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Arunachal Welcomes First Sunrise with 'Dance of Dawn'

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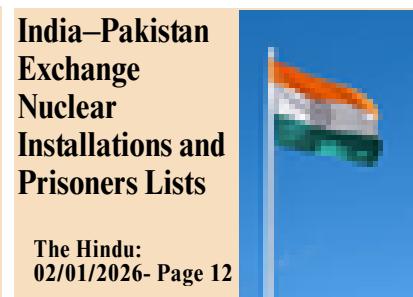
Why Does India Need Climate-Resilient Agriculture?

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Paris Agreement at 10: A Moment of Reckoning

The Paris Agreement completed ten years in November 2025, marking a significant milestone in the global fight against climate change. Over the past decade, thousands of climate actions—led by governments, corporations, civil society and individuals—have been implemented worldwide under its broad framework. The Agreement occupies a distinct place in the history of climate change mitigation for bringing nearly all nations under a single, shared platform of action.



The exit of the United States in 2025, along with growing demands from developing nations for alternative pathways to climate resilience, has triggered renewed debate on the relevance of Paris framework today. At the core of the Paris Agreement lies the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (1850–1900). This target has proved difficult to reconcile with the diverse and complex mitigation and adaptation needs of developing countries still grappling with basic development challenges. By replacing the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) under the Kyoto Protocol with voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for all countries, the Paris Agreement diluted the responsibility of developed nations, despite their greater historical emissions and financial capacity.

As a result, climate mitigation became a shared obligation without enforceable accountability. India's Position - India has consistently argued for a balanced approach that recognises development realities. India has also maintained that a 2°C target would not be catastrophic and that economic growth itself enhances climate resilience. New Delhi has repeatedly stressed that mitigation and adaptation deserve equal priority, particularly for climate-vulnerable countries. It has also pointed out the contradiction in climate actions by developed regions, citing the carbon-intensive nature of import restrictions imposed by the European Union on Indian goods.

What is the China model and why is it important to India?

China continues to be classified as a developing country under the Paris Agreement, despite being the world's largest annual emitter for the last two decades. At the same time, China has been decarbonising faster than many developed economies and is positioning itself as a partner for countries seeking alternative development and energy pathways. China has expressed readiness to reduce emissions and has indicated targets of 60–80% reduction from unspecified peak levels. Success of the China model shows that alternative pathways can meet climate obligations, as highlighted by India.

Ganges Water Sharing Treaty Enters Final Year

The 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty between India and Bangladesh has entered its final year. As part of the treaty mechanism, joint water measurements began on January 1, 2026.

The measurements are being carried out at two fixed locations: on the Padma River, about 3,500 feet upstream of the Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh, and at the Farakka point on the Ganga river in India. This annual exercise will continue until May 31.

Two-member technical teams from both countries are participating in the joint monitoring process. The data collected during this period is used to assess river flows, in line with the provisions of the treaty.

GO TO BASICS

Ganga River system

Origin: Gangotri Glacier in Uttarakhand;

Length: Approximately 2,525 km.

Basin Area: Covers about 8,61,452 sq. km in India, nearly 27% of India's landmass over 11 Indian states.

A.P says Alo Prabhat

Dong, India's easternmost village located in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, welcomed the first sunrise of 2026 on Thursday (January 1, 2026) with "Alo Prabhat: Dance of the Dawn", a cultural performance inspired by the traditions of the indigenous Meyor and Mishmi communities.

The performance marked a key highlight of the inaugural Sunrise Festival, organised by the Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Department at Dong, which is known for receiving the first rays of sunlight in India. The festival is being celebrated from December 29, 2025, to January 2, 2026, showcasing local culture and heritage while promoting the region's tourism potential.

Literary sources reveals savannas as not degraded forests

According to a study published in the British Ecological Society journal *People and Nature*, savannas in western Maharashtra are far older than commonly believed. Furthermore, they should not be treated as degraded forests as the research based on evidence from medieval Marathi literature describes them as open-canopy, tree-grass landscapes that persisted for at least 750 years predating colonial timber extraction. The research team led by Ashish N. Nerlekar and Digvijay Patil reviewed 28 georeferenced excerpts from 13th-20th century Marathi literature including biographies, hagiographies, poems and oral traditions. Consistent to the repeated mentions in the ancient text, research work has revealed typical savanna indicators like ivara, khaira, tarai, babhua, paasa, and grasses like Pavanya. Altogether, 62 plant species were identified. Out of this, 44 are wild plants, 27 savanna indicators, 14 generalists, only 3 forest indicators.

Recognising savannas as natural, ancient landscapes corrects the long-held bias that all open ecosystems are "deforested areas".

- **Avoidance of misguided afforestation**

Treating savannas as ancient ecosystems would prevent inappropriate afforestation drives that harm native flora and fauna.

- **Ecosystem-specific management**

Conservation strategies would shift from forest-style protection to fire management, grazing regulation, and species-specific plans, improving ecological outcomes.

Indian savannas support unique flora and fauna (grassland birds, pollinators, herbivores). Recognising their antiquity strengthens the case for protecting non-forest biodiversity.



Why India needs Climate -resilient Agriculture

India urgently needs climate-resilient agriculture (CRA) to ensure food security in the face of climate change. CRA aims to sustainably increase agricultural productivity and farmers' incomes, adapt farming systems to climate variability, build resilience, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRA relies on modern biotechnology such as biofertilisers, biopesticides, and genome-edited crops that can withstand drought, heat, salinity and other harsh conditions, along with AI-based analytics for precise agricultural engineering. These tools help guide farm decisions and significantly improve yields under changing climatic conditions.



Why CRA is Needed

India's food demand is rising rapidly due to population growth. Conventional farming methods are increasingly inadequate to deal with these climate stresses along with the growing population. Even today, about 51% of the country's net sown area is rainfed, making agriculture highly vulnerable to erratic rainfall, droughts, and temperature extremes.

Current Initiatives

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research launched the National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) in 2011 to demonstrate climate-resilient technologies such as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), zero-till wheat, and climate-resilient crop varieties.
- The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture focuses on rainfed areas, integrated farming systems, water-use efficiency, and soil health management.
- The BioE3 Policy positions climate-resilient agriculture as a key area for biotechnology-led solutions. In parallel, India's growing agritech sector is offering AI-enabled advisories and precision farming tools.

Key Challenges

- Adoption of CRA remains low among small and marginal farmers due to limited access, awareness, and affordability. There are quality inconsistencies in bio-inputs, which further discourage them. Added to that, the rollout of climate-resilient and genome-edited crops has been slow. The digital divide restricts the reach of precision agriculture, while soil degradation, water scarcity, increasing climate volatility, and fragmented policy coordination continue to pose serious challenges.

Cigarettes to cost more

From February 1, excise duty on cigarettes will be increased sharply, ranging from ₹2,500 to ₹8,500 per 1,000 sticks, compared to the earlier level of ₹5–10 per 1,000 sticks. While the compensatory cess on cigarettes will be eliminated, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate on cigarettes will be raised to 40% from the existing 28%.

In addition, cigarettes will continue to attract the National Calamity Contingent Duty (NCCD). Taken together, analysts estimate that the revised tax structure could lead to a 15–40% increase in cigarette prices.

Finance Ministry sources stated that India's total tax incidence on cigarettes currently stands at around 53% of the retail price, significantly lower than the 75% level recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to the Ministry, this gap provides both fiscal and public health space for a calibrated increase in tobacco taxation without deviating from global norms.

Apart from cigarettes, paan masala will also be subjected to higher taxation. It will attract a 40% GST along with an additional Health Security cess. In December, the government introduced Health Security cess. National Security cess Bill in Parliament aimed at imposing an additional Cess on paan masala. With these measures, the total levy on paan masala is expected to reach 88%.

Further, the Central Excise duty on other tobacco products such as chewing tobacco and gutkha will be levied on the basis of production.

The revised tax measures underscore the government's stated objective of aligning tobacco taxation with public health priorities while enhancing revenue mobilisation.



CBAM : A trade test for India

India's steel and aluminium exports to the European Union are expected to face significant cost pressures under the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a regulatory instrument introduced by the European Union to tax emission-intensive industries. It applies to sectors such as steel, aluminium, cement, electricity, and fertilisers. Under CBAM, imports of products like steel and aluminium will be taxed based on the volume of carbon emissions generated during their production. The mechanism aims to address the problem of carbon leakage, where production shifts to countries with less stringent environmental regulations.

Analysts estimate that CBAM-related costs could wipe out 16–22% of actual prices, making Indian exports less competitive in the European market. Steel and aluminium are already among the most protected sectors in the developed world, and CBAM adds a carbon-linked trade barrier. Indian exporters are projected to incur a margin loss of 16–22% reduction in realised margins.

From January 2026, exporters will be required to submit verified emissions data, certified by auditors under ISO 14065 standards. In the absence of verified data, EU authorities may apply default CBAM emission values, which are the highest benchmark, further increasing tax liability.

MSME sector to bear the burden

- CBAM requirements raises compliance costs pushing out small exporters from the market.
- Acceptance of default emission values : without proper disclosure of plant-level data from large producers, MSMEs end up paying default emission values which substantially raises effective costs.
- Verification and compliance will require additional financial and institutional capacity from exporters.
- Contractual pressures are likely, as European buyers may demand price reductions or shift suppliers to minimise CBAM exposure.

Emissions are highest in the blast furnace–basic oxygen furnace route widely used by Indian steel producers. In contrast, the US, EU, and UK predominantly use electric arc furnaces, which have much lower emissions. Indian exporters contend that CBAM serves commercial interests by regulating steel scrap exports to strengthen domestic capacity in developed economies.

India–Pakistan Exchange Nuclear Installations and Prisoners Lists

India and Pakistan carried out the annual exchange of lists of nuclear installations on January 1, marking the 35th consecutive exchange since the practice began in 1992. Under this arrangement, both countries share details of nuclear facilities that are not to be attacked in the event of hostilities. The exchange is held every year on January 1.

The agreement governing this exchange was signed on December 31, 1988, and came into force on January 27, 1991. The latest exchange took place despite bilateral relations remaining in a “deep freeze” following the military conflict between May 7 and 10, 2024, linked to Operation Sindoora after the Pahalgam terror attack.

On the same day, India and Pakistan also exchanged lists of prisoners and fishermen under the 2008 Agreement on Consular Access. This exchange is conducted twice a year, on January 1 and July 1.

India shared a list of 391 civil prisoners and 33 fishermen who are Pakistani or believed to be Pakistani. Pakistan, in turn, shared details of 58 civil prisoners and 199 fishermen who are Indian or believed to be Indian. India urged Pakistan to ensure the early release and repatriation of 167 fishermen and civilian prisoners.

UN Criticises Israel’s Move on UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is facing restrictions on its operations following a law passed by the Israeli parliament in 2024. The law bans UNRWA from operating in Israel and has blocked the supply of electricity and water to its facilities.

UNRWA provides essential assistance to Palestinian refugees and operates key facilities such as schools and healthcare centres. The restrictions are expected to affect the functioning of these services.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned the move, stressing that UNRWA functions under the protection of the UN Convention on Privileges and Immunities. UN officials have described the action as part of a “systematic campaign to discredit UNRWA.”



“It is a direct affront to the mandate granted to the Agency by the UN General Assembly and contrary to findings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which oblige Israel to fulfil its responsibilities as a UN Member State to UNRWA and the broader UN system.” - Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner-General

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to Indian history, consider the following statements: (2022)

1. The Dutch established their factories/ warehouses on the east coast on lands granted to them by the Gajapati rulers.
2. Alfonso de Albuquerque captured Goa from the Bijapur Sultanate.
3. The English East India Company established a factory at Madras on a plot of land leased from a representative of the Vijayanagara empire. Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

2) Convertibility of rupee implies

(2015)

- a) being able to convert rupee notes into gold
- b) allowing the value of rupee to be fixed by market forces
- c) freely permitting the conversion of rupee to other currencies and vice versa
- d) developing an international market for currencies in India

Case Study

As District Magistrate of Tonk in Rajasthan, IAS Saumya Jha noticed a troubling contradiction. While over 90 percent of Class 10 students aspired to science-based careers, fewer than 12 percent could actually pursue the science stream. Weak foundational maths skills stood in the way. To bridge this gap, she launched 'PadhaiWithAI.in', an AI-powered personalised learning platform designed for government schools. The tool solved textbook problems in Hindi and English, generated unlimited practice questions, and adapted to each student's pace. Teachers could focus on mentoring instead of repetitive worksheets. After a six-week intervention, Tonk's Class 10 maths pass percentage rose to 96.4 percent in 2025, a three-point increase over the previous year. The model now offers a scalable approach for districts facing similar learning challenges.



Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Option b (2 and 3 only)

1. “*The Dutch established their factories/warehouses on the east coast on lands granted to them by the Gajapati rulers.*” This statement is Incorrect: The Dutch established their presence in India primarily on the Coromandel Coast (Pulicat) and other parts of southern India. However, there is no historical evidence that their factories or warehouses were specifically established on lands granted by the Gajapati rulers (the rulers of Odisha). Their trade and establishments were more linked to regions outside the influence of the Gajapati rulers.

2. ‘*Alfonso de Albuquerque captured Goa from the Bijapur Sultanate.*’ This statement is correct: Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese governor, captured Goa in 1510 from the Bijapur Sultanate. Goa became the centerpiece of Portuguese colonial operations in India.

3. “*The English East India Company established a factory at Madras on a plot of land leased from a representative of the Vijayanagara Empire.*” This statement is correct: In 1639, the English East India Company acquired a plot of land on the Coromandel Coast from the local Nayak ruler (Damarla Venkatadri Nayak), a feudal representative of the declining Vijayanagara Empire.

This land later became the site for Fort St. George, which developed into the city of Madras (now Chennai).

2. Option (c)

freely permitting the conversion of rupee to other currencies and vice versa.

Convertibility of Rupee: Convertibility of a currency refers to the ease with which a country's currency can be exchanged for another currency in the foreign exchange market. It indicates the level of freedom available to residents and non-residents to convert the domestic currency into foreign currencies and vice versa without any restrictions imposed by the government or central bank. It means there are no significant restrictions on exchanging the rupee for foreign currencies in current account transactions (like trade and travel) or, in some cases, capital account transactions borrowing.

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