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7 Kerala districts record over 70% voter turnout

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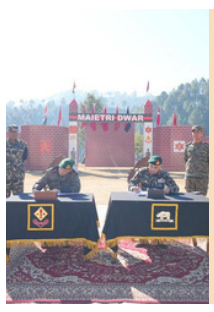

SURYAKIRAN-XIX: India-Nepal Army exercise concludes in Uttarakhand

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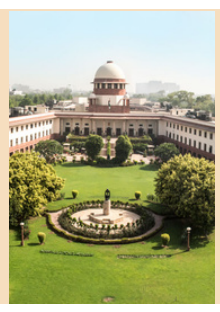

Top court criticises Election Commission's 'mechanical' answers to SIR-related issues

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Citizenship under CAA only after scrutiny: SC

Supreme Court has held that refugees seeking Indian citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) will get citizenship only after individual scrutiny of their claims, and until then they cannot be treated as citizens for purposes like entry in the electoral rolls. The Court clarified that the CAA only creates a pathway and "enforceable rights" to apply for Indian citizenship; it does not automatically confer citizenship on any category of migrants.

Each applicant must first satisfy statutory conditions (such as eligibility, documentation, and security checks) and obtain a formal certificate of registration or naturalisation before being recognised as an Indian citizen. Consequently, persons who have only applied under Section 6B of the Citizenship Act, as amended by the CAA, cannot be included in electoral rolls or treated as voters until their applications are finally approved. The case arose from a petition filed by NGO Atmadeep concerning persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan living in West Bengal, many of whom had applied for CAA citizenship but had not yet received certificates. The petition was triggered by the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, where many such migrants feared exclusion from voter lists because their CAA applications were still pending and their online acknowledgement receipts were not being treated as proof of citizenship. The petitioners argued that delay in issuing citizenship certificates, combined with refusal to recognise acknowledgement receipts during SIR, created a "serious constitutional crisis" by exposing already-recognised persecuted minorities to the risk of statelessness, social exclusion, and disenfranchisement.

Russian support personnel around the Soyuz MS-27 space capsule shortly after it landed in a remote area near the town of Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, with Expedition 73 NASA astronaut Jonny Kim, and Roscosmos cosmonauts Sergey Ryzhikov, and Alexey Zubritsky aboard

IndiGo will slash 400 to 500 flights to fully stabilise its daily schedule, nearly double the number of cuts the government ordered after the airline's failure to allocate enough pilots after the new night-flying rules crippled its operations and led to the cancellation of hundreds of flights over the past week. The airline will now operate 1,800 to 1,900 flights daily instead of 2,300 it was operating earlier.

7 Kerala districts record over 70% voter turnout

- **Seven southern Kerala districts recorded an overall voter turnout of 70.9% in the first phase of the 2025 local body elections, with voting reported as largely peaceful and well-managed by the State Election Commission (SEC).**

Scale and distribution of turnout

- **Polling was held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam, covering nearly 93 lakh of the total 1.32 crore voters in Kerala's local bodies.**
- **The provisional district-wise turnout figures were: Thiruvananthapuram 67.4%, Kollam 70.36%, Pathanamthitta 66.78%, Alappuzha 73.76%, Kottayam 70.94%, Idukki 71.77% and Ernakulam 74.58%, with late-evening updates expected to push the overall figure slightly higher.**

District performance and patterns

- **Ernakulam emerged with the highest turnout, reflecting strong urban and semi-urban mobilisation, while Pathanamthitta and Thiruvananthapuram remained at the lower end, indicating relatively weaker participation there.**
- **Compared with the 2020 local body polls, when these seven districts together had a turnout of about 73.85%, the current figures suggest a modest dip, hinting at either voter fatigue, reduced mobilisation, or local factors dampening enthusiasm in some areas.**

Conduct and logistics of polling

- **Polling was held from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and all voters who were in the queue at closing time were allowed to cast their votes, which helped maintain the high participation rate despite minor delays.**
- **The SEC described the first phase as peaceful, crediting the cooperation of voters, political parties, and security agencies; repolling was ordered only in a limited number of wards (such as Mannanchery in Alappuzha) due to technical issues with voting machines.**

Political and electoral significance

- **Over 12,000 local body wards across the state are going to polls in two phases, and this 70.9% turnout in the first phase sets a relatively strong baseline for the second phase, which will cover northern districts.**
- **High but slightly reduced turnout compared to 2020 suggests that while grassroots political engagement in Kerala remains robust, parties may need to recalibrate their mobilisation strategies ahead of the second phase and the 2026 Assembly elections, for which these local polls are widely seen as a "semi-final".**

SURYAKIRAN-XIX: India-Nepal Army exercise concludes in Uttarakhand

- **19th edition of the India–Nepal joint military exercise, SURYAKIRAN-XIX, has concluded at Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand, after an intensive combined training cycle focused on high-intensity counter-terrorism operations and interoperability between the two armies.**

Nature and scope of the exercise

- **SURYAKIRAN-XIX was conducted at the Foreign Training Node in Pithoragarh, with battalion-level contingents from both the Indian and Nepal Armies training together over nearly two weeks in mountainous terrain.**

Tactical focus and UN mandate linkage

- **The validation phase showcased joint tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for counter-terrorism operations mandated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, emphasising operations in complex, high-threat environments.**
- **Troops rehearsed intelligence-based surgical missions, including room intervention, hostage rescue, and area domination in difficult terrain, mirroring realistic scenarios likely to be encountered in regional counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism contexts.**

Use of advanced technologies

- **The exercise featured a suite of cutting-edge capabilities such as ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) drones, precision-targeting systems, advanced day–night weapon sights, and AI-enabled surveillance feeds integrated into operational and logistics platforms.**
- **These technologies were combined with secure battlefield communication networks to enable real-time information-sharing and synchronised mission planning from battalion down to small-team level, reinforcing network-centric warfare skills in both forces.**

Interoperability and joint operations

- **The drills underscored seamless interoperability, with mixed teams from India and Nepal executing coordinated air-ground and multi-axis operations, including aerial insertion and rapid-response missions in a simulated counter-terrorism environment.**
- **Emphasis on standardised procedures, shared communication protocols and common operating pictures is intended to ensure that the two armies can operate together swiftly during real crises, such as cross-border terrorism, disaster relief or UN peacekeeping deployments.**

Strategic and diplomatic significance

- **As a symbolic conclusion, the two DGMOs planted a "Tree of Friendship", highlighting the exercise as not only a tactical training event but also an instrument for reaffirming the close military-to-military ties and people-to-people bonds between India and Nepal.**
- **Regular iterations of SURYAKIRAN signal continuity in defence cooperation despite periodic political frictions, anchoring Nepal within India's security architecture and contributing to stability along the Himalayan frontier and in broader regional security frameworks.**

Aditya-L1 joins global effort revealing why the 2024 solar storm behaved unusually

- **India's Aditya-L1 spacecraft has helped explain why the powerful May 2024 "Gannon's storm" solar event behaved in an unusually intense way, by revealing a gigantic region of magnetic reconnection inside colliding solar eruptions.**

What made the 2024 storm unusual

- **The May 2024 storm was driven by a series of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) – huge bubbles of hot plasma and magnetic field – that severely disturbed Earth's space environment, threatening satellites, communication systems, GPS and power grids.**
- **Unlike typical events where a single CME's "magnetic rope" interacts with Earth's magnetic shield, this storm involved two CMEs that collided and compressed each other en route to Earth, setting up highly unusual magnetic conditions.**

Discovery of giant magnetic reconnection

- **Scientists found that the collision caused the magnetic field lines inside one CME to snap and rejoin in new patterns, a process known as magnetic reconnection, which suddenly reversed the CME's magnetic field direction.**
- **The reconnection region was enormous, about 1.3 million km across – nearly 100 times Earth's diameter – making it the largest magnetic breakup and rejoining ever observed inside a CME and directly explaining the storm's exceptional strength.**

Role of Aditya-L1 and international collaboration

- **Aditya-L1, India's first dedicated solar observatory at the Sun–Earth L1 point, supplied high-precision magnetic field measurements within the CME, which were combined with data from six U.S. spacecraft (NASA's Wind, ACE, THEMIS-C, STEREO-A, MMS and the NOAA–NASA DSCOVR mission).**
- **This multi-satellite, multi-vantage observation campaign allowed scientists to map the reconnection zone in 3D and to link the sudden field reversal to rapid particle acceleration seen across the fleet, giving a coherent physical picture of the storm.**

Scientific and practical implications

- **The result reshapes understanding of how CMEs evolve as they travel through interplanetary space, showing that large-scale reconnection inside the ejecta can dramatically amplify their impact on Earth beyond what near-Sun observations alone would predict.**
- **Better modelling of such internal CME dynamics, aided by missions like Aditya-L1, is expected to improve space-weather forecasting and help protect critical technological infrastructure from future extreme solar storms.**

Top court criticises Election Commission's 'mechanical' answers to SIR-related issues

- **Supreme Court strongly criticised the Election Commission of India (ECI) for giving "mechanical" responses to real, ground-level difficulties faced by voters and officials during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.**

Court's criticism of the Election Commission

- **Chief Justice Surya Kant remarked that whenever human problems are raised, the ECI replies with stock percentages like "99.27% forms digitised," which do not address individual hardships, calling these answers "mechanical and cyclostyled."**
- **The bench expressed frustration that despite repeated hearings, the Commission continued to rely on abstract statistics instead of presenting concrete solutions or flexible timelines for those struggling to complete forms.**

Issues raised: migrant workers and pending forms

- **One petition highlighted that many people, especially migrant workers and those in hilly or remote regions of Tamil Nadu, were away on seasonal work or pilgrimages and could not submit SIR forms within the deadline, risking disenfranchisement.**
- **Another application noted that around 56 lakh people in Tamil Nadu, and more than 20 lakh voters in Kerala, still had to submit enumeration forms, prompting requests for extension of time to avoid large-scale exclusion from the rolls.**

Court's directions and demands for flexibility

- **The Court took note that the ECI had already extended the deadline in Kerala once, but petitioners argued that more time was needed since many students, migrants and employees would only return after Christmas or Pongal.**
- **While not halting SIR, the bench pressed the Commission to adopt a problem-solving approach, consider further extensions where justified, and file updated status reports so that the process does not become a mere formality detached from ground realities.**
- **The Court referenced reports of stress and threats faced by BLOs, particularly in states like West Bengal, and asked the ECI to treat these as serious issues rather than dismiss them as "political narratives," warning that inaction could lead to "anarchy."**

Broader implications for electoral governance

- **The clash underscores a tension between the Court's insistence on citizen-centric implementation of SIR and the ECI's reliance on aggregate metrics to demonstrate compliance, raising questions about institutional responsiveness in large-scale electoral exercises.**
- **The outcome of these hearings will shape how SIR 2.0 is managed across states, influencing timelines, protections for field staff, and the safeguards available to migrants and other vulnerable groups to ensure their continued presence on electoral rolls.**

PRELIMS CORNER :

1.He was a saint&social reformer of Medieval India who founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism.He popularised 'Sankirtan' or public singing of God's name and opposed the inequalities of the caste system. Which one of the following personalities is described above?

(a) Vallabhacharya

(b) Vidyaranya

(c) Nimbarka

(d) Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

2.The Tehran Convention, 2006 is an overarching legal instrument for the environmental protection of which one of the following water bodies?

(a) Red Sea

(b) South China Sea

(c) Caspian Sea

(d) Arabian Sea

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

(a) Ethiopia

(b) Eritrea

(c) Kenya

(d) Tanzania

4.Optical fibre cables work on the principle of:

(a) Doppler Effect

(b) Photoelectric Effect

(c) Quantum Tunnelling

(d) Total Internal Reflection

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

Ensure free content access for LLMs, says working paper

- **A government working paper has proposed that large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT should have default, permission-free access to all lawfully and publicly available online content for training, with compensation to creators handled through a central copyright society rather than opt-out controls by individual publishers.**

Core proposal on content access

- **The paper, prepared by a DPIIT-appointed committee, suggests a "permission-free" regime where AI developers can freely crawl and mine publicly available web content, including behind registration but not paywalls, without needing prior licences from each rights holder.**
- **To address copyright concerns, it recommends a compulsory, blanket licensing system under which AI firms pay royalties into a central non-profit copyright society that represents different categories of works and distributes payments to both members and registered non-members.**

No opt-out for publishers and creators

- **The scheme explicitly rejects an opt-out model: copyright owners would not be allowed to prevent their works from being used for AI training, provided the content is lawfully accessible online, on the ground that opt-outs are hard to enforce at scale and could privilege large players.**
- **Instead, creators who want remuneration would have to register their works with the copyright society to receive a share of royalties, while those who do not register would still see their content mined but may not receive payments.**

Royalty design and comparison with existing regimes

- **Royalty rates would be fixed by a government-appointed committee, likely as a flat percentage of AI-related revenues, and applied uniformly across AI firms; this is likened to "compulsory licensing" used for music and radio broadcasting in India, where collective bodies collect and distribute fees.**
- **The working paper argues that such a model could eliminate allegations of "improper" access to data by legally blessing text-and-data mining for AI, while avoiding case-by-case negotiations that favour large tech platforms and big publishers.**

Stakeholder reactions and tensions

- **Nasscom, which was represented on the committee, dissented on the royalty aspect, warning that mandatory payments risk becoming a "tax on innovation" and that small AI start-ups may find the fee structure burdensome compared with global competitors.**
- **On the other side, the Digital News Publishers Association and other media groups, some of whom are already suing OpenAI for copyright infringement in Indian courts, have been demanding strong remuneration rules and may oppose any arrangement that yields only modest flat royalties.**

Economic and legal implications

- **The paper notes that a compulsory licence with free crawling would dramatically lower legal risk for AI developers but might reduce the bargaining power of individual creators, especially if only a few AI companies are profitable enough to pay meaningful royalties.**
- **If adopted after the 30-day consultation, India would become one of the first countries to establish a statutory, government-rate-set AI training licence, shaping global debates on how to balance open data for AI with sustainable incentives for human creativity.**

Why India is not 'dumping' rice in the US as Trump says

India is not "dumping" rice in the US market, contrary to President Donald Trump's allegation, because US rice imports from India are small, consist mainly of premium basmati, and do not undercut US producers; it also explains why this issue is unlikely to derail broader India–US trade talks that have begun in parallel.

Structure of US rice market and India's share

- **The US is a modest rice producer (around 7.05 million tonnes in 2024–25) but exports more rice than it imports, indicating that it is broadly competitive rather than threatened by foreign supplies.**
- **India is the world's largest rice producer (about 150 million tonnes) and exporter, yet the US accounts for only about 2–3% of India's total rice exports; most Indian shipments go to West Asian markets such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and the UAE.**

Nature of Indian rice exports to the US

- **Indian exports to the US are dominated by high-priced basmati and certain specialty non-basmati varieties that target diaspora and niche consumers, rather than bulk, low-cost varieties that compete with American long-grain rice.**
- **For 2024–25, India's basmati exports were about 60.65 lakh tonnes worth nearly 6 billion dollars, out of which the US bought roughly 2.74 lakh tonnes (under 5% of the total), underscoring that the US is a small, premium market segment.**

Why "dumping" allegation is weak

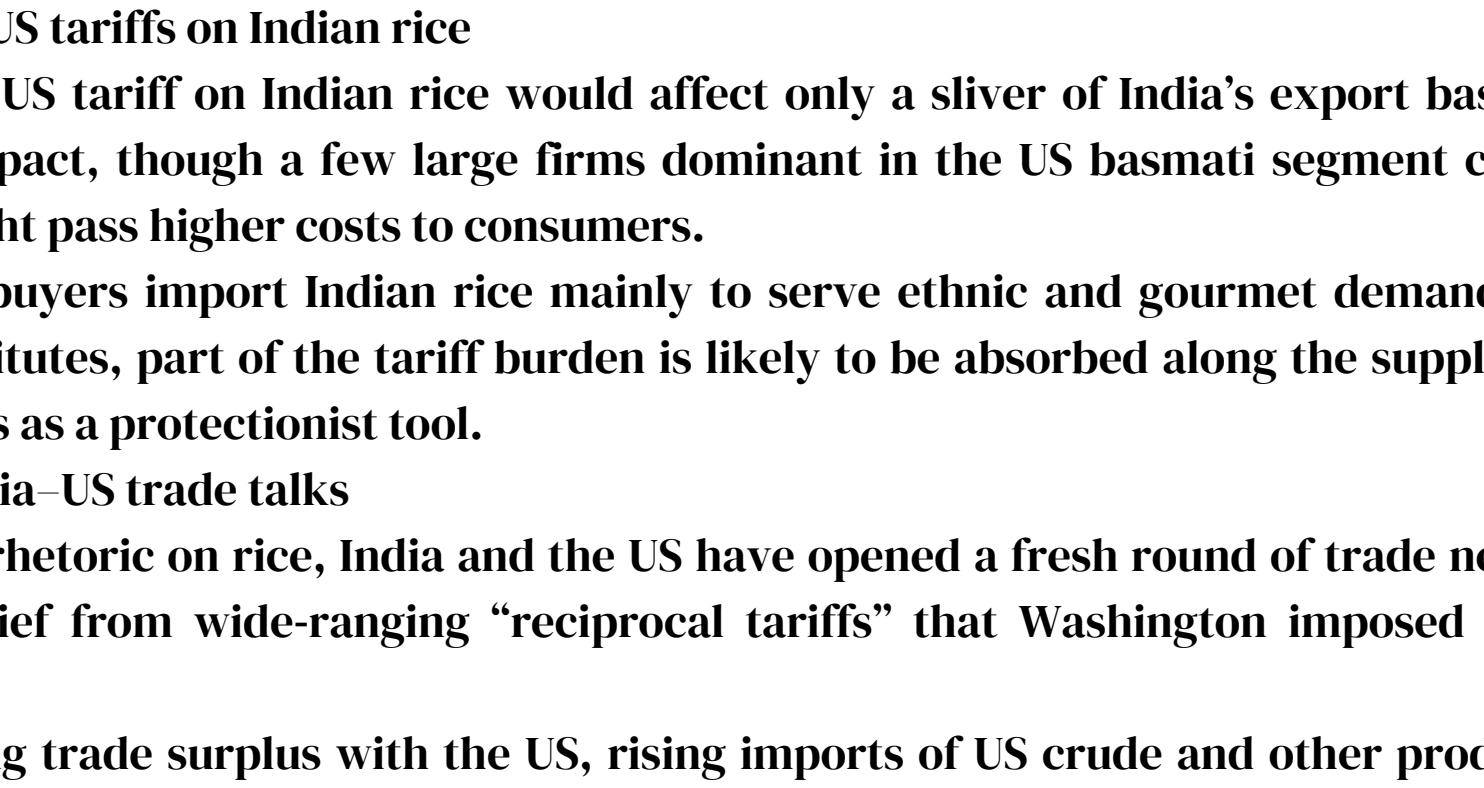
- **Under trade law, dumping requires exporters to sell below cost or below the price charged in their home market; Indian exporters sell basmati in the US at higher prices than in many other destinations, making the accusation economically implausible.**
- **Since the US actually exports more rice than it imports and Indian volumes are tiny, there is little evidence that Indian shipments are depressing US farmgate prices or displacing domestic rice in mainstream supermarkets.**

Possible impact of US tariffs on Indian rice

- **Any additional US tariff on Indian rice would affect only a sliver of India's export basket, with limited macro-level impact, though a few large firms dominant in the US basmati segment could see reduced margins or might pass higher costs to consumers.**
- **Given that US buyers import Indian rice mainly to serve ethnic and gourmet demand that lacks close domestic substitutes, part of the tariff burden is likely to be absorbed along the supply chain, reducing its effectiveness as a protectionist tool.**

Link to ongoing India–US trade talks

- **Parallel to the rhetoric on rice, India and the US have opened a fresh round of trade negotiations where India seeks relief from wide-ranging "reciprocal tariffs" that Washington imposed earlier on Indian goods.**
- **India's shrinking trade surplus with the US, rising imports of US crude and other products, and mutual interest in stabilising economic ties give New Delhi reason to expect some breakthroughs, making it likely that rice will be treated as a bargaining chip rather than a structural obstacle.**



Microsoft's $17.5 billion bet on India's AI future

Microsoft will invest 17.5 billion dollars in India between 2026 and 2029, its largest commitment in Asia, to accelerate cloud and AI infrastructure, bolster "sovereign" digital capabilities and massively expand AI-related skilling programmes across the country.

Scale, timeline and context of the investment

- **The 17.5-billion-dollar outlay comes on top of a 3-billion-dollar India investment announced in January 2025, which Microsoft plans to fully deploy by end-2026, signalling a multi-year, 20-billion-plus capital push into India's digital ecosystem.**
- **The announcement followed Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the India AI tour, where Nadella called India a "frontier AI nation" and said the country stands at a pivotal point in its AI trajectory.**

Strategic objectives: infrastructure, skills, sovereignty

- **A major share of the new funds will build hyperscale cloud and AI infrastructure, including the India South Central cloud region in Hyderabad, slated to go live in mid-2026 as Microsoft's largest Indian data-centre region with three availability zones.**
- **The company aims to deepen "sovereign-ready" capabilities by offering cloud solutions aligned with India's data-protection and localisation rules, supporting secure AI adoption in sensitive sectors such as government, financial services and health.**

Skilling and employment impacts

- **Microsoft will expand its ADVANTA(I)GE India initiative and related programmes to train tens of millions of Indians in AI and digital skills by 2030, having already trained over 5.6 million people since early 2025 in AI fundamentals and related competencies.**
- **The investment also underpins Microsoft's existing workforce of more than 22,000 employees spread across Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Gurugram, Noida and other cities, where teams work on AI model development, engineering, cloud operations and product innovation for global markets.**

India's positioning and government narrative

- **Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw framed the deal as evidence that India is emerging as a trusted, innovation-driven technology partner, arguing that the Microsoft partnership will help the country leap from "digital public infrastructure" (like UPI) to "AI public infrastructure."**
- **For the government, the investment is both a geopolitical and economic signal: it anchors a leading US tech firm more deeply in India's ecosystem, supports broad-based AI diffusion at "population scale," and strengthens the country's case as a hub for responsible, sovereign AI development.**

RBI Governor asks banks to cut intermediation costs

Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra has urged commercial banks to lower their "intermediation costs" and fully pass on the cumulative 125-basis-point repo rate cut to borrowers, arguing that cheaper funding and technology adoption must translate into more efficient, affordable banking services.

What intermediation cost means and why it matters

- **Intermediation cost is the overall cost of running the banking business—mobilising deposits, extending loans, managing risks, operating branches and digital channels, paying staff, complying with regulations and maintaining IT infrastructure.**
- **Lower intermediation costs allow banks to offer better deposit rates and lower lending rates, thereby supporting credit growth, sustainable economic expansion and deeper financial inclusion.**

Link with recent repo-rate cuts and transmission

- **Since February 2025, the RBI has cut the policy repo rate by a total of 125 basis points to 5.25%, including a 25-basis-point cut in the latest policy, and expects banks to mirror this easing in their lending benchmarks.**
- **Following the cut, many banks have started reducing Marginal Cost of Funds-based Lending Rates (MCLR), repo-linked lending rates and other external benchmark rates, which should gradually lower EMIs or shorten loan tenures for eligible retail and MSME borrowers.**

Current credit trends and balance-sheet health

- **Credit offtake grew sequentially to 11.1% in October 2025 from 10.2% in September, driven by festive-season demand and strong growth in automobile, unsecured personal and consumer-durable loans, although year-on-year non-food credit growth has moderated slightly compared with 2024.**
- **The Governor noted that the banking sector's asset quality, capital buffers and profitability have improved, but warned banks against complacency and urged them to remain vigilant in a rapidly changing macro-financial environment.**

Operational efficiency, technology and risk management

- **Malhotra told bank chiefs that the combination of rate cuts and greater use of digital technologies—like analytics, automation and online channels—should be used to streamline operations, cut back-office costs and reduce turnaround times for loans and services.**
- **At the same time, he highlighted rising threats from cyber and digital fraud, asking banks to strengthen internal controls and deploy more robust, intelligence-driven monitoring systems to protect customers.**

Customer service, compliance and regulatory agenda

- **The RBI has pushed banks to resolve long-pending customer complaints, intensify outreach on re-KYC and unclaimed deposits, and improve transparency in pricing so that borrowers clearly benefit from policy easing.**
- **Malhotra emphasised that the central bank will continue its consultative approach while simplifying regulations, but expects banks to align with the broader goal of efficient, low-cost intermediation that supports inclusive growth and maintains financial stability.**

Cambodia vows fierce fight as Thailand crisis worsens

Thailand–Cambodia border has prompted Cambodia's influential Senate President Hun Sen to promise a "fierce fight" against Thailand, as clashes enter a second day, kill people on both sides, and displace tens of thousands of civilians from border areas.

How the latest violence began

- The current flare-up followed a Sunday skirmish in which two Thai soldiers were injured, effectively collapsing a ceasefire that had been brokered in July to halt earlier battles over long-running territorial disputes.
- Over subsequent days, both sides traded artillery, rocket and drone attacks, with Thailand accusing Cambodian forces of repeatedly firing on its troops and Cambodia claiming that Thai units launched the first strikes.

Humanitarian situation on the ground

- Continued shelling and air strikes have forced the evacuation of more than 100,000 civilians from border districts, with Thai authorities alone setting up hundreds of shelters for well over one lakh evacuees.
- Images from Surin province show Thai families crowded into temporary camps, highlighting fears among residents that the conflict could escalate further and disrupt livelihoods for an extended period.

Casualties and military claims

- Cambodia's military reports that the new round of clashes has killed at least seven Cambodian civilians and wounded about 20 more, blaming Thai bombardment for the deaths.
- A spokesperson for the Thai military says three Thai soldiers have been killed in recent days of fighting, while Thai officials maintain that their operations are defensive responses to Cambodian attacks.

Political messaging in Phnom Penh and Bangkok

- In social-media statements, Hun Sen says Cambodia initially refrained from firing back, but has now begun focused counter-attacks and vows that the government will support "all kinds of military operations" deemed necessary to defend national sovereignty.
- Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul insists that Thailand "never wanted violence" but will continue military operations as required to protect the country and public safety, signalling that Bangkok is also preparing for a prolonged confrontation.

Risk of wider escalation

- Regional observers note that the clashes mark the most serious confrontation between the neighbours since the July ceasefire, rekindling a decades-old dispute over border demarcation and control of temple areas.
- With both governments under domestic pressure not to appear weak and with nationalist rhetoric rising, there is concern that miscalculation or further civilian casualties could push the crisis toward a more sustained conflict unless outside mediation or renewed talks intervene.

Cyclone impact sparks fresh calls in Sri Lanka to recast IMF agreement

Human and economic impact of the cyclone

- Cyclone Ditwah triggered torrential rains, unprecedented flooding and large landslides, killing at least 638 people, with nearly 200 still missing, making it one of Sri Lanka's worst climate disasters in recent history.
- The storm has badly damaged housing, infrastructure, agriculture and livelihoods, deepening the economic pain of a country already struggling with sovereign default, currency depreciation and IMF-mandated fiscal consolidation.

Why critics want the IMF deal recast

- Civil society groups, opposition politicians and activists argue that IMF-required measures—such as regressive tax hikes, subsidy cuts and tight spending limits—have worsened hardship and left Sri Lanka with little fiscal space to respond to humanitarian needs.
- A joint statement by over 70 organisations calls for an "urgent revision" of the debt restructuring plan, including substantial debt reduction, a standstill on current and future debt servicing, and exemption of climate and social spending from IMF primary-surplus targets.

Government position and debt-sustainability challenge

- President Anura Kumara Dissanayake acknowledges that the island's vulnerability to repeated climate disasters raises questions about the realism of existing debt-sustainability assumptions, which did not fully price in such shocks when the Extended Fund Facility was agreed in 2023.
- By 2026, Sri Lanka must service external debt of over 2 billion dollars annually even under the current restructuring, and development experts warn that continued austerity risks pushing the country into a "debt-climate trap" where rebuilding after each disaster becomes harder.

Regional and international voices

- Former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed, a prominent advocate for climate-vulnerable states, argues that the cyclone makes it "impossible" for Sri Lanka to stay on its present IMF path and urges redesign of global debt frameworks to account for climate loss and damage.
- International NGOs and church-based networks have amplified Sri Lankan civil society's call for loss-and-damage grants, climate-justice-based debt relief and guarantees that social protection and public services for marginalised communities are strengthened, not cut, under any revised deal.

IMF response and prospects for emergency finance

- The IMF has issued a statement expressing sympathy and signalling "strong support," saying it is assessing the cyclone's macroeconomic impact and is open to considering additional support under its Rapid Financing Instrument alongside the ongoing EFF.
- Colombo has already requested 200 million dollars in emergency financing and expects a separate 350-million-dollar EFF tranche shortly, but critics insist that without structural changes to conditionalities—such as automatic standstills after climate shocks—these inflows will not translate into a just and resilient recovery.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans d

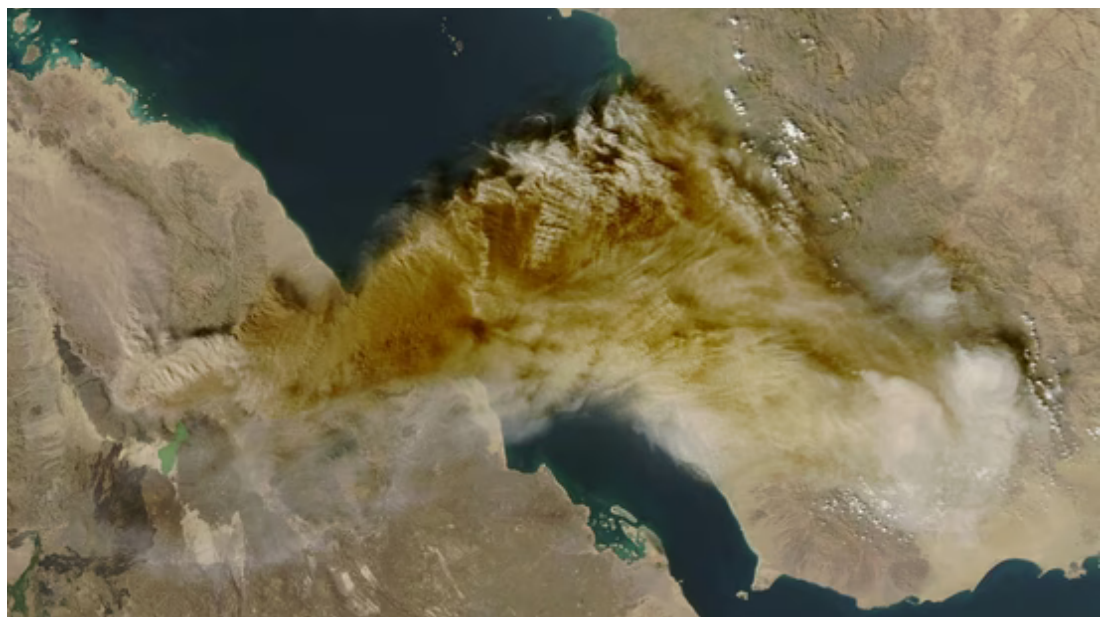
Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was Bengal's most prominent Vaishnava saint. He popularised Krishna-bhakti in many parts of Eastern India. The advent of Chaitanya marks the shifting of the focus of the Bengal Vaishnava bhakti from devotional literary compositions to a full-fledged reform movement with a broad social base. Chaitanya disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti. His followers belonged to all castes and communities. One of his favourite disciples was Haridas, who was a Muslim. He popularised the sankirtan (group devotional songs accompanied by ecstatic dancing). Chaitanya's exposition of Rasalila is one of his most profound contributions to Indian philosophy.

Q2. Ans c

The Tehran Convention (formally the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea), which entered into force in 2006, is the overarching legal instrument for the environmental protection of the Caspian Sea. It is the first legally binding regional agreement signed by all five Caspian littoral states: the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan. The Caspian Sea is a unique natural reservoir on our planet. It is a land locked water body located between two major parts of the Eurasian continent. Economic activities in the Caspian Sea include oil production, fishing, and shipping.

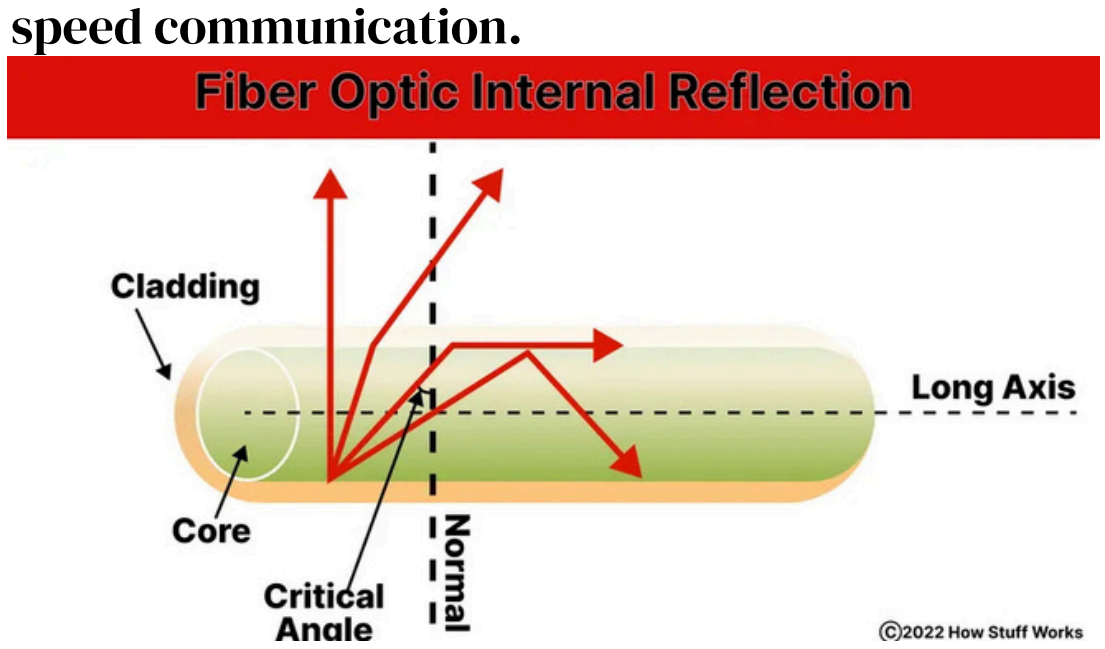
Q3. Ans a

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 d

Optical fibre cables work on the principle of Total Internal Reflection (TIR), where light signals, converted from digital data, bounce repeatedly within the fibre's core (a glass/plastic strand) by striking the boundary with the surrounding cladding at angles greater than the critical angle, allowing data transmission over long distances with minimal loss. This principle ensures that light signals, carrying vast amounts of data, stay trapped and travel efficiently from one end to the other, making fibre optics a superior choice for high-speed communication.



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Case Study:

Israel again tops the list of countries for most journalist deaths: watchdog

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said on Tuesday that Israel was responsible for nearly half of all journalists killed this year worldwide, with 29 Palestinian reporters slain by its forces in Gaza. In its annual report, the Paris-based media freedom group said the total number of journalists killed reached 67 globally this year, up from 66 killed in 2024. Israeli forces accounted for 43% of the total, making them "the worst enemy of journalists", RSF said in its report. The most deadly single attack was a so-called "double-tap" strike—where dual bombings were staged—on a hospital in south Gaza on August 25, which killed five journalists, including two contributors to international news agencies Reuters and the Associated Press. In total, since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023, after the Hamas attack on Israel, nearly 220 journalists have died, making Israel the biggest killer of journalists worldwide for three years running, RSF data shows. RSF editorial director Anne Bocande noted a growing tendency to "smear" journalists as a way to "justify" the crime of targeting them. The report also counts the number of journalists imprisoned for their work, with China (121), Russia (48) and Myanmar (47) being the most repressive countries.

Australia launches youth social media ban it says will be the world's 'first domino'.

More than 1 million social media accounts held by users under 16 are set to be deactivated in Australia on Wednesday in a divisive world-first ban that has inflamed a culture war and is being closely watched in the United States and elsewhere. Social media companies will have to take "reasonable steps" to ensure that under-16s in Australia cannot set up accounts on their platforms. Australian officials say the landmark ban, which lawmakers swiftly approved late last year, is meant to protect children from addictive social media platforms that experts say can be disastrous for their mental health.