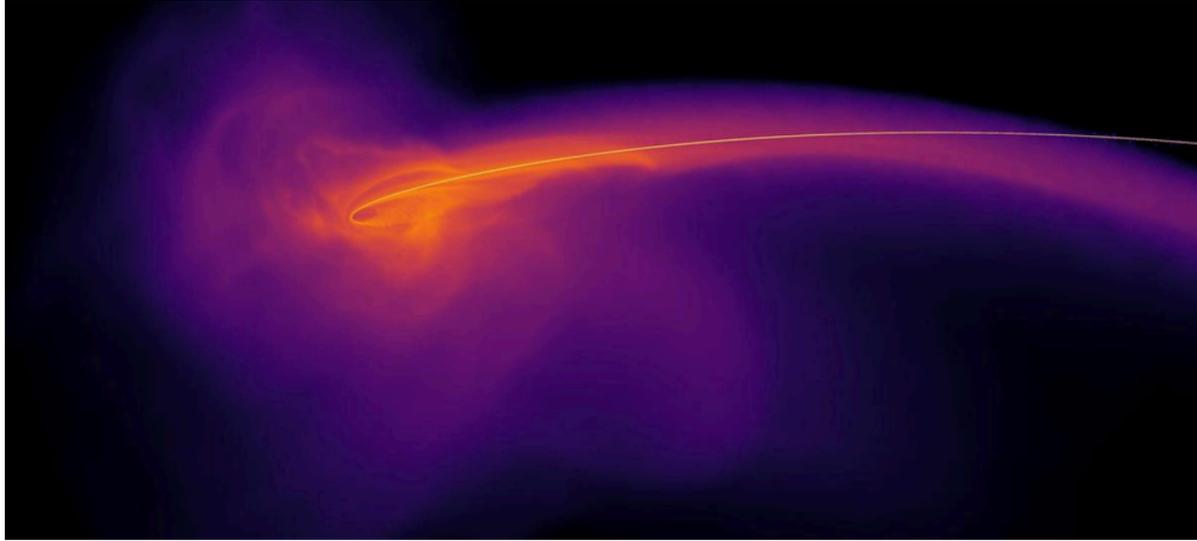
### Humanitarian Incidents

- An Indian citizen died on the Guatemala-US border in March 2023, and the body was initially buried anonymously; after the family was located, the remains were sent to India in July 2023 for religious rites.

### Other Details

- The Embassy did not provide overall numbers of Indians deported from Central America, but clarified it does not shelter migrants in its mission.
- In 2023, the Embassy organized over 100 cultural and commercial events across Guatemala.
- Lack of shelter or consular support at transit points makes the journey more vulnerable, with embassies having limited capacity to assist detained or stranded migrants.
- The complexity of these illegal pathways highlights significant risks relating to human trafficking, legal challenges, physical harm, and lack of protection for migrants.
- Violence and exploitation – Smugglers often abuse, assault, or abandon migrants midway. Women and children face higher risks of sexual exploitation.
- Taking "donkey routes" (informal, unsafe, and illegal paths used for migration, often across deserts, mountains, or seas) creates a wide range of problems and risks for migrants. These routes are usually organized by smugglers and traffickers, making them highly dangerous.

# Astronomers have spotted the biggest bangs since the Big Bang



## Discovery of New Celestial Events

- Astronomers at the University of Hawai'i's Institute for Astronomy identified a new category of events .
- Astronomers have identified a new category of powerful cosmic explosions, more energetic than gamma-ray bursts (GRBs), termed "extreme nuclear transients" (ENTs).
- ENTs occur when stars, much denser than typical stars, are torn apart by supermassive black holes, producing immense amounts of energy over a relatively short period.

## How ENTs Differ From Other Cosmic Explosions

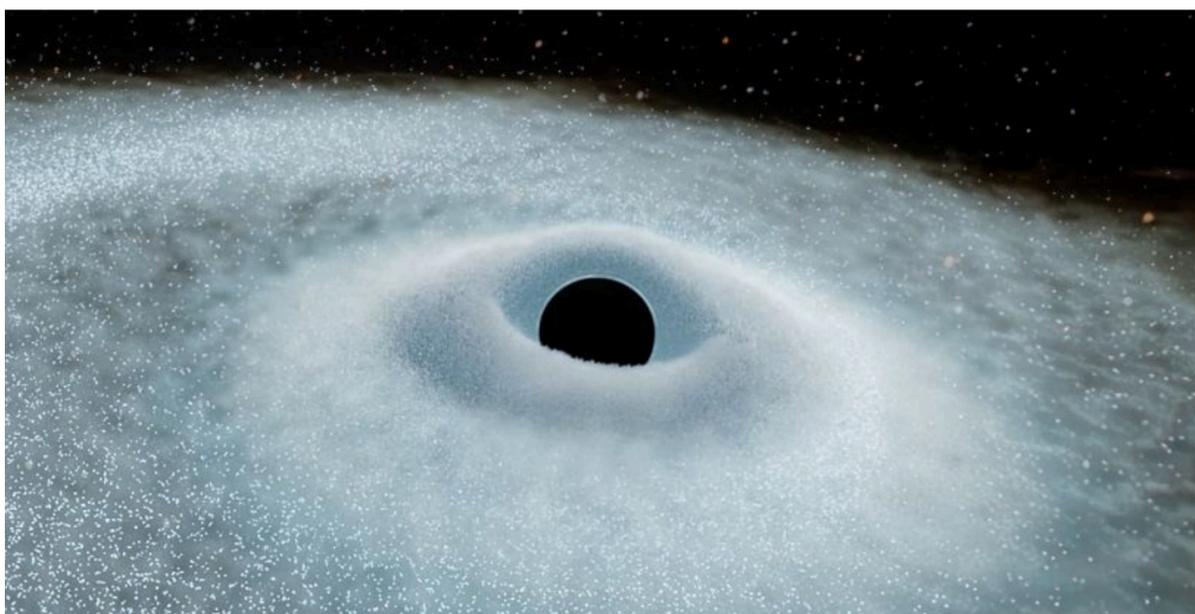
- ENTs are not just more energetic but also rarer and more powerful than tidal disruption events (TDEs), where ordinary stars are shredded by black holes.
- Unlike ordinary TDEs, which lack a major "central black hole bite," ENTs involve incredibly dense remnants like white dwarfs or neutron stars, leading to even more violent breakups.
- These events can outshine the galaxies in which they occur and are significant for their short, intense brightness compared to more commonly observed GRBs.

## Scientific Impact and Further Research

- ENTs enable astronomers to explore the formation, composition, and history of black holes and galaxies, as these "biggest bangs" offer new insights into the early universe.
- By studying ENTs, scientists expect to build a sample of black holes in the early universe, complementing knowledge about both ancient and evolving galaxies.
- The study of ENTs, using data from the Gaia spacecraft and other observatories, is seen as an excellent opportunity to advance the understanding of cosmic events and extreme physics.

## Future Research

- Researchers plan to identify more ENTs through surveys like Zwicky Transient Facility (ZTF) and Gaia.
- ENTs provide an excellent complement to gravitational wave astronomy for probing the universe's extreme events.



## EXPLAINED

# Can timelines be fixed for Governors?



### Supreme Court Reference and Current Issue

- The Supreme Court is reviewing whether timelines should be fixed for Governors and the President to decide on bills, following a reference from a two-judge bench in April 2023 regarding delays in bill assent.
- States, especially those led by opposition parties, have raised concerns about Governors withholding assent or delaying decisions, leading to legislative deadlocks.

### Constitutional Provisions

- Article 200 of the Constitution allows the Governor to assent, withhold assent, reserve for President, or return a bill for reconsideration but does not specify a deadline for making these decisions.
- Article 201 applies if a bill is reserved for the President, but neither article prescribes an explicit timeline.

### Judicial Interpretations

- Courts have held that although the Governor should act without "undue delay," no mandatory time frame can be judicially enforced due to constitutional silence on specific deadlines.
- The Centre's argument is that courts should not prescribe timelines, considering the discretionary and federal nature of the Governor's role.

### Recommendations and Opposition Views

- Recommendations from commissions and expert panels have suggested setting reasonable time frames such as three months for decision on bills, to ensure smoother functioning of state legislatures.
- Opposition-ruled states have consistently urged the Supreme Court to direct Governors to act within a specified time, citing the need for legislative efficiency and respect for the elected government's mandate.

### Federalism and Comparisons

- Governors are appointed by the President (Centre) but act as constitutional heads of states, symbolizing a link between the Centre and states. Fixing timelines for Governors to act on bills may limit their discretionary power, altering this delicate balance.
- On the other hand, unchecked discretion by Governors has been criticized for causing delays and obstructing state governments, which raises concerns about the democratic mandate and decentralization—core federal principles.
- The controversy continues as different states seek clear, court-prescribed norms, but the Centre upholds the need for discretionary flexibility.

Thus, how this issue is resolved will influence the distribution of power, state autonomy, and Centre-state relations, key components of India's federalism.

## Gazans hail, while Israelis condemn West's recognition of Palestine state



### Recognition of Palestine

- Britain, Canada, and Australia officially recognised a Palestinian state on Sunday.
- This move reflects frustration over the Gaza war and aims to promote a two-state solution.
- Aligns these nations with about 140 other countries that back Palestinian statehood.

### Symbolic Importance

- Britain's recognition is particularly symbolic given its role in Israel's creation after WWII.
- PM Keir Starmer stated the move seeks to revive hopes for peace and address the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

### Israel's Reaction

- Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the decision, calling it a "huge reward to terrorism."
- He insisted a Palestinian state "will not happen," especially after Hamas' October 7 attacks.

### Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

- Israel's military campaign in Gaza has killed 65,000+ Palestinians, with most civilians affected.
- The war has caused mass displacement, hunger, and destruction of homes and infrastructure.

### Global and Local Responses

- Other nations, including France, are expected to follow with recognition.
- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas welcomed the move, saying it paves the way for a peaceful coexistence with Israel.
- Palestinians in the West Bank expressed support but stressed the need for practical measures to end the war and prevent Israeli annexation.

### Diplomatic Implications

- Recognition of Palestine forces countries to review all bilateral ties with Israel, ensuring no deals violate obligations to Palestine.
- Example: Recognising countries cannot import goods from Israeli settlements in occupied territories, as it breaches international law.

## Taliban rule out deal on Bagram base despite Trump's demand

### Bagram Airbase and U.S. Demands

- Bagram is Afghanistan's largest air base and was a center of U.S. operations during the 20-year war against the Taliban.
- Former U.S. President Donald Trump has publicly demanded the return of Bagram Airbase to U.S. control, threatening consequences for Afghanistan if the request is ignored.

### Taliban's Response

- The Taliban government has rejected the idea of any deal with the U.S. for regaining Bagram, insisting Afghanistan's independence is non-negotiable.
- Afghan officials stated that any negotiations for returning Bagram would undermine their sovereignty, and that their military does not need the base.

### Broader Context

- Bagram was abandoned by U.S. forces in July 2021, under Joe Biden's presidency, as part of the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- The loss of Bagram air power was a key factor in the quick Taliban takeover after the U.S. withdrawal.
- The airfield has a long history, having grown significantly in size over decades and previously used by different foreign armies, including the Soviet Union and the United States.

### Other Details

- Bagram had also been criticized for allegations of human rights abuses at its detention facilities during U.S. use.
- Trump's renewed interest in Bagram is partly driven by his concerns over U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and his belief that retaining the base is essential for future U.S. actions in the region.



# Prelims Corner: Explanations

**Q1. Ans d**

The Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, known as the Macolin Convention, is a multilateral treaty that checks match-fixing. The convention was concluded in Macolin/Magglingen, Switzerland. It came into force on September 1, 2019. The 12th meeting of Interpol's Match-Fixing Task Force (IMFTF), in which the Central Bureau of Investigation was one of the participants, concluded recently with a call for harmonised global efforts to curb competition manipulation.



**Q2. Ans d**

Dal Lake, the urban lake, is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is named the “Jewel in the crown of Kashmir” or “Srinagar’s Jewel”. The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting. The lake covers an area of 18 square kilometers (6.9 sq mi) and is part of a natural wetland, which covers 21.1 square kilometers (8.1 sq mi), including its floating gardens. The floating gardens, known as “Raad” in Kashmiri, blossom with lotus flowers during July and August. The wetland is divided by causeways into four basins — Gagribal, Lokut Dal, Bod Dal, and Nagin.



**Q3. Ans c**

The State of Inequality in India Report was released by Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM). The report has been written by the Institute for Competitiveness and presents a holistic analysis of the depth and nature of inequality in India. The report compiles information on inequities across sectors of health, education, household characteristics, and the labour market. As the report presents, inequities in these sectors make the population more vulnerable and trigger a descent into multidimensional poverty.



**Q4. Ans b**

Recently, the Turkish President warned Greece to demilitarize islands in the Aegean Sea. Greece and Turkey have had a regional issue concerning the Aegean Sea since the 1970s, with both countries asserting rival claims over their borders in the Sea.



## Case Study:



India is experiencing a surge in non-cricket sporting leagues, with at least a dozen leagues in sports like kabaddi, armwrestling, tennis, and chess, driven by high audiences and strong monetization. The Pro Kabaddi League and Pro Panja League have set new benchmarks, showcasing how sports events can capture millions of viewers and attract big business through digital and social media. Sporting leagues now contribute up to 25% of India's sports economy, with the total industry expected to grow at 10-12% per year. The arrival of new leagues (such as chess, kabaddi, table tennis, and football) is changing the perception and topography of the Indian sports business, with regional leagues proliferating and drawing participation from smaller towns. Franchises and events are utilizing influencer marketing and digital platforms to boost reach, audience size, and sponsor confidence, making the leagues financially viable and sustainable. The rise in non-cricket franchise leagues is expected to continue, with digital and social strategies at their core, ultimately professionalizing, commercializing, and expanding India's sports ecosystem.

## UN chief urges peace, end of conflict in International Peace Day message



**UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on the international community to silence the guns, end the suffering, build bridges, and create stability and prosperity, in a message on the International Day of Peace, observed annually on September 21. The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by the UN General Assembly. Two decades later, in 2001, the General Assembly unanimously voted to designate the Day as a period of non-violence and ceasefire. The theme for this year is Act Now for a Peaceful World.**



**'My mother was my shelter and storm': Arundhati Roy on her fierce new memoir - "Mother Mary Comes to Me". It is the story of Mary Roy, her formidable, mercurial mother: feminist icon, educator, crusader, eccentric, and inspiration.**