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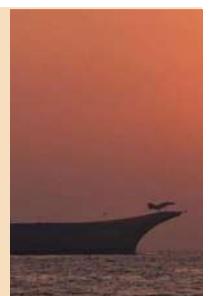


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Retail inflation moves up marginally to 0.7% in Nov.

Retail inflation in India rose slightly to 0.7% in November 2025, up from a record low of 0.25% in October, remaining one of the lowest readings in the current CPI series and well below the RBI's target band of 2–6%. November's 0.7% CPI print marks a marginal quickening but still indicates extremely subdued price pressures by India's historical standards, with inflation having stayed unusually low in most of the financial year so far.

Marginal rise

Retail inflation in India inched up in November 2025, rising from October's **record low of 0.25%**



This highlights that this is the second-lowest inflation rate in the current CPI series, underlining how exceptional the present disinflation phase is compared with past years. Food and beverages continued to remain in deflation, with prices contracting by around 3.9% year-on-year in November after a deeper fall of about 5% in October, so the drag from food prices on overall inflation persisted but weakened. Within the food basket, prices of vegetables, pulses, potatoes, onions and tomatoes fell, pulling food inflation down, while edible oils such as mustard and coconut oil saw sharper increases and were singled out as key drivers of whatever food inflation existed. Fuel inflation picked up to roughly 2.3% in November from about 2% in October, so higher fuel costs exerted some upward pressure on the headline number even as food prices were still falling. Inflation in pan, tobacco and intoxicants rose marginally to about 3% from 2.9% in October, indicating a small but broad-based firming in this category rather than any dramatic price shock. Housing inflation remained almost unchanged at close to 3%, suggesting that shelter costs were stable and not a major source of either inflationary pressure or relief in November. Clothing and footwear inflation eased slightly to about 1.5% from 1.7%, contributing modestly to keeping core inflation contained, alongside other non-food, non-fuel items where price growth has been relatively steady.



A historic UNESCO recognition that declares Italian cooking—not a single dish, but the entire national culinary tradition—as an element of humanity's intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, during the 20th session held in Delhi.



India's push for a stronger global system to manage and prevent wild fires—centred on early-warning mechanisms and improved risk assessments—was formally adopted on Thursday at the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi, the Environment Ministry said in a statement. India's resolution, titled "Strengthening the Global Management of Wild fires," calls for a shift from reactive fire fighting to proactive prevention.

Census 2027 to cost ₹11,718 crore, no separate budget earmarked for NPR

- The Union Cabinet has approved conducting Census 2027 at an estimated cost of ₹11,718.24 crore, underlining the scale and fiscal commitment for what is described as the world's largest administrative and statistical exercise.
- Unlike the 2019 Cabinet decision, the latest statement does not provide any separate budgetary allocation for updating the National Population Register (NPR), signalling that the politically contentious NPR–NRC linkage is being kept in abeyance for now and that Census funding is being clearly delinked from it.
- This recalls that in 2019 the Cabinet had sanctioned over ₹3,941 crore for NPR and more than ₹8,754 crore for Census 2021, but the exercise was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also meant the planned NPR update did not proceed.
- It explains that the NPR, first compiled in 2010 and updated in 2015 to cover around 119 crore residents, was earlier meant to be updated alongside the 2021 Census and is widely viewed as the first step toward a nationwide National Register of Citizens, hence the political sensitivity around its current exclusion from budget lines.
- The government had informed Parliament in July 2024 that no decision had yet been taken on updating the NPR during the forthcoming Census, and the present approval without NPR funds effectively continues that holding position while allowing the core Census operation to move ahead.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah is quoted as framing Census 2027 as a “new compass for development”, arguing that more up-to-date, granular population data will enhance governance and delivery of welfare to all demographic groups in line with the slogan “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas”.
- The statement emphasizes that this will be India's first fully digital Census and the first digital Census in independent India, with data collection using mobile applications and a dedicated Census Management and Monitoring System to track the exercise in real time, which should improve timeliness, transparency and data quality but also raises issues of digital readiness and privacy.
- The government plans to disseminate Census results faster and with “customised visualisation tools”, promising machine-readable, analyzable datasets for ministries under a “Census-as-a-Service” model, which could significantly strengthen evidence-based policymaking if implemented effectively and openly.
- Operationally, about 18,600 technical personnel are to be engaged for roughly 550 days, while field-level enumeration will still be carried out mainly by government schoolteachers and other state employees as part of their regular duties, indicating continuity in ground-level human infrastructure even as the technological backbone changes.

Centre likely to rebrand MGNREGS as ‘Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana’

- This reports that the Union government is likely to bring a Bill in the current Winter Session of Parliament to amend the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and rename the flagship scheme as “Pujya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana”, signalling a political and symbolic rebranding while retaining its core employment-guarantee character.
- According to the report, the Union Cabinet has already cleared the draft amendment Bill, and it will formally be introduced in Parliament, indicating that the proposal is at an advanced decision stage rather than a mere idea or consultation.
- Substantively, the flagship scheme will continue to guarantee up to 100 days of wage employment per rural household per financial year to adult members who volunteer for unskilled manual work, so the fundamental entitlement under MGNREGA is proposed to remain intact even as the name changes.
- This notes that the government is also considering increasing this employment guarantee from 100 to 125 days, which would expand the scheme's social-protection footprint and could raise fiscal outlay and demand for work in rural areas if implemented.
- A written answer by the Minister of State for Rural Development to the Rajya Sabha is cited to show that the average number of days of employment provided per household over the last five years has been about 50.35 days, revealing a persistent gap between the legal maximum of 100 days and the actual utilisation of the scheme.
- The piece recalls that in 2022 the government appointed a panel headed by former Rural Development Secretary Amarjeet Singh to review MGNREGS, particularly the inter-State variations, and the forthcoming amendments are likely to incorporate that panel's recommendations, including exclusionary clauses based on States' economic indicators.
- Introducing exclusion clauses linked to a State's economic status would mark a shift from MGNREGA's uniform national design towards a more differentiated approach, potentially reducing coverage or altering funding norms for relatively better-off States while concentrating resources in poorer regions.
- The government also plans to tweak the scheme's funding pattern, which could change the cost-sharing balance between the Centre and States and affect States' willingness and capacity to generate work, especially in fiscally constrained or opposition-ruled States.
- Politically, renaming MGNREGS after “Pujya Bapu” (Mahatma Gandhi) allows the Centre to emphasise Gandhian symbolism and rural uplift while distancing the scheme from its original association with the UPA era, thus re-branding an entrenched welfare programme without dismantling it.

'PF contributions on wages beyond 15,000 voluntary'

- Union Labour and Employment Ministry has clarified that Provident Fund (PF) contributions by employers and employees on the portion of monthly wages above the statutory ceiling of ₹15,000 will remain voluntary even after the Code on Social Security and the other three labour codes came into force on November 21.
- The Code on Social Security replaces the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, while 20 other existing labour laws have been subsumed into the Codes on Wages, Industrial Relations, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, signalling a consolidation of India's labour law framework without mandating higher PF outgo on all wages.
- In a social-media clarification, the Ministry said there is "no legal requirement" to make PF contributions on wages above the ₹15,000 ceiling; if an employer and employee choose to contribute on higher wages, they may do so, but such contributions are not compulsory under the new regime.
- The Ministry emphasised that, in light of this voluntariness, there would be no reduction in employees' take-home pay purely on account of the enforcement of the four labour codes, countering fears that codification would automatically expand the PF base and lower net salaries.
- This notes that since September 2014 the current wage ceiling of ₹15,000 for mandatory PF coverage has been in force; recently some MPs from Kerala asked in the Lok Sabha whether this ceiling would be raised to ₹30,000, prompting Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya to reiterate that any such change would require broader consultations given its impact on employers' costs.
- The Ministry illustrated how mandatory PF on the full wage, instead of only up to ₹15,000, would reduce cash in hand and increase the employer's statutory contribution burden, arguing that keeping contributions above the ceiling voluntary strikes a balance between social security, wage flexibility and the cost of employing formal-sector workers.
- Uniform wage and social-security definitions help ensure clearer entitlements, with minimum wages and payment timelines becoming enforceable across organised and much of unorganised employment.
- Gig and platform workers become eligible for social-security schemes financed partly by platform aggregators (1-2% of turnover within specified limits), which begins to address precarity in the digital/platform economy.

5,000 ex-servicemen to fill Railway pointsmen posts

- This reports that Indian Railways, facing an acute manpower shortage, has decided to recruit 5,058 ex-servicemen as pointsmen on a contractual basis across its zones, with appointments routed through Ex-Servicemen Welfare Boards under the Centre and States.
- Pointsmen perform a safety-critical role by manually operating track switches, assisting in shunting operations and ensuring safe train movement through yards and junctions; any gaps or inexperience here can directly affect operational safety and accident risk.
- This recruitment is characterised as an interim measure until regular candidates are selected through Railway Recruitment Cells, with initial contracts valid up to 31 December 2026, leaving scope for extension or termination depending on vacancy positions.
- Selected ex-servicemen will first be categorised under the safety category and will undergo the full initial training prescribed for pointsmen; only after successful completion will they be engaged and paid as per contractual terms, indicating some attempt to maintain training standards despite the temporary nature of the jobs.
- This notes that those who fail training or are found unsuitable will be released with payments as per the contract for the training period, which could create incentives to pass marginal candidates and raises questions about how rigorously competence will be assessed.
- Railway unions, especially the All India Railwaymen Federation (AIRF), oppose the move, arguing that using contract staff in safety-critical posts undermines accountability because such workers lack long-term job security, full responsibility and institutional memory, yet gain complete knowledge of sensitive safety infrastructure before their contracts end.
- The piece situates this decision against a recent warning by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), who, after probing the 2024 rear-end collision between the Bagmati Express and a stabled goods train near Chennai, recommended reviewing the policy of deploying contractual staff in safety-critical areas and urged that such engagement be reduced to "near zero" in the long term.
- CRS had highlighted insider threats, misuse of sensitive information and weakened vigilance as risks of relying on short-term staff, and also criticised the excessive dependence on contract workers for coach-maintenance AC mechanics, suggesting a broader pattern of casualisation in crucial railway functions.
- By proceeding with large-scale contractual hiring for pointsmen despite these warnings, the Railway Board appears to prioritise immediate staffing needs and cost considerations over structural reform in recruitment and cadre management, intensifying the long-running tension between efficiency, fiscal prudence and safety in railway human-resource policy.

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. Which of the following is Brunei's only land neighbour?

- (a) Thailand**
- (b) Malaysia**
- (c) Indonesia**
- (d) Vietnam**

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

EDITORIAL

The Indian Ocean as cradle of a new blue economy

- Indian Ocean, already one of the most climate-vulnerable basins, should now be seen not as a theatre of rivalry but as the cradle of a "blue economy" built on sustainability, innovation and resilience, with India positioned to lead this shift because of its long normative history on ocean governance from UNCLOS negotiations onward.
- The proposed Blue Ocean Strategy for India rests on three pillars: stewardship of the commons (treating the Indian Ocean as a shared space whose health underpins terrestrial and marine livelihoods), resilience (building capacity to withstand climate-induced shocks such as sea-level rise and acidification), and inclusive growth (ensuring that littoral and island communities share the benefits of emerging ocean-based industries).
- On the economic side, the article highlights opportunities in sustainable fisheries, offshore renewable energy, seabed resources, biotechnology and green shipping, but stresses that unlocking this potential requires large-scale, climate-compatible investments, regional coordination, and institutional architectures that align public finance, private capital and multilateral funds toward blue-economy goals.
- It cites recent developments such as the Blue Economy and Finance Forum in Monaco, the Finance in Common Ocean Coalition, and Brazil's Ocean Partnership under the Belém Action Agenda as evidence that global ocean finance is slowly moving from the margins to the mainstream, and argues that India must use this moment to channel and shape such capital flows into the Indian Ocean region.
- Security is reframed in terms of "through sustainability" rather than "against threats": instead of only emphasising naval presence and sea-lane protection, India is encouraged to prioritise ecological security, address illegal and unreported fishing, and tackle pollution and habitat loss that could trigger social conflict and economic collapse in coastal states.
- The ongoing climate diplomacy, suggesting that initiatives like the International Year of the Ocean, the proposed Ocean for All Platform, and India's own Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative provide vehicles for India to articulate an ocean narrative centred on stewardship, equity and climate justice, rather than on great-power contestation.
- India's "historic responsibility" is framed as demonstrating that a large developing country can pursue a cooperative, consultative and outcome-oriented approach in the Indian Ocean, aligning with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's description of India's maritime outlook and reinforcing the "From the Indian Ocean, for the World" motto.
- This also connects the blue-economy agenda to India's domestic development, arguing that better integration of coastal infrastructure, ports, blue-carbon ecosystems (like mangroves and seagrasses) and community-led conservation can both advance national prosperity and showcase India as a model for other Global South littorals.

India is focusing on PM10, but PM2.5 is the real threat

- India's air-quality regime is structurally mis-aligned because regulations, standards and monitoring focus on coarse particulate matter (PM10), whereas fine particulate matter (PM2.5) poses the real, more severe health risk and should be the centre of policy.
- It draws on a new Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC) report that examines regulatory approaches to air pollution in countries with similar economic and industrial trajectories—such as Brazil, China, Germany, Mexico, Poland, South Korea and the U.S.—to show how India is lagging in health-based, PM2.5-focused standards and enforcement.

Why PM2.5 is the real threat

- PM2.5 is highlighted as more dangerous than PM10 because these tiny particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream, causing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, strokes, reduced life expectancy and other chronic conditions, even at relatively low concentrations.
- This notes that many comparator countries have progressively tightened their PM2.5 standards in line with evolving science and WHO guidelines, whereas India's regulatory and monitoring framework has not kept pace, leaving populations exposed to harmful levels almost year-round in many cities.

India's current focus on PM10

- India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and much of the monitoring infrastructure were historically built around PM10, and many non-attainment cities are assessed against PM10 targets; as a result, PM2.5 gets less regulatory attention despite being more health-relevant.
- Because most stations track PM10 but far fewer measure PM2.5 accurately and continuously, policymakers and implementing agencies often rely on PM10 trends as a proxy, which masks the true scale of health risk and leads to misplaced priorities in control measures.

Lessons from international experience

- The SFC authors point to Mexico City and several European jurisdictions where strong, health-based standards, independent scientific bodies, and city-led innovation have driven ambitious PM2.5 reductions through coordinated action on vehicle emissions, industrial sources, fuel quality and urban planning.
- In these countries, PM standards are tied directly to public-health objectives, with clear timelines for tightening limits, transparent data, and strong local authority mandates, illustrating the importance of a “bottom-up” governance model combined with national backing.

Structural and governance gaps in India

- This emphasises that India's air-pollution regulation is comparatively “resource-poor” and fragmented: the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) are under-resourced, inspection and enforcement capacity is weak, and penalties for non-compliance are low and inconsistently applied.
- Existing instruments like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and city clean-air action plans remain largely PM10-centric, lack robust legal backing, and often devolve into box-ticking exercises, with little alignment between sectoral policies (transport, energy, construction, agriculture) and air-quality goals.

Health-based standards and data needs

- A central recommendation is that India must shift to explicitly health-based air-quality standards that prioritise PM2.5, backed by a dense, reliable monitoring network and publicly accessible, real-time data so that citizens, courts and local governments can hold polluters and regulators accountable.
- The authors argue for integrating health impact assessments into policy design, quantifying morbidity and mortality burdens of PM2.5, and using these metrics to justify stronger regulations, fiscal measures (like pollution pricing) and targeted interventions in heavily exposed communities.

Political economy and way forward

- This underlines that air pollution in India becomes a political issue only episodically—such as during winter smog in Delhi—rather than being treated as a continuous public-health crisis, which weakens sustained political will for stringent PM2.5 controls.
- It concludes that India needs a paradigm shift: reframing air pollution from an episodic nuisance to a chronic health emergency; redesigning regulatory architecture around PM2.5; learning from international best practices; and empowering cities with resources, authority and data to implement health-centred clean-air strategies.

Union Cabinet allows export of coal

- Union Cabinet has cleared a major policy change allowing coal obtained through linkage auctions to be used for any industrial purpose, including export, rather than being restricted to specified domestic uses.
- Under the current regime, coal secured via auctions could be used only by sectors such as cement, steel, sponge iron and aluminium, and only for captive consumption; the new decision effectively liberalises end-use by permitting sale, transfer and export so long as the coal was acquired through the formal auction system.
- This change is implemented through the Policy for Auction of Coal Linkage for Seamless, Efficient and Transparent Utilisation of coal (CoalSETU), which will now allow guaranteed supply deals (coal linkages) obtained in auctions to be deployed not just for captive plants but also for washing, trading, export, or use by subsidiaries and group firms.
- Strategically, the move is presented as “paving the way” for higher coal exports at a time when India’s coal production reached about 1.05 billion tonnes in FY25, suggesting that the government expects surplus availability in some grades and wants producers to monetise that surplus in international markets.
- Economically, this could improve utilisation of auctioned coal, raise revenues for both miners and the exchequer, and give Indian firms flexibility to respond to global price signals, but it may also intensify concerns about locking in coal infrastructure and emissions when India has parallel commitments on energy transition and climate mitigation.
- Coal linkage holders will be eligible to export coal upto 50 per cent of their quantity and flexibly utilise the fuel among group companies as needed.
- The coking coal shall not be offered under this window.



India offers ‘final’ deal to U.S., but tariff removal is focus

- This reports that India has put a “final” revised offer on the table in ongoing trade talks with the United States, making clear that its top demand is removal of the additional 25% U.S. tariffs imposed on certain Indian exports as a penalty linked to India’s continued purchase of discounted Russian oil.
- Under the latest proposal, India is willing to offer “immediate” removal of its retaliatory tariffs on a set of U.S. farm and consumer goods such as walnuts, almonds, apples and industrial products, but wants Washington to first commit to scrapping the extra 25% duty that currently sits on top of the standard 50% tariff on some Indian items.
- This notes that the U.S. presently imposes a 50% tariff on some Indian imports, of which 25 percentage points represent a “penalty kick” specifically linked to Russian oil purchases; Indian exporters say they are absorbing much of this additional cost to remain price-competitive, which is eroding their already thin profit margins.
- Indian officials quoted in the piece argue that while exporters can just about manage a 19% base tariff, the cumulative 50% duty is significantly damaging trade flows, and they accuse the U.S. of using tariffs as a pressure lever despite India’s broader strategic partnership with Washington.
- This highlights that Indian exporters have appealed to their government to secure at least the removal of the additional 25% component even if the base tariff remains, contending that the penalty has no economic justification and is purely political, tied to U.S. displeasure over Russian oil deals.
- On the U.S. side, officials maintain that the extra tariffs are intended to “nudge” India away from Russian energy, and describe India as a “tough nut to crack” in trade negotiations; yet the article suggests that both delegations have in principle agreed most elements of a wider Bilateral Trade Agreement, with tariff issues now the main sticking point.
- The story also notes that India’s latest offer to roll back its retaliatory tariffs on certain U.S. goods—such as motorcycles and some agricultural items—could provide political cover for the U.S. administration to reciprocate, but there is still uncertainty over whether the White House under President Trump will accept the package.
- Commerce Ministry officials in New Delhi are cited as saying that the discussions are not “centred around negotiations alone” but also around the broader political signalling of India’s Russia policy and strategic autonomy, implying that New Delhi is unwilling to let trade concessions be directly tied to its energy-security decisions.
- Overall, this portrays a complex bargaining situation in which India is using market access on high-value U.S. exports as leverage to remove Russia-related penalty tariffs, while the U.S. is using those same tariffs to shape India’s geopolitical choices, turning a relatively narrow trade dispute into a test of strategic convergence.

India frees up business visas for Chinese professionals in major step to boost ties

- India has eased bureaucratic restrictions on business visas for Chinese professionals, significantly shortening approval times to less than a month and removing an additional layer of security vetting that had effectively stalled most such applications since mid-2020.
- After the deadly clashes along the Line of Actual Control in 2020, India had virtually frozen Chinese business and work visas, which contributed to severe shortages of technical personnel in sectors such as telecom equipment, power, electronics and infrastructure, reportedly costing Indian projects billions of dollars in delays and under-utilised capacity.
- The decision to free up visas is portrayed as a “major step” by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government to cautiously rekindle economic engagement with Beijing even as New Delhi balances relations with Washington, which has imposed tariffs and technology restrictions on China and is pressing partners to reduce dependence on it.
- Operationally, the move means that visa clearances for Chinese executives, engineers and specialists will no longer require case-by-case scrutiny at the level of the home and foreign ministries, thereby de-bottlenecking approvals and giving Indian companies greater certainty when hiring or bringing in vendor staff from China.
- China’s Foreign Ministry welcomed the change as a “positive action” and signalled that Beijing is willing to enhance people-to-people and business exchanges, saying it wants to maintain communication and consultation with India to “continuously enhance the level of facilitation of exchanges”, which suggests scope for reciprocal easing on the Chinese side.
- This situates the step within a broader diplomatic thaw: it follows Modi’s visit to China earlier in the year—his first in seven years—and indicates that both sides are exploring economic confidence-building measures even though the underlying boundary dispute and military stand-off remain unresolved.
- India deepens strategic partnerships with the U.S., Japan, Australia and Europe (including through the Quad), while China doubles down on its Eurasian and maritime networks, so both countries view each other as long-term competitors even as they manage crises and cooperate selectively.

EU set to lock up Russia’s frozen assets despite Hungary’s protest

- European Union is moving to formally “lock up” around €210 billion in Russian state assets frozen in Europe, signalling that these funds will remain immobilised until Russia ends its war in Ukraine and pays for the damage it has caused.
- This decision is portrayed as a critical legal and political step that will let EU leaders, at an upcoming summit, design mechanisms to use the proceeds from these frozen assets—especially windfall profits on Russian Central Bank reserves—to back a large multi-year loan that would cover Ukraine’s financial and military needs for roughly two years.
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is quoted denouncing the move as “systematically raping European law”, arguing that seizing or redirecting profits from sovereign assets undermines the rule of law and sets a precedent that could one day be used against EU states themselves; Hungary and Slovakia both oppose using frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine.
- This notes that the frozen money sits mainly in Belgium’s Euroclear clearing house and is held under EU sanctions imposed after Russia’s full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022; these sanctions must be renewed every six months and require unanimous approval from all 27 member-states, giving dissenters like Hungary procedural leverage.
- Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, in a letter to the European Council President, warns that he will not support any step that would “include covering Ukraine’s military expenses for the coming years”, and he also claims that such use of sovereign assets could complicate U.S. peace efforts by making Russia view the West as expropriating its resources.
- Russia’s central bank and other officials have condemned the EU’s discussions as “unclear” and unlawful, signalling that Moscow would treat any eventual transfer or use of the assets as an escalation, possibly prompting counter-measures against Western property in Russia and further complicating any future peace settlement.
- Strategically, this underscores that for most EU states the move is less about immediate cash and more about signalling long-term resolve: by ring-fencing Russian assets and tying their eventual release to reparations and withdrawal, the EU aims to increase pressure on Moscow while reassuring Kyiv of sustained support, despite internal dissent from Hungary and Slovakia.

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.

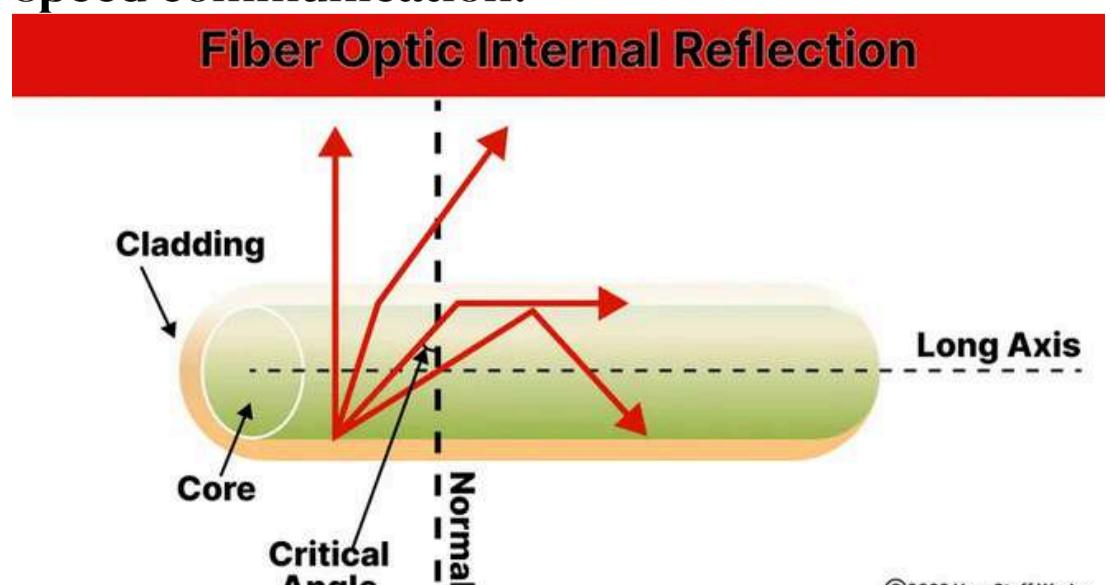
Q3. Ans b

Brunei is a sovereign state located on the northern coast of the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. It is bordered by the South China Sea to the north and is completely surrounded by the Malaysian state of Sarawak on all other land sides. Brunei consists of two disconnected territories that occupy a total land area of 2,226 square miles and are separated by the state of Sarawak. The segment to the west is significantly larger than the part on to the east and is home to the nation's capital of Bandar Seri Begawan. The nation gained its independence from the British in 1984.



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.



Case Study:



Haiti's Compas Music Wins UNESCO Recognition

UNESCO has added Haiti's beloved music and dance genre, Compas, to its cultural heritage list, prompting national pride and celebration in Haiti. It explores Compas's historical roots, social role, and emotional significance for Haitians at home and in the diaspora, while highlighting how the recognition affirms Haiti's cultural resilience. Compas, a syncopated rhythm developed in the 1950s and inspired by merengue and percussion, has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage, recognizing its deep cultural value for Haiti. The piece notes that this status is seen domestically as an "ode to joy" at a time of political instability and gang violence, giving Haitians a symbolic victory and source of collective pride. Compas is more than entertainment: its lyrics emerge from everyday life and are tied to themes of love, hope, freedom, peace, and resistance, helping people cope with hardship. It underlines how Compas "brings together people of all ages, genders and backgrounds," serving as a unifying force in a society fragmented by insecurity and economic crisis. Compas still dominates Haitian stages 70 years after its creation and is popular across parts of West Africa and the Caribbean.

The sixth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), claimed to be the largest contemporary art festival in India, will open on Friday with the hoisting of the Biennale flag at Aspinwall House in Fort Kochi at noon. The latest KMB, organised by the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF), will be spread across 22 venues, in addition to seven collateral events. The 110-day event will conclude on March 31, 2026. Curated by Goa based artist Nikhil Chopra along with his art collective HH Art Spaces, this edition has 'For the Time Being' as its curatorial theme. "This edition of KMB is oriented around the body as a bearer of memory and materiality. The 'body' extends metaphorically into Kochi's landscape, built on human and non-human movements," he said.



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