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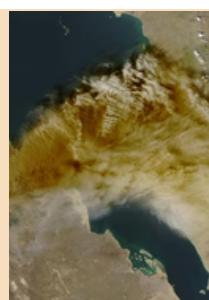
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Putin's visit: The long arc of India's ties with Russia, the road ahead

Russian President Vladimir Putin first came to India for a summit with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in October 2000. Putin was then new to the President's job — having been elected earlier in 2000 — and Vajpayee was also in the early years of his Prime Ministership. Now, 25 years later, Putin will come to India on December 4-5 for the 23rd annual summit between India and Russia. This is his first visit to India after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Putin's Russia is facing sanctions from the Western world, while India is also at the receiving end of secondary sanctions and high tariffs from the US. India and Pakistan have once again seen conflict in May, and Delhi just witnessed a blast near the Red Fort.

Over time, India has reduced its defence import dependence on Russia. But there is legacy equipment that needs spares and servicing from Russia, and thus, about 60 % of the defence equipment is still from the country. India has bought the S-400 air defence system from Russia. Moscow has been able to deliver 3 out of 5 batteries, and now there is a demand for another 5 of them. But mired in the Ukraine war, Russia has not been able to deliver the entire equipment on time. European analysts say the sanctions on Russia have also slowed down its capacity to manufacture cutting-edge defence equipment — something that Moscow rejects. With India under pressure from the US and Europe over its Russia ties, the conversations between Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be watched very closely. Delhi prepares to host Putin with a private dinner, a state banquet, bilateral meetings, and an address to CEOs. The visit is expected to be high on optics and pageantry associated with a State visit. India wants strong ties with the US and Europe, as they are the source of technology and capital and remain the aspirational destination for ambitious Indians. It is in the process of negotiating trade deals with both these powerhouses.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar formally assumed the Chairship of the Council of Member States of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) for 2026, signaling a landmark global recognition for India's Election Commission (ECI). In his acceptance speech in Stockholm, CEC Kumar emphasized a forward-looking agenda focused on strengthening electoral integrity worldwide, declaring, "India's Chairmanship will be decisive, ambitious and action oriented."

The maiden test of LandSpace's next-generation Zhuque-3 rocket ended in failure on Wednesday, dashing the Chinese firm's hopes of becoming the third company, after Elon Musk's SpaceX and Je Bezos's Blue Origin to successfully test a reusable spacecraft. The rocket was not able to complete a controlled landing following an initial launch, state news agency Xinhua reported. Zhuque-3's failed landing attempt highlights the difficulty of developing a rocket that can be recovered and reused after being launched into orbit.

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STATE

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Proposal to divert Ganga water to Yamuna hits roadblock

The central government proposal to divert Ganga water to augment the Yamuna's flow near Delhi has stalled due to objections from the Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) government, mainly over farmer interests and engineering feasibility. It frames the scheme as an interim political and technical response to the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) directions to clean the Yamuna by 2017, but shows how inter-state water politics and structural constraints have blocked progress.

1. Core proposal and route
- The plan envisages releasing about 500 cusecs of Ganga water from the Upper Ganga Canal (UGC) in western U.P. and conveying it via the Eastern Yamuna Canal (EYC) into the Yamuna to increase flow and dilute pollution in the Delhi stretch.
- Because the UGC is not directly connected to the Yamuna, water would first be diverted from the UGC to the EYC through an existing channel, then discharged into the Yamuna; the extra water would later be recovered downstream via the Agra canal by the U.P. government, and Delhi Jal Board would not be allowed to use it for drinking water.

2. Institutional responses and studies
- An engineering committee has been constituted to examine U.P.'s technical concerns, while IIT Roorkee has been tasked with studying how to augment the capacity of the Deoband channel that would link the UGC and EYC.
- A National Institute of Hydrology study recommended maintaining a minimum flow of about 23 cumecs in the Yamuna downstream of the Hathnikund (Hathni Kund) Barrage, but current flows are reported at less than half that level, underscoring the ecological rationale for seeking additional releases.

3. Interim measure versus long-term solution
- Diverting Ganga water is described as an interim or stop-gap measure; the long-term strategy is to construct three dams in the upper Yamuna basin so that monsoon surplus can be stored and released in lean months to sustain ecological flows.
- However, even this long-term plan faces major delays: only one dam's construction has begun and the tentative completion date is around 2031, suggesting continued reliance on short-term fixes and highlighting the chronic gap between river-rejuvenation promises and on-ground execution.
- The diversion plan within the NGT's 'Maily se Nirmal Yamuna Revitalization Plan, 2017', which directed authorities to ensure environmental flows and restore the Delhi stretch of the Yamuna by March 31, 2017—a deadline that has been missed.
- The central government views increasing flow through Delhi as a key promise under the larger Ganga–Yamuna rejuvenation agenda, but the piece implicitly highlights that structural pollution sources —untreated sewage and industrial effluents—remain inadequately addressed

AAI to evaluate two sites shortlisted for Rameswaram airport

- Airports Authority of India (AAI) is conducting a pre-feasibility study of two shortlisted sites in Ramanathapuram district for a proposed Rameswaram airport, which is aimed at boosting tourism and regional infrastructure. It highlights the technical, land, and approval issues the Tamil Nadu government must resolve before selecting the final site.

Background and purpose
- Tamil Nadu announced in March its decision to build an airport in Rameswaram to improve connectivity and promote tourism, especially to religious destinations in and around the town.
- Five initial sites were examined; by August, the State had narrowed this to two—near Uchippuli and near Keelakarai —and asked AAI to conduct a pre-feasibility study on their pros and cons.

Details of the shortlisted sites
- The Uchippuli site lies near INS Parundu, an Indian Naval Air Station, which means any final choice of this site will require explicit clearance from the Navy because of airspace and security sensitivities.
- Both sites have high-tension power lines crossing them, and the Uchippuli site additionally has a railway line, implying that if Uchippuli is chosen, both the power lines and the railway track will have to be shifted, adding cost and complexity.

Pre-feasibility study and land needs
- An AAI team has already inspected villages around both sites and is now preparing a pre-feasibility report with recommendations on which location is more suitable from technical, safety, and cost perspectives.
- Once the report is submitted, the Tamil Nadu government must pick one site and then assemble roughly 600 acres of land, a significant acquisition requirement that will shape timelines and local politics.

Tourism and regional implications
- This underlines that Rameswaram and nearby areas host several important temples—such as Sri Ramanathaswamy Temple, Adi Jagannatha Perumal Temple, Mangalanatha Swamy Temple, and Kodhandaramar Temple—drawing large numbers of pilgrims.
- Better air connectivity is projected to increase tourist inflows, support local livelihoods, and strengthen the broader infrastructure network in southern Tamil Nadu, but the piece implicitly suggests that environmental, social, and security clearances will be crucial determinants of whether and how fast the airport materialises.

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Govt. withdraws order on Sanchar Saathi app

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has withdrawn its controversial order directing smartphone manufacturers to mandatorily pre-install the Sanchar Saathi app on all handsets sold in India from next year.

- This reversal comes after strong backlash from civil society, opposition parties, and users who criticised the order as intrusive and as effectively forcing a government app onto citizens without their consent.

- The DoT initially justified the mandate by claiming that Sanchar Saathi helps safeguard citizens against fraud by identifying fake or non-genuine handsets and enabling blocking of misused mobile connections.

- However, critics argued that compulsory pre-installation could enable excessive data collection and surveillance, especially when combined with other recent directions the DoT has issued under its expanded powers over Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUE).

- The piece highlights that the app order was one of at least three new directions issued after the DoT created and empowered the TIUE framework, allowing it to issue obligations not only to telecom operators but to any entity using phone numbers, including handset makers and major online platforms.

- Another direction, mentioned but not widely publicised earlier, requires messaging and social-media platforms to integrate a government-run "Financial Fraud Risk Indicator" and blacklist of suspended mobile numbers, and to immediately deactivate associated user accounts to curb telecom-linked fraud.

- A further order mandates that apps such as WhatsApp and similar platforms log out users every six hours, instead of allowing persistent log-ins, ostensibly to reduce SIM-based fraud and unauthorised access.

- Together, these measures reveal a broader regulatory push by the DoT to combat cyber fraud and misuse of telecom resources by embedding government control points into both devices and digital platforms, raising questions about proportionality and user autonomy.

- The ministry defended the rollback by stating that a sharp uptick in voluntary downloads—around six lakh users in a single day, reportedly a ten-fold increase—showed that there was "no need" to force manufacturers to preload the app.

- Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia is quoted as framing the app's success as dependent on public support and asserting that the government is prepared to change orders when feedback demands it, positioning the reversal as responsiveness rather than retreat.

- The central implication is that while combating digital fraud is a legitimate policy goal, the manner of implementation—through sweeping technocratic directions with limited consultation—can provoke public resistance and privacy concerns.

- It also underlines how the creation of new regulatory categories like TIUE has effectively expanded executive power over a wide range of private actors in the digital ecosystem, and that sustained scrutiny from civil society and political opposition can still force course-corrections in such governance by directive.

Protest against Bill to revamp Statistical Institute

- More than 1,500 academics have raised strong objections and held protests in Kolkata against a Union government move to repeal the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Act, 1959 and replace it with a new Bill to "revamp" ISI.

- Protesters argue that the proposed legislation will significantly alter how ISI functions and "severely strip" the premier institute of its academic autonomy, which they regard as central to its global reputation in statistics and related fields.

- The piece highlights ISI Kolkata's status: founded by P.C. Mahalanobis, recognised as an Institution of National Importance, and widely seen as India's "gold standard" in statistical research, with major contributions to population studies, economics, mathematics, computer science, and other disciplines.

- With around 1,200 students across centres in India, ISI is portrayed as playing a critical national role in advancing statistical science and training; hence, any change to its governance is viewed as having wide implications beyond a single campus.

- Petitioners have submitted a written appeal to Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation, stating that the Bill "disturbs the spirit of cooperative federalism" and violates the basic spirit of the original agreement between ISI Society and the government.

- They argue that the draft was introduced without meaningful consultation with the ISI community or broader stakeholders, and that there has been no clear explanation of why existing bylaws and governance structures require complete replacement rather than targeted amendment.

- A key substantive concern is that the Bill would empower a new, government-dominated Board of Governors to overrule the Academic Council, which currently has statutory authority over academic matters; this is seen as sharply curtailing internal self-governance.

- The reduction of professors' and faculty representatives' role to that of a largely advisory group is interpreted as a direct threat to academic freedom, since decisions on curriculum, research priorities, and appointments could ultimately be controlled by external nominees.

- This notes that the petitioners also fear disruption to ISI's identity and heritage, as the Bill symbolically and structurally reconfigures an institute that has functioned as an autonomous society since before Independence.

- Overall, the protests frame the Bill not as a neutral governance reform but as a centralising move that may undermine cooperative federalism, weaken peer-driven academic standards, and set a precedent for tighter political control over institutions of national importance.

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PRELIMS CORNER :

1.The term "Auramine" recently seen in news is?

(a) A dormant Volcano

(b) Nuclear Submarine

(c) Malware used in cyberattacks

(d) A banned hazardous dye used as food additive

2.According to the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the expression "Scheduled Areas" means such areas as declared by:

(a) President

(b) Parliament

(c) Governor of a state

(d) State legislature

3.Hayli Gubbi volcano recently seen in news located at?

(a) Ethiopia

(b) Eritrea

(c) Kenya

(d) Tanzania

4.The Changthang plateau of Ladakh region is known for the production of:

(a) Saffron

(b) Pashmina Wool

(c) Golden Silk

(d) Wheat

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE
CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

Man-animal conflict frays India's wildlife conservation principles

- India is facing an intensifying human–wildlife conflict crisis, with wild animals increasingly entering farms and settlements, causing casualties among both people and animals and prompting calls to "contain" wildlife numbers that run counter to conservation ethics.

- It notes that in states such as Assam, Odisha and Karnataka, farmers frequently report wild elephants raiding paddy, sugarcane and banana fields at night, illustrating how habitat loss and fragmentation are pushing large mammals into human-dominated landscapes in search of food and migration routes.

- Official data cited show that 186 elephants were killed by trains across India between 2009-10 and 2020-21, with Assam accounting for the highest casualties, underscoring the deadly intersection between expanding infrastructure and elephant movement corridors.

- This links the conflict to India's wider development trajectory: as infrastructure such as roads and railways expand, natural habitats shrink into isolated patches, forcing wildlife to cross croplands and villages and increasing the probability of encounters and retaliatory killings.

- Expert commentary from conservation organisations warns that within a single human lifetime, human-wildlife conflict, combined with other pressures like habitat degradation and climate change, has pushed many once-common species towards local extinction.

- Agriculture near forests is said to draw elephants and other species into human fields, while villages near tiger reserves face crop raids by herbivores such as nilgai and deer, leading some local communities to label these species as "vermin" and demand lethal control measures.

- This emphasises that such framing erodes the foundational conservation principle of coexistence and risks normalising wide-scale culling or exclusion of wildlife rather than addressing structural drivers like land-use change and poor landscape planning.

- It also highlights the silent crisis facing scavengers like vultures, whose populations in South Asia have collapsed by over 95% in some species due to veterinary drug poisoning, habitat disruption and disturbance at carcass-feeding sites.

- With vulture numbers depleted, rural India experiences rotting carcasses, proliferation of stray dogs, and associated public-health risks, showing how human actions that harm one species can cascade across ecosystems and communities.

- In response to escalating conflicts, the Union government has introduced a National Human–Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan, which seeks to tackle root causes such as habitat fragmentation and disrupted corridors, and to promote data-driven monitoring and mitigation measures.

- This suggests, however, that unless development planning becomes more ecologically sensitive and conservation policies are grounded in coexistence rather than control, man–animal conflicts will continue to undermine India's wildlife conservation principles and long-term biodiversity goals.

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Why is volcanic ash a safety concern for flights?

- India's aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has issued an advisory after the Hayli Gubbi volcano in northern Ethiopia erupted for the first time in about 12,000 years, sending ash plumes up to around 14 km high and drifting across the Red Sea towards West Asia and India.
- Airlines operating on affected routes have been told to steer clear of ash clouds at specific altitudes and regions, monitor advisories continuously, and report any suspected ash-related issues in engines, cabin air, or aircraft systems.
- Volcanic ash clouds are made of tiny, hard particles of glassy rock and minerals plus acidic gases; unlike normal weather clouds they are highly abrasive and electrically conductive, so they can damage aircraft surfaces, windscreens, and sensors, and interfere with radio and navigation equipment.
- When a jet engine flies through an ash cloud, it sucks in the ash along with air; in the high-temperature combustion section, the silicate particles can melt and later re-solidify as a glassy coating on turbine blades and guide vanes, blocking cooling holes and disrupting airflow, which can cause power loss or complete engine flame-out.
- The DGCA advisory therefore stresses precautionary inspections of engines and airframes for aircraft that may have flown close to the ash, and authorises airports to inspect and, if necessary, temporarily close runways and taxiways contaminated by ash deposits, since ash on the ground can reduce braking effectiveness and damage landing gear.
- Indian carriers such as Air India and Akasa have cancelled or diverted several flights to destinations in the Gulf and West Asia (for example, Jeddah, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Dammam) to avoid the ash-affected airspace and allow time for safety checks, accepting short-term disruption to minimise risk.
- To underline the seriousness of ash encounters, the article cites historical incidents: in 1982, a British Airways Boeing 747 near Jakarta lost all four engines after flying through ash from Indonesia's Mount Galunggung, and only after gliding out of the cloud did the crew manage to restart them and land safely.
- In 1989, a KLM Boeing 747 near Alaska's Redoubt volcano similarly suffered the shutdown of all four engines at about 24,000 ft; although the aircraft was eventually recovered and landed, its engines and components were so badly damaged by ash ingestion that they had to be replaced, illustrating the huge safety and economic costs.
- Overall, the central point is that volcanic ash is a critical aviation hazard because it is largely invisible on standard weather radar yet capable of rapidly degrading or disabling multiple aircraft systems, so regulators adopt a "better safe than sorry" posture—rerouting flights, tightening inspections, and relying on satellite-based tracking of ash plumes to keep modern air travel safe.

Malaria parasites corkscrew through skin while finding a way to the liver

- This explains that when a malaria-infected mosquito injects sporozoites into human skin, the parasites do not move in straight lines; instead, they follow tightly wound, corkscrew-like paths to locate and enter tiny blood capillaries that take them to the liver, their next infection stage.
- Earlier physical models treated sporozoite motion as essentially random "Brownian-like" wandering, which could not fully explain how parasites so reliably find vessels despite having to travel hundreds of micrometres through dense tissue.
- New work combining high-resolution imaging, 3D collagen or hydrogel models of skin, and mathematical simulations shows that sporozoites predominantly trace right-handed helical paths whose loop size is comparable to the radius of small blood vessels, making it easier to hook around and follow them.
- The parasite's crescent, banana-shaped body—and, crucially, a subtle structural asymmetry near its front end—creates an uneven distribution of forces as it glides, generating this chiral, right-turning helix rather than a simple curve or straight trajectory.
- Simulations indicate that when the pitch and radius of the helix match the geometry of the tissue and vessels, the parasite can move further in a given time, efficiently sampling space while still being readily captured by capillaries that it loops around.
- Experiments reveal that sporozoites behave differently in 3D tissue-like matrices compared with flat glass surfaces: in realistic 3D environments they almost always adopt right-handed helices, whereas on 2D glass they simply circle, which helps explain why traditional lab assays underestimated their ability to infect liver cells.
- This context-dependent motility suggests that prior in-vitro tests of drugs or vaccines that used only flat substrates may not have accurately captured how parasites move and invade in real tissue, and that 3D models are essential for more predictive experimentation.
- The findings also fit into a broader picture of malaria parasites using chiral motion at multiple stages—for example, forming coordinated vortices in mosquito salivary glands—indicating that handed, rotational dynamics are a conserved strategy for navigating complex biological environments.
- By clarifying the biophysical rules governing sporozoite movement, the research opens possibilities for targeting motility itself: interventions that disrupt the parasite's shape, front-end asymmetry, or interaction with skin's fibrous matrix could, in principle, prevent it from reaching capillaries and establishing infection in the liver.
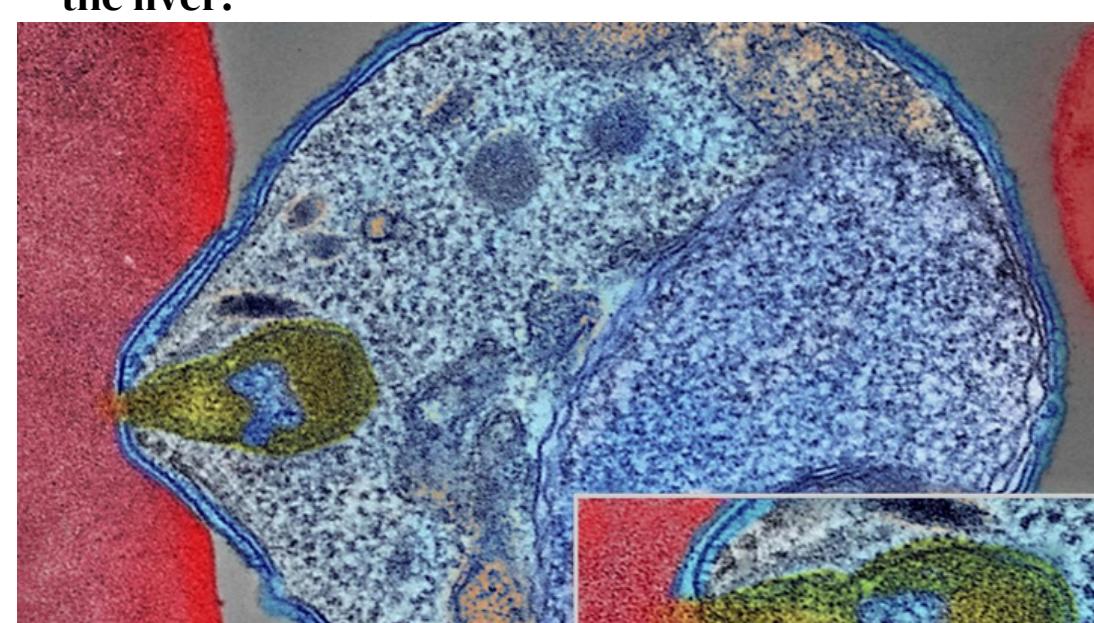
Higher duties on cigarettes will be shared with States: FM

- This reports Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's clarification in Lok Sabha that the proposed higher duties on cigarettes under the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025 are excise duties, not a new cess, and therefore will form part of the divisible tax pool of which 41% is shared with States.

- She stresses that the move is meant to maintain the current overall tax burden on cigarettes once the GST compensation cess is withdrawn, not to increase the incidence beyond present levels; in her words, "not even a single paisa of tax has been increased" compared to today's combined GST-plus-cess structure.

- Under GST, cigarettes and other tobacco products currently attract 28% GST plus a substantial compensation cess; central excise on these items had earlier been cut to a "nominal" level to make room for the cess, which finances loans taken to compensate States for GST-related revenue losses and is due to end in 2026.

- Once the cess ends, the same high tax incidence would drop sharply if no other levy replaced it because GST law caps the rate at 40%, so the new excise duty is designed to prevent cigarettes from becoming cheaper and to preserve public-health disincentives on tobacco consumption.

- Responding to MPs' concerns that the higher excise would push up prices and hurt workers in the tobacco value chain, Sitharaman argues that the Bill simply restores the pre-GST excise framework on tobacco and channels part of the revenue back to States, rather than imposing an extra burden on consumers.

- She also points out that low pre-GST tax rates on some tobacco products were raised regularly before 2017, and that the Centre has run awareness campaigns on the health harms of tobacco while simultaneously trying to diversify farmers away from the crop.

- The Minister cites the National Agricultural Development Scheme and other diversification programmes under which tobacco-growing States such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Odisha and West Bengal have been encouraged to shift land to alternative crops over the past decade.

- Between 2018 and 2022, she notes, over 1.12 lakh acres of land were reported to have moved from tobacco cultivation to other crops, a statistic used in the debate to argue that fiscal and policy measures are gradually reducing dependence on tobacco farming.

- The Lok Sabha passed the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025 on Wednesday.

Sinking rupee awaits clarity on trade deal

- This describes a fresh fall in the rupee, which has depreciated to around ₹90.15 per U.S. dollar, breaching the psychologically important 90-level and marking a new all-time low; this slide is linked to uncertainty over the yet-to-be-finalised India–U.S. trade deal and the way domestic regulators are handling the currency.

- Trading on the day saw the rupee open just beyond 90, briefly strengthen to about 90.3, and then weaken again to close near the record low, showing intraday volatility but no decisive support level emerging from either markets or the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- Market participants interpret the fall as a reaction to mixed signals from the government on the trade agreement: expectations had been built up that a deal was imminent, but continued delays and lack of clarity on tariff cuts have eroded investor confidence and encouraged dollar demand from importers.

- This stresses that a weaker rupee makes every dollar of foreign earnings or inflows worth more in local terms, benefiting exporters and foreign investors repatriating profits, but it also raises the domestic price of imports, especially for Indian consumers buying foreign goods or travelling abroad.

- Analysts cited argue that while the direct effect on consumer inflation from this specific bout of depreciation may be modest, the broader concern is that prolonged weakness could pass through to higher prices over time and worsen the trade deficit if export volumes do not respond positively.

- Commentary in the piece notes that the RBI has intervened heavily in recent months—selling large amounts of dollars from its reserves and using forwards—to smooth volatility, yet it has allowed the exchange rate to adjust rather than defend any particular level, which some see as a shift to a more hands-off stance compared with the previous governor.

- Economists quoted suggest that, between FY23 and FY25, average monthly interventions have been in the range of $8–10 billion, but even sizeable sales have not prevented a cumulative rupee depreciation of more than 4–5% up to November, highlighting the limits of central-bank defence when fundamentals and sentiment are weak.

- This also captures differing views on whether a cheaper currency is desirable: some bankers argue that a somewhat undervalued rupee could support exports in the face of U.S. tariff threats, while others caution that rapid, uncertainty-driven falls—as opposed to gradual, competitiveness-driven moves—damage confidence and may deter foreign investment.

- Forward-looking assessments in the piece suggest that if clarity emerges on the India–U.S. trade deal and global risk sentiment stabilises, the rupee could strengthen back towards about 88–89 per dollar; however, if negotiations drag on or tariffs remain unresolved, the currency may test deeper lows, potentially around 92.5 per dollar.

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U.S., Russia nd 'no compromise' on territory after talks on Ukraine

- High-stakes talks in Moscow between Russian President Vladimir Putin and a U.S. delegation led by Jared Kushner and special envoy Steve Witkoff have failed to produce a breakthrough, with the Kremlin saying there is "no compromise" on the core issue of territory.
- Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov says some U.S. proposals remain "open for discussion", but many formulations are unacceptable to Moscow, and Russia maintains its demand that Kyiv surrender territories it claims as its own and rejects any foreign monitoring force in Ukraine.
- The current U.S. plan is a revised version of an earlier 28-point proposal that drew heavy criticism in Ukraine and Europe for appearing too close to Russian positions; revisions were meant to address those fears, yet Moscow still views key elements negatively.
- Talks are portrayed as part of a new round of "personalised" Trump-era diplomacy, with Kushner's involvement raising questions about parallel channels to traditional U.S. foreign-policy institutions and about whose interests the plan best reflects.
- Donald Trump publicly characterises the situation as "difficult and messy", signalling that a quick end to the nearly four-year war is unlikely and that any settlement will demand painful concessions from all sides.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy insists that any deal must bring a lasting end to the war, not merely a pause before Russia resumes hostilities, and emphasises that nothing can be decided about Ukraine's future without Ukraine at the table.
- This underscores enduring gaps on three axes: control over occupied territory, future security guarantees and NATO prospects for Ukraine, and the presence or absence of international forces—gaps that make even a ceasefire framework hard to agree.
- Overall, this suggests that while channels between Washington and Moscow are active and some technical points see convergence, entrenched political red lines—especially over land and long-term security architecture—still block meaningful progress towards peace.
- Belgium has rejected an EU proposal to use profits from frozen Russian central-bank assets as collateral for a large "reparations loan" to Ukraine, warning of serious financial, economic and legal risks.
- Ukraine is estimated to need around 150 billion dollars (roughly 135–140 billion euros) for budget and military support in 2026–27; the European Commission has drafted a scheme under which EU states would lend about 140 billion euros to Kyiv, backed by cash balances from the immobilised Russian assets.
- Belgium also fears reputational damage to its financial centre and warns that the EU is downplaying the fact that one member state would shoulder disproportionate risks while others benefit from demonstrating solidarity with Ukraine.

Sri Lanka braces for tough recovery after cyclone

- Sri Lanka is confronting one of its worst natural disasters since the 2004 tsunami, as the full scale of destruction from Cyclone Ditwah emerges, with around 479 confirmed deaths so far and fears that the toll could rise as rescue teams uncover more bodies in landslides and mud.
- A UN-backed Rapid Needs Assessment flags very high risks of food insecurity, damaged livelihoods and widespread destruction of critical infrastructure, noting that all 25 districts have suffered impacts, though the central hill districts and parts of Kandy, Badulla and Nuwara Eliya appear among the worst hit.
- Many roads, bridges and hill tracks remain blocked or washed away, leaving some villages still inaccessible; assessment teams report that over 65,000 people are displaced, 118 bridges damaged and basic services like power and communications disrupted across large areas.
- The paddy-growing north-central and eastern regions escaped the cyclone's eye at the crucial sowing stage, but vegetable farms and smallholder plots in many upland and peri-urban zones have been destroyed, removing a key source of domestic food supply for months to come.
- Farmer organisations quoted warn that Sri Lanka, which usually balances regional shortages by moving produce between provinces, now faces simultaneous crop damage across multiple zones, so urban centres like Colombo are already seeing sharp price spikes—for example, carrots reportedly touching about LKR 3,000 per 10 kg.
- Health and social-sector assessments highlight that several rural hospitals and primary health centres are flooded or cut off, complicating trauma care and disease surveillance; civil-society groups stress the need for better coordination and early-warning systems, and some also criticise the administration for slow communication to communities before the storm.
- Local volunteers and community-based organisations are filling gaps in the state response, running soup kitchens, temporary shelters and tracing services for missing people, but they say resources are stretched and long-term psychosocial support will be essential given the scale of bereavement and displacement.
- International aid is beginning to flow in: India, Pakistan, the UAE and other countries have rushed humanitarian supplies and specialist teams, with India's "Operation Sagar Bandhu" providing naval and air assets, medical teams and field hospitals to assist Sri Lankan authorities.
- UN agencies such as WFP and WHO are supporting the government's rapid-needs assessments and providing food, water, generators and emergency health funding, while urging donors to scale up assistance because more than 1.5 million people now face moderate to high food insecurity.
- Economists and disaster-management experts quoted in the article warn that recovery will be protracted and politically demanding: Sri Lanka was only starting to emerge from a severe economic and debt crisis, and now faces billions of rupees of reconstruction costs for housing, roads, irrigation and livelihoods.
- Without sustained international financing and a coherent national plan that links relief to climate-resilient rebuilding—especially in fragile hill slopes and river basins—the country risks repeated disasters and deeper social strain in the coming years.

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Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans d

Auramine O – It is a synthetic yellow dye, produced from compounds such as dimethylaniline and formaldehyde. The dye appears as yellow flakes or powder and dissolves easily when mixed with solvents. Used in – Industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, etc. Banned for food use – It is bright in colour, easily available and low-cost, yet remains unapproved for use as a food additive. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) – classifies auramine as a substance that is possibly carcinogenic to humans. Commonly found in – Sweets, turmeric powder, and street food snacks, gives a bright yellow hue that looks more appealing to consumers.


Q2. Ans a

Article 244 in Part X of the Constitution of India envisages a special system of administration for certain areas designated as 'Scheduled Areas' and 'Tribal Areas'. In the Constitution of India, the expression "Scheduled Areas" means such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas. The President is empowered to declare an area to be a scheduled area. He can also increase or decrease its area, alter its boundary lines, rescind such designation or make fresh orders for such re designation on an area in consultation with the Governor of the State concerned. Recently, the Supreme Court has held that Parliamentary or State law wouldn't apply to Scheduled Areas only if the Governor notifies so.

Q3. Ans a

Ethiopia's Hayli Gubbi volcano , dormant for over 12,000 years, erupted, sending a massive ash cloud across the Red Sea and South Asia. The thick ash cloud reached India, resulting in the diversion of several flights. Type and Location: Hayli Gubbi is a shield volcano in Afar, Ethiopia, part of the Erta Ale Range. Situated at the edge of the East African Rift, where the African and Arabian plates are slowly diverging. Shield volcanoes are broad, gently sloping, formed by thin, fluid lava flows. Eruptions are usually less explosive, with lava spreading wide like a warrior's shield.
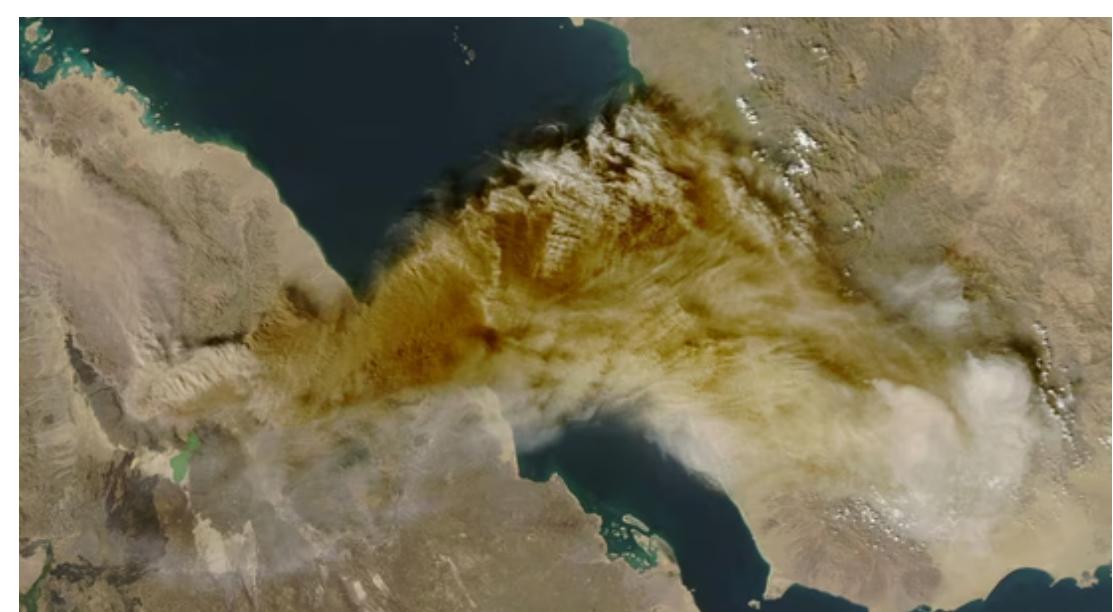
Q4. Ans b

The Changthang plateau of the Ladakh region is primarily known for the production of Pashmina wool. This fine cashmere wool is sourced from the undercoat of a specific breed of goat known as the Changthangi or Changra goat, which is native to the high-altitude region. The local nomadic community, the Changpa tribe, are semi-nomadic pastoralists who have herded these goats, along with sheep and yaks, for centuries. Their livelihood and the regional economy are largely dependent on the trade of this world-class fiber.

Case Study:

Indonesia's floods were made worse by loss of forests

The deadly flooding that has killed hundreds in Indonesia was largely the result of monsoon rains and a rare tropical storm. But something else may have played a role: deforestation. Environmentalists, experts and even Indonesia's government have pointed to the role forest loss played in flash flooding and landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages and stranded residents on roofs. Indonesia is regularly among the countries in the world with the largest annual forest loss. Mining, plantations and fires have caused the clearance of large tracts of the country's lush rainforest over recent decades. In 2024, over 240,000 hectares of primary forest was lost, and that was less than the year before, according to conservation start-up The Tree Map's Nusantara Atlas project. Indonesia's forests are also home to enormous biodiversity and some of the world's most threatened species, including orangutans. And in the wake of the flooding, even the country's president urged action. "We must truly prevent deforestation and forest destruction," President Prabowo Subianto said on Friday. The floods carried not only collapsed hillsides and torrents of mud, but also timber that fuelled speculation about the link between deforestation and the disaster.

Navy Day in India is celebrated on 4 December every year to recognize the achievements of the Indian Navy and its role in the country. 4 December was chosen as on that day in 1971, during Operation Trident, the Indian Navy sank four Pakistani vessels including PNS Khaibar, defeating the Pakistani Navy. Various events take place during Navy Week with the finale on Navy Day. On this day the warships and aircraft of the Indian Navy are open to visitors such as school children.
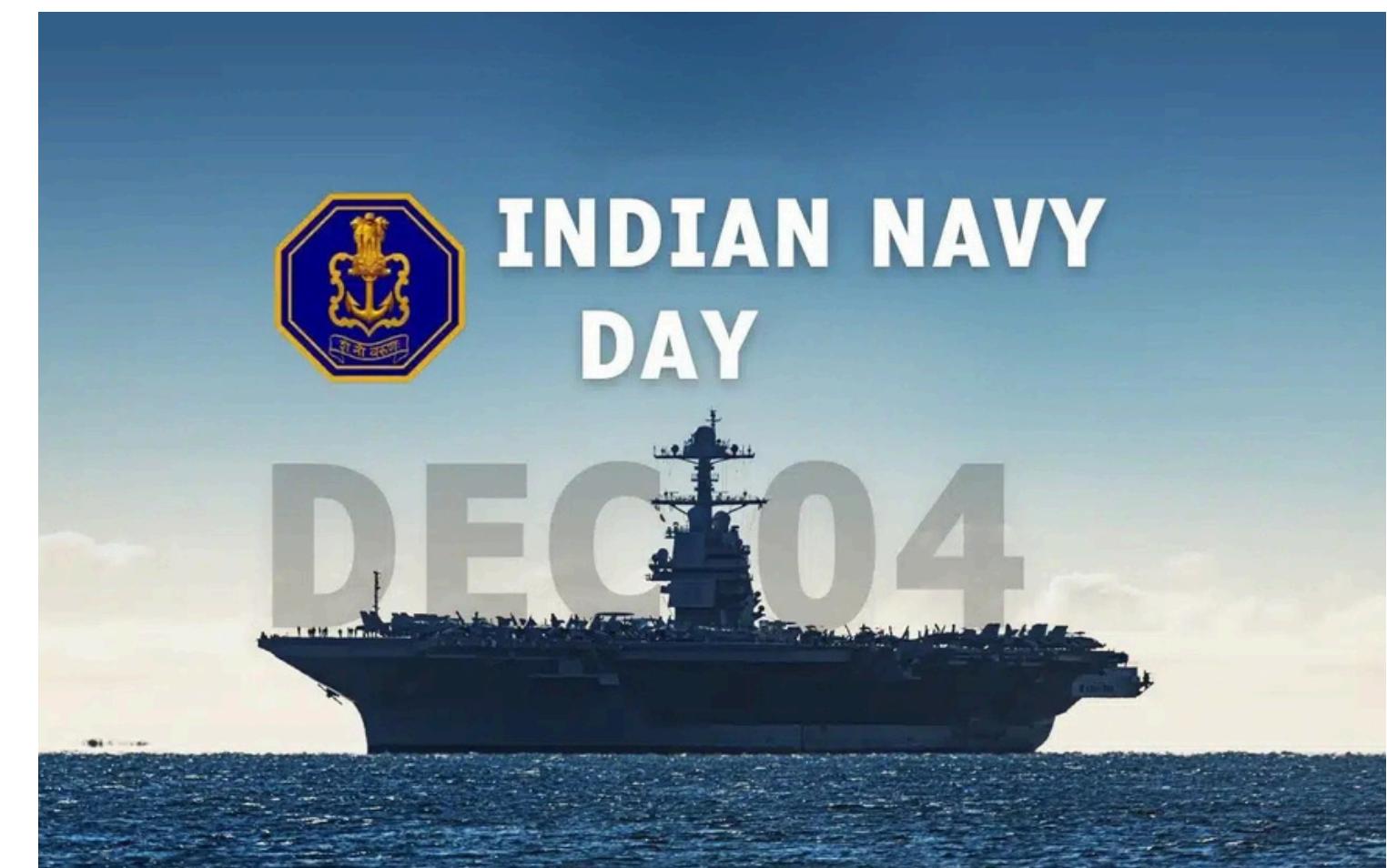
IndiGo passengers faced chaos on Wednesday as the airline cancelled at least 200 flights and delayed several others by up to 12 hours, triggered by skewed pilot scheduling and cabin crew no-shows in Mumbai, prompting an official apology. IndiGo chaos sends domestic airfares soaring to 1.3 lakh. The crisis was triggered by the full implementation of the rest and duty norms for pilots from November 1, which was delayed by the government by a year to help airlines plan their crew requirement as they had warned of widespread flight cancellations.

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- Salary: ₹21,700 – ₹69,100 (Level-3)
- Last Date: 31 December 2025

No. of Vacancies **25,487**

IOCL Refinery Apprentice Recruitment 2025
- Eligibility: 12th / ITI / Diploma / Graduate
- Selection: Merit Based (No Exam)
- Last Date: 18 December 2025

No. of Vacancies **2575**

SBI SO Recruitment 2025
- Eligibility: Graduation / Post Graduate
- Salary: ₹4 Lakhs – ₹45 Lakhs CTC
- Last Date: 23 December 2025

No. of Vacancies **996**

IB MTS Recruitment 2025
- Post: Multi-Tasking Staff (General)
- Eligibility: 10th Pass
- Salary: Level-1 (₹18,000 – ₹56,900) + 20% SSA
- Last Date: 14 December 2025 (23:59 hrs)

No. of Vacancies **362**

DVC Executive Trainee Recruitment 2025
- Eligibility: B.E./B.Tech + GATE 2025
- Salary: Level 10 (₹56,100+)
- Last Date: 23 December 2025

No. of Vacancies **54**

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Steve Jobs