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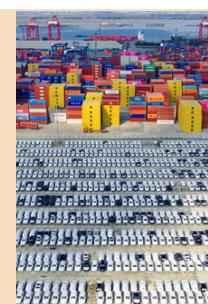
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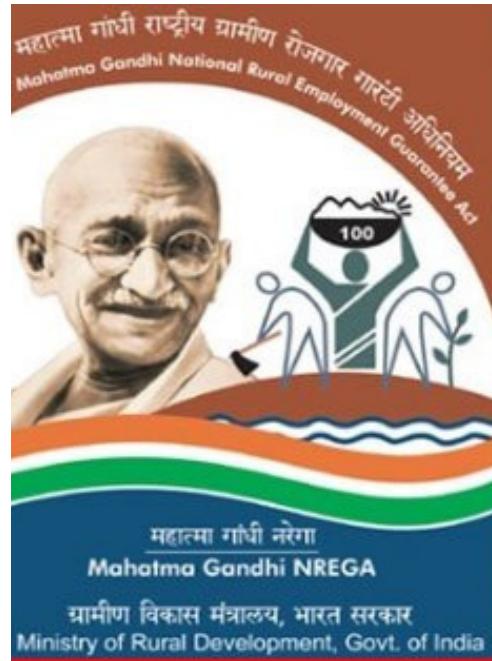
Israeli military expansion in Syria raises tensions as it carves out buffer zone

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New job guarantee plan to be supply-driven

Union government plans a fundamental redesign of India's rural job guarantee, shifting from a demand-driven MGNREGA to a supply-driven VB-G RAM G framework with tighter Central control and capped allocations. The Bill proposes to repeal the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and introduce the "Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)" (VB-G RAM G) as the new rural employment law, aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.



The framework moves from MGNREGA's rights-based, demand-driven guarantee (where any rural adult demanding work had to be provided employment within a legal timeframe) to a supply-driven scheme where employment is available only within a fixed national budget and in areas notified by the Centre. Under MGNREGA, the Centre bore 100% of the wage cost and 75% of material costs (90:10 in north-eastern and select hill states), but the new Bill shifts to a 60:40 Centre-state share for most states, and 90:10 only for north-eastern, Himalayan states and Jammu & Kashmir. This substantially increases states' financial responsibility at a time of constrained fiscal space, leading critics to argue that poorer states may be unable to fully utilise the scheme, effectively weakening the guarantee in regions that need it most. Instead of an open-ended "labour budget" that expanded with demand under MGNREGA, the new scheme will work within a fixed annual allocation decided by the Union government on parameters that are yet to be specified. The Centre will not only set the total State-wise allocation each year but will also decide which rural areas are notified for implementation, giving it far greater discretion over the geographical spread and intensity of the programme than under the earlier law. However, opposition parties and labour activists argue that because employment is now conditional on Central notifications and capped budgets, the practical guarantee may be weaker despite the higher nominal days.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday that his visit to Jordan will boost bilateral linkages between the two nations. He was speaking after arriving in Amman on the first leg of his three-nation trip aimed at further strengthening ties. Jordan is the first leg of Modi's four-day, three-nation tour, which will also take him to Ethiopia and Oman.



Raj Kumar Goyal, a retired 1990-batch IAS officer and former Secretary, Department of Justice, has been sworn in as the new Chief Information Commissioner (CIC), filling a vacancy that existed since September 2025. The President has also cleared the appointment of eight Information Commissioners, restoring the Central Information Commission to full strength after several years. The CIC post had been lying vacant since September 2025 after former CIC Heeralal Samariya demitted office, which had raised concerns about delays and backlogs in RTI appeals at the national level.

NATIONAL

Centre proposes to send Bill that seeks to replace UGC to joint committee

- Centre's Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 — which overhauls higher-education regulation by replacing the UGC — is being referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) after opposition criticism and sectoral pushback. It also foregrounds concerns that the proposed regulator centralises control, separates funding from regulation and may undermine institutional autonomy and federal principles.
- The VBSA Bill proposes to repeal the UGC, AICTE and NCTE Acts and create a new apex Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan commission with three specialised councils for regulation, accreditation and standards, effectively becoming a single “super-regulator” for higher education.
- The commission is envisaged as an umbrella body that will subsume key functions of the existing regulators, set norms and standards, and impose penalties, but it will not directly disburse grants, which will remain under the Ministry of Education.
- The Coordination Committee Against HECA (now opposing the VBSA) describes the Bill as a “rebranded” version of the earlier 2018 HECA proposal, warning that it will increase bureaucracy, politicise regulation, reduce representation of teachers and marginalised groups, and weaken collegial academic governance.
- A major substantive change is the delinking of grants from the regulator: while UGC currently combines regulatory and grant-giving functions, under VBSA the regulator will mainly set rules and enforce compliance, while funding for universities continues to flow through the Ministry of Education.
- Critics fear this arrangement will make institutions more vulnerable to political pressures in grant decisions, because they may be forced to approach the Ministry directly for funds while simultaneously complying with a powerful regulator's mandates, altering existing checks and balances.
- Teacher groups and student associations argue that the new architecture centralises power at the Union level, leaving state governments and universities with reduced say in regulatory decisions despite being major providers of higher education.
- They warn that stringent compliance requirements, high monetary penalties and centrally determined norms could disproportionately hurt state universities and smaller colleges, pushing them to seek private funding or hike fees, thereby aggravating inequalities and undermining the public character of higher education.
- By moving the Bill to a JPC rather than pushing it through immediately, the government aims to manage political opposition while still signalling commitment to NEP-aligned consolidation of higher-education regulation under a unified framework.

How illicit cultivation of cannabis has left the verdant hills of Kandhamal in the weeds

- Large-scale illicit cannabis cultivation has transformed the landscape and economy of Kandhamal district in Odisha, and how the state is responding with intensive eradication and enforcement drives. It highlights a complex nexus of terrain advantages, high profits, organised crime and alleged Maoist patronage, alongside the challenges of sustainable alternative livelihoods for local villagers.
- Kandhamal's remote forested hills have seen thousands of acres converted into cannabis plantations, with recent drives reportedly destroying several thousand acres and millions of plants across the district.
- District police and administration have seized tens of thousands of kilograms of ganja in 2025 and arrested numerous persons in over a hundred cases, making this one of the largest anti-cannabis operations currently underway in India.
- The geography—steep hills, deep forests, and valleys far from motorable roads—provides ideal conditions for clandestine cultivation and makes law-enforcement access costly and physically demanding.
- Cannabis offers returns far higher than regular legal crops, with black-market prices in Odisha and neighbouring states running into tens of thousands of rupees per kilogram, making it extremely attractive for local cultivators and outside syndicates.
- Security agencies believe that outlawed Maoist groups patronise and tax this cultivation, using forests under their influence and the proceeds from the ganja trade to fund insurgent activities and arms procurement.
- Many villagers, including those with small landholdings and limited employment options, participate in cannabis cultivation despite knowing the legal risks, viewing it as a survival strategy in the absence of remunerative alternatives.
- Police acknowledge that unless viable legal livelihoods are created—through horticulture, high-value crops, agro-forestry or rural employment schemes—the lure of ganja will persist and the hills are likely to revert to cannabis after each destruction drive.
- Authorities are trying to combine law-enforcement with developmental interventions: discouraging farmers through awareness campaigns, monitoring repeat offenders, and exploring substitution programmes that shift farmers to fruit trees, spices or other cash crops.
- Financial-intelligence and income-tax probes are being used in some cases to target big investors behind the trade, signalling a shift from viewing it only as a local law-and-order issue to treating it as an organised criminal economy tied to insurgency.
- The situation in Kandhamal illustrates how narcotics economies can entrench themselves in marginal, conflict-affected regions by exploiting weak state presence, difficult terrain and livelihood distress.

SHANTI Bill to allow private sector to make, run nuclear power plants

- SHANTI Bill, 2025 is a major overhaul of India's nuclear law that opens nuclear power generation to private (including foreign) companies while revising safety and liability rules. It links this legal change to India's long-term plan to massively scale up nuclear capacity as part of its clean-energy transition.

What the SHANTI Bill changes

- The Bill replaces key existing laws—the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010—under a new umbrella framework called “Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI).”
- It ends the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) monopoly by allowing “any other company,” Indian or foreign, to build, own and operate nuclear power plants, subject to licensing and regulation.

New regulatory and safety architecture

- The Bill creates an autonomous nuclear energy regulatory structure that absorbs and upgrades the existing Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), with expanded powers over safety, security, quality assurance and safeguards.
- Research and some innovation activities get a relatively lighter licensing regime, but commercial operators must meet stringent design, construction and operational standards before and during plant operation.

Civil liability and risk-sharing

- SHANTI introduces what the government calls a “pragmatic” no-fault civil-liability framework: operators bear primary liability up to a capped amount per incident, beyond which a central Nuclear Liability Fund will cover additional compensation.
- The Bill significantly limits and narrows supplier liability and rights of recourse compared to the CLND Act, addressing long-standing concerns of foreign vendors (especially from the US and Europe) that India's earlier regime exposed them to open-ended risk.

Economic and energy-policy objectives

- Opening nuclear power to private participation is meant to mobilise large volumes of capital and technology so that nuclear capacity can rise from around 8.8 GW today to about 100 GW by 2047, including new small modular reactors backed by a dedicated ₹20,000-crore R&D mission.
- The government argues that more players and investment will improve grid stability, provide firm low-carbon baseload power, and help meet India's net-zero emissions commitments while reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Concerns and implications

- Critics worry that capping operator and supplier liability and restricting jurisdiction of ordinary civil courts could weaken incentives for maximum safety and limit victims' avenues for redress in the event of a serious accident.
- There are also questions about regulatory capacity and independence: as private and foreign entities enter a high-risk, capital-intensive sector, the effectiveness, autonomy and technical depth of the new regulator will be crucial to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure robust oversight.

Army celebrates victory in 1971 war with Pakistan, hails indigenous tech

Indian Army celebrated Vijay Diwas ‘At Home’ at Army House, New Delhi, which commemorated India's decisive victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war and showcased cutting-edge indigenous defence technologies. It emphasises the Army's transformation into a tech-enabled, self-reliant force and the growing synergy between soldiers, engineers, industry and academia.

Commemoration of 1971 victory

- Vijay Diwas, observed annually on 16 December, marks Pakistan's surrender in 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh; the Army's ‘At Home’ is a high-profile social-ceremonial event around this date.
- President Droupadi Murmu, senior military leadership and other dignitaries attended the function, underlining the political and symbolic importance of the 1971 victory in India's strategic memory.

Showcase of indigenous technology

- The Defence Ministry highlighted a range of indigenously developed platforms, including AI-based systems, drone-analysis tools, surveillance solutions and advanced bridging and mobility equipment, as evidence of Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence.
- Many of these systems have dual-use potential, being applicable not only to battlefield awareness and logistics but also to disaster response, infrastructure restoration and sustainability efforts.

Civil-military-industry collaboration

- Displays were explicitly framed as products of collaboration among Indian soldiers, domestic defence industry, start-ups and academic institutions, reflecting the ecosystem approach promoted by recent defence innovation initiatives such as iDEX and the Technology Development Fund.
- This collaborative model is presented as central to the Army's shift towards a future-ready force that can rapidly integrate AI, robotics and autonomous systems while keeping critical technologies under Indian control.

International and societal signalling

- The presence of 73 ambassadors and high commissioners, gallantry awardees, sportspersons and national achievers signalled both India's desire to project its indigenous capabilities to foreign partners and its effort to connect the armed forces with wider society.
- By foregrounding homegrown tech at a commemorative event, the Army links historical martial achievements with contemporary defence-industrial progress, reinforcing narratives of national resilience, self-reliance and strategic autonomy.

Strategic implications

- The emphasis on indigenous, AI-driven and dual-use systems suggests that the Army increasingly sees technological edge and sovereign control over data and hardware as core elements of deterrence and war-fighting capability.
- At the same time, their roles in disaster management and national development show how defence innovation is being positioned as a broader public good, supporting internal security, humanitarian assistance and infrastructure resilience beyond pure combat roles.
- Demonstrating AI-enabled satellite analysis, drone forensics and secure “AI-in-a-box” platforms advertises to adversaries that India can fuse multi-source data quickly and fight in a sensor-saturated, algorithmic battlespace, thereby strengthening deterrence.

Trade deficit falls to \$6.6 bn. in Nov. due to merchandise export growth

• India's overall trade deficit in November 2025 narrowed sharply to about 6.6 billion dollars because exports surged while imports softened, reversing the stress seen in October. This is a sign of resilience in goods exports despite global uncertainty and punitive US tariffs.

Headline trade numbers

- Combined merchandise and services exports reached about 74 billion dollars in November, up roughly 15.5% year-on-year, while total imports were around 80.6 billion dollars, marginally lower than a year ago.
- This pushed the overall trade deficit down from roughly 17 billion dollars in November 2024 to 6.6 billion dollars in November 2025, a compression of more than 60% and the lowest gap in many months.

Merchandise exports and imports

- Merchandise exports alone grew about 19.4% to 38.1 billion dollars, the highest November level in at least a decade, led by engineering goods, electronics, gems and jewellery, petroleum products, chemicals and pharma.
- Goods imports fell slightly to about 62.7 billion dollars, with notable declines in gold and some energy-related items after a spike in October; this combination of higher exports and softer imports narrowed the merchandise trade deficit significantly.

Exports to the United States

- Despite Washington's 50% additional tariffs on a wide basket of Indian products since late August, exports to the US rebounded strongly in November, rising about 22–23% year-on-year to just under 7 billion dollars.
- Commerce ministry officials read this as evidence that Indian exporters are competitively adjusting—through product diversification, pricing and possibly shipment timing—and that bilateral trade ties remain robust even under tariff pressure.

Interpretation by policymakers

- Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal argued that the November numbers "even out" the 11.8% export contraction seen in October, attributing some of the earlier dip to shipment timing issues and highlighting that November exports are the best for that month in 10 years.
- Officials and export bodies stress that market diversification, logistics upgrades and policy support (such as export credit and production-linked incentives) have helped maintain export momentum, and they express cautious optimism for the remaining months of the fiscal year.

Broader macro-economic implications

- A narrower trade deficit eases pressure on India's current-account balance and supports currency stability, especially important in an environment of volatile oil prices and high global interest rates.
- However, cumulative data for April–November still show imports growing faster than exports and a sizeable overall goods deficit above 220 billion dollars, signalling that the November improvement, while welcome, needs to be sustained for durable external-sector comfort.

Unemployment rate dips to 4.7% in November: PLFS

• India's official unemployment rate fell to 4.7% in November 2025, its lowest level since April, alongside a rise in labour-force participation, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) monthly bulletin. This is a largely positive labour-market signal driven by rural employment gains and increasing female participation.

Headline unemployment and participation trends

- The jobless rate for persons aged 15 and above declined from 5.1% in April to 4.7% in November, with both rural and urban unemployment easing; urban unemployment dropped to about 6.5% from 7% over the same period.
- The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)—the share of people either working or looking for work—rose to 55.8% in November, the highest since April and up from 55.4% in October, indicating that more people are engaging with the labour market rather than exiting it.

Rural–urban patterns

- Rural LFPR climbed to 58.6% in November from 58.0% in April and 57.8% in October, reflecting sustained demand for labour in agriculture and non-farm rural activities; in contrast, urban LFPR edged down marginally from 50.5% to 50.4% month-on-month, suggesting a relatively softer urban jobs environment.
- The Worker Population Ratio (WPR)—the share of the population actually employed—also improved, rising overall from 52.8% in April to 53.2% in November, with rural WPR increasing from 55.4% to 56.3%, while urban WPR moved up from 52.8% to around 53.2–53.3%.

Female labour-force participation

- Female LFPR showed a notable rise, climbing steadily from 32% in June 2025 to about 35.1% in November, driven primarily by rural women whose participation increased from 35.2% to nearly 39.7% over the period.
- Urban female LFPR remained relatively stable at around 25–26%, indicating that most of the gendered improvement is coming from rural labour markets, where women are likely entering both agricultural and low-skill non-farm work; this helps reduce the gender gap but also raises questions about job quality.

Interpretation and caveats

- The combination of falling unemployment and rising LFPR/WPR suggests that job creation is outpacing the entry of new workers, especially in rural areas, which is consistent with post-monsoon agricultural activity and rural construction or public works.
- However, the PLFS headline rate does not directly capture underemployment or informality; given the dominance of self-employment and casual work in rural India, the improvement could mask a shift into low-productivity, low-wage jobs, meaning policymakers still need to prioritise high-quality, formal employment creation, particularly in urban and youth segments.
- The data strengthen the case for targeting public employment schemes, skilling programmes and credit support specifically at women, so that higher participation is accompanied by movement into better-paid, formal and diversified occupations.
- Regular high-frequency PLFS monitoring also means gender impacts of shocks (heatwaves, tariff changes, sectoral slowdowns) can be tracked quickly, enabling course corrections and more granular, region-specific interventions to sustain and improve women's labour market outcomes.

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

India, Mexico in talks to mitigate tariff hike impact, says Agrawal

- India and Mexico are engaged in urgent talks to blunt the impact of Mexico's steep MFN tariff hikes—up to 50%—on countries without a trade agreement, which could hit about 2 billion dollars of Indian exports from 2026. This frames a limited Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) as New Delhi's preferred, time-efficient instrument to secure relief while a full FTA remains a longer-term possibility.

Nature and scale of Mexico's tariff move

- Mexico has approved a reform of its General Import and Export Tariffs Law that raises MFN duties to between 5% and 50% on around 1,455 product lines from non-FTA partners, citing industrial policy and import-substitution goals.
- For India, preliminary estimates suggest exports worth roughly 2 billion dollars will be exposed, notably in automobiles, two-wheelers, auto parts, textiles, iron and steel, plastics, leather and footwear—sectors where Mexico is a key growth market.

India's economic exposure

- Mexico is among India's top trading partners in Latin America and an important destination for car exports, making it strategically relevant for Indian OEMs that use Mexico as a gateway to the Americas.
- The new tariffs risk eroding Indian firms' price competitiveness vis-à-vis suppliers from FTA partners like the US, Canada and EU members, potentially triggering trade diversion and relocation of investment away from India in these value chains.

Diplomatic engagement and proposed PTA

- India's embassy in Mexico raised concerns with the Mexican Ministry of Economy in September 2025; this led to a virtual meeting on 2 December between Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and Mexico's Vice-Minister, where both sides agreed to explore a PTA as a "fast-track" solution.
- A PTA would allow selective tariff cuts on a negotiated list of products of mutual interest, offering quicker relief to affected exporters than a comprehensive FTA, which typically requires broad tariff elimination and lengthy negotiations.

Legal and WTO considerations

- Mexico has presented the hikes as WTO-consistent MFN measures applied on a non-discriminatory basis to all non-FTA countries, limiting India's scope for legal challenge at the WTO.
- A bilateral PTA can be notified under GATT Article XXIV or the Enabling Clause, but India must offer reciprocal concessions to ensure the deal is balanced and passes WTO scrutiny, which may involve opening segments of its own market to Mexican exports.

Strategic and policy implications for India

- The episode illustrates the vulnerability of Indian exporters in markets where India lacks FTAs, especially as more countries use industrial policy and tariff hikes to reshape supply chains and favour near-shoring.
- It strengthens the case for India to proactively pursue focused trade agreements in Latin America and diversify export destinations, while also nudging firms—particularly in autos and textiles—to upgrade products and explore local assembly in Mexico to stay competitive under evolving tariff regimes.

How Canada's farmers are producing record output of crops despite droughts and floods

Canadian farmers are achieving record or near-record crop output despite more frequent droughts and floods by aggressively adopting climate-adaptation technologies, agronomic tweaks and new crop genetics. These gains come with high capital costs, uneven adoption and potential pressure on global grain prices.

- Farmers combine multiple practices: minimum and zero-tillage to protect soil structure, subsurface tile drainage to remove excess water, slow-release fertilizer pellets, and precision herbicide use under agronomist guidance.
- These “little tweaks” allow fields to withstand both waterlogging and prolonged drought, helping grain, oilseed and pulse crops deliver unexpectedly high yields even in years that would previously have been written off as disasters.
- Across the Prairies, widespread adoption of climate-adapted crop varieties—bred or gene-edited for drought, heat, pest and disease resistance—has lifted average yields while moderating year-to-year volatility.
- Automation and data-driven equipment, such as self-guiding tractors, variable-rate applicators and million-dollar smart combines, enable precise seeding and nutrient placement, improving water use efficiency and boosting returns from each millimetre of rainfall.
- Canada’s government projects record harvests of spring wheat and canola for 2025, even as a multi-year drought persists; since most Canadian grain is exported, this helps stabilise global supplies and keeps food prices lower than they otherwise would be.
- Similar output resilience is reported in other export hubs like Australia, so climate-adapted production in a few technologically advanced regions is offsetting weather-related losses elsewhere, altering trade flows and price dynamics in world grain markets.
- High input prices and technology costs mean that while yields are high, margins remain tight for growers facing volatile commodity prices, and there is a risk that wealthier, larger farms will pull ahead while smaller operations struggle to keep up.
- The Canadian experience suggests that, with sufficient investment in R&D, extension services and risk-management tools, grain belts can adapt to more erratic climate regimes and even raise output, but only at high upfront cost and with sophisticated management.
- For other countries, the model underscores the importance of supporting farmer access to credit, advisory services and climate-smart technologies, while ensuring that adaptation strategies do not exacerbate inequality or environmental externalities.

Israeli military expansion in Syria raises tensions as it carves out buffer zone

- Israeli troops carried out a pre-dawn raid in Beit Jinn in southwestern Syria, officially to detain members of an Islamist militant group allegedly planning attacks into Israel; six Israeli soldiers were wounded in clashes during the operation.
- The raid is part of a wider Israeli push, made easier after the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, to establish a deeper buffer zone north of the 1974 disengagement line on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights.
- Israeli forces have set up new checkpoints, trenches and patrol routes in multiple Druze and Sunni villages, fielding tanks and Humvees and conducting frequent raids that residents say restrict movement and amount to creeping annexation.

Israel's stated rationale

- Israeli officials portray the build-up as a temporary measure to clear out remnants of Iranian-backed militias and prevent weapons or rocket teams from positioning within striking distance of northern Israel.
- They argue that only by physically controlling key high ground and border villages can Israel enforce the 1974 ceasefire terms and keep Hezbollah or other armed groups from exploiting Syria's post-war vacuum.

Syrian, Iranian and Hezbollah reactions

- The transitional authorities in Damascus, aligned with Iran, accuse Israel of using exaggerated or fabricated threats to justify aggressive actions and permanent territorial grabs, likening the moves to Israel's earlier annexation of the occupied Golan Heights.
- Hezbollah and allied militias point to the Beit Jinn killings as evidence of Israeli “occupation expansion,” vowing to resist but so far avoiding a full-scale confrontation, which keeps the area tense but below the threshold of open war.

Spillover into Lebanon and Gaza

- Israel continues to strike Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon and infrastructure linked to Palestinian factions, arguing that these operations are part of a single northern-front strategy stretching from Gaza through Lebanon into Syria.
- The overlapping theatres mean that any escalation in southern Syria—for example, further civilian casualties or attacks on Israeli patrols—could quickly reverberate along the Lebanese border and into Gaza, complicating ceasefire efforts there.

Strategic implications

- Israel's Syrian buffer-zone strategy fits into a broader doctrine of “rings of security,” using forward positions in neighbouring states to keep Iranian and allied forces at arm's length, but it increases friction with local populations and regional rivals.
- For Syria's fractured state and its backers, the gradual loss of control over yet another border strip underscores their weakened leverage and could push them towards asymmetric responses—such as deniable attacks or cyber operations—rather than direct military confrontation.

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.

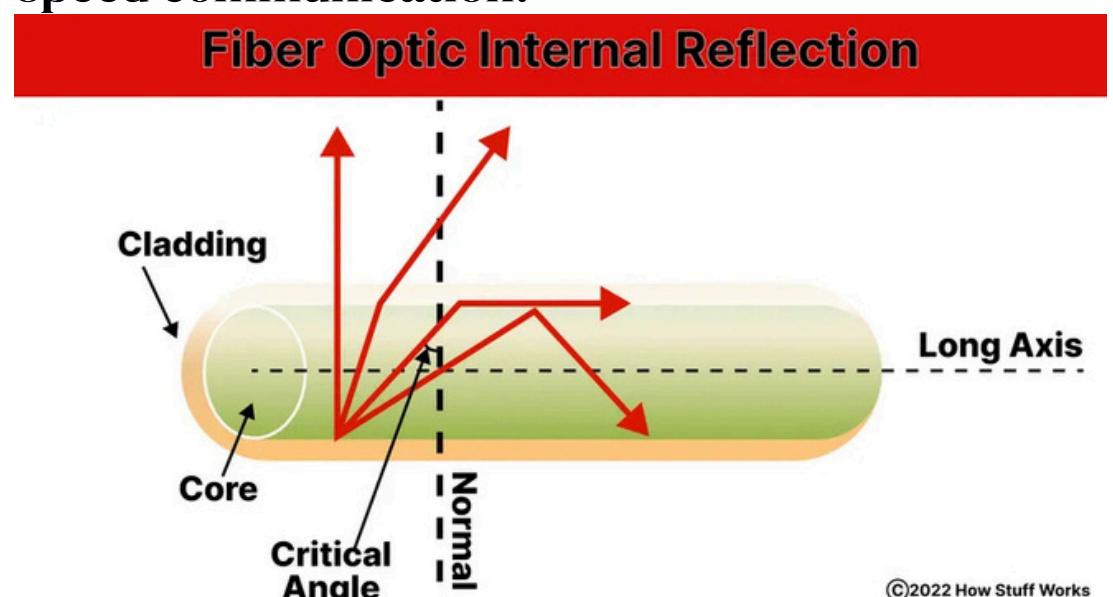
Q3. Ans b

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:



Anti-immigrant rhetoric intensifies across Europe

In the past year, tens of thousands hostile to immigrants marched through London, chanting, "send them home!" A British lawmaker complained of seeing too many non-white faces on TV. And senior politicians advocated the deportation of long time U.K. residents born abroad. The overt demonisation of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the U.K. — and Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right-wing parties gain popularity. In several European nations, parties that favour deportations and depict immigration as a threat to national identity come at or near the top of opinion polls — Reform U.K., the AfD, or Alternative for Germany and France's National Rally. President Donald Trump, who recently called Somali immigrants in the U.S. "garbage" and whose national security strategy depicts European countries as threatened by immigration, appears to be endorsing and emboldening Europe's coarse, anti-immigrant sentiments. Immigration has risen dramatically over the past decade in some European countries, driven in part by millions of asylum-seekers who have come to Europe fleeing conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Ukraine.

The Boston Tea Party was a pivotal act of political protest on December 16, 1773, where American colonists, disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded British ships in Boston Harbor and threw 342 chests of tea into the water to protest unfair taxation, particularly the Tea Act, and taxation without representation. This defiant act, organized by the Sons of Liberty, escalated tensions with Britain, leading to the punitive Intolerable Acts and pushing the colonies closer to the American Revolution.



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