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2 billion-strong market... mother of all deals: EU chief on pact with India

The European Union and India are close to finalising a long-pending comprehensive trade agreement, which both sides have described as a major economic milestone. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stated that the deal is “on the cusp” of being signed and could create a combined market of about two billion people, accounting for nearly one-fourth of global GDP, while giving the EU a “first mover advantage” in a fast-growing region. The agreement is expected to be signed around the time of the India–EU Summit later this month.



Negotiations for this deal began in 2007, were suspended in 2013, and were relaunched in July 2022. Since then, substantial progress has been made, with 20 out of 24 chapters already agreed upon. The proposed agreement is described as comprehensive and aimed at addressing the interests of both sides.

'Exploitative, will step in': SC on airfare surge during festivals



The Supreme Court has said it will intervene to check “exploitative” airfares during peak seasons and festivals after observing that ticket prices often rise to three times the normal rates, such as during the Kumbh and other festivals. The Court was hearing a public interest litigation seeking a strong and independent regulatory framework to ensure transparency in airfare pricing and better passenger protection. Earlier, the Court had sought responses from the Centre, the DGCA and the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India. The petition pointed to repeated instances of sharp fare hikes and questioned the State's inaction in regulating pricing practices, cancellation policies, and grievance mechanisms.

The plea argues that air travel has become an essential service and that failure to regulate such practices violates the right to life under Article 21. It states that arbitrary and opaque pricing denies economically weaker passengers access to safe and timely mobility.

T.N. Governor refuses to read customary address in Assembly

The Tamil Nadu Governor declined to read out the customary address prepared by the State government at the beginning of the Assembly session and walked out of the House. The Raj Bhavan later stated that the address contained unsubstantiated and misleading claims. The Speaker repeatedly requested the Governor to follow the laid-down procedure and read the prepared address, reminding the House that the Governor cannot express personal opinions in the Assembly and that only elected members can do so. As the Governor persisted in not reading the address, he left the House. The Chief Minister then moved a resolution to take on record only the approved address, which was adopted unanimously by the Assembly.

The incident raises important questions about adherence to constitutional conventions and the respective roles of the Governor and the elected legislature. The Chief Minister announced that steps would be taken to seek a constitutional amendment to remove the practice of beginning the first Assembly session of the year with the Governor's address.

Governor altered policy address, says Kerala CM

The Kerala Assembly witnessed unusual scenes when the Chief Minister stated that the Governor had changed parts of the Cabinet-approved policy speech while delivering the customary address at the start of the 2026 session. According to the government, paragraphs 12, 15 and 16 were altered, with some parts removed and some additions made. The Chief Minister said that, as per established practice, the Cabinet-approved version would be treated as the official text, and the Speaker approved this version for the records.

The incident highlights a procedural issue regarding the Governor's constitutional role under Article 176, which requires the Governor to present the government's policy in the Assembly. Since the address represents the government's views, any changes to the approved text raise questions about adherence to constitutional convention and legislative procedure.

Position of Governor

- **Formal executive head:** Executive power of the State is vested in the Governor, exercised directly or through subordinate officers (Article 154).
- **Acts on ministerial advice:** The Governor functions with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister, except in matters requiring discretion (Article 163).
- **Real executive authority lies with ministers:** The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the State Legislative Assembly, not to the Governor (Article 164).

INTERNATIONAL

Trump slams U.K's move to hand over Chagos Islands

The United Kingdom has decided to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, ending nearly two centuries of British control. Under a deal signed in May 2025, Mauritius will gain control of the islands, while the U.K. will lease back Diego Garcia — where an important U.S. military base is located — for at least 99 years. The U.S. had earlier supported this arrangement, saying it ensures stable operation of the joint U.S.-U.K. military facility.

Recently, this decision came under criticism from U.S. President Donald Trump, who called it a strategic mistake. The U.K. government, however, says the move is needed to protect the base from international legal challenges, as the United Nations and its top court have urged Britain to return the islands to Mauritius.

This issue matters because it involves sovereignty, international law, military strategy, and great power rivalry. It also highlights how territorial disputes and legal pressure can affect long-term security arrangements in the global order.



Israel pulls down headquarters of UN agency for Palestinian refugees



Israel has begun demolishing the headquarters of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) in East Jerusalem. The agency described this as an “unprecedented attack”. A video released by Israel’s National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir showed a bulldozer starting the demolition at the compound.

UNRWA, or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is responsible for providing humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees. Its work is focused on relief and basic support for displaced Palestinian populations.

The location of the incident, East Jerusalem, is a disputed territory. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim it as their capital, making it a highly sensitive and contested area. Because of this, any action taken there has political and symbolic importance.

This development highlights the continuing tensions over Jerusalem and shows how the conflict affects international organisations working in the region. It also brings attention to the fragile situation surrounding humanitarian work in disputed territories.

NATO Against NATO: Trump's Greenland Ambition

What happened ? Recent developments have created serious tensions in transatlantic relations after the U.S. renewed and escalated its claims over Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark. While earlier statements were initially seen as not serious, the situation changed after a series of strong moves and statements, including the imposition of a 10% tariff on several European countries such as Denmark, Germany, France and the U.K. Greenland is strategically important due to its location between North America and the Arctic, its role in early warning systems, monitoring of vessels, and its vast untapped resources, especially rare earths. The U.S. already maintains a military base on the island with permanent personnel presence, which further underlines its strategic importance.

Why it matters ? Recent developments have created serious tensions in transatlantic relations after the U.S. renewed and escalated its claims over Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark. While earlier statements were initially seen as not serious, the situation changed after a series of strong moves and statements, including the imposition of a 10% tariff on several European countries such as Denmark, Germany, France and the U.K. Greenland is strategically important due to its location between North America and the Arctic, its role in early warning systems, monitoring of vessels, and its vast untapped resources, especially rare earths. The U.S. already maintains a military base on the island with permanent personnel presence, which further underlines its strategic importance. What makes the current situation more serious is that the pressure is coming from within the NATO alliance.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

- ✓ The North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty) – signed in Washington, D.C. on 4 April 1949 **April 4, 1949**
- ✓ Founding members : Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States
- ✓ NATO derives its authority from Article 51 of the United Nations Charter – inherent right of independent states to individual or collective defence.
- ✓ Article 5 of North Atlantic Treaty - Collective defence.
- ✓ Foreign exporters cut export volumes but **did not reduce prices**. It commits members to protect each other and sets a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance.
- ✓ The primary aim was to create a collective defence pact to counter the perceived threat of collective action in Europe in the post-Second World War period.
- ✓ NATO requires its members not to enter into any international commitments that conflicted with the Treaty.

At Present, NATO has 32 member countries:

Greece 1952	Turkiye 1952	Germany 1955
Spain 1982	Czechia 1999	Czechia 1999
Czechia 1999	Hungary 1999	Poland 1999
Bulgaria 2004	Estonia 2004	Bulgaria 2004
Estonia 2004	Latvia 2004	Lithuania 2004
Romania 2004	Romania 2004	Slovakia 2004
Slovakia 2004	Albania 2009	Croatia 2009
Finland 2023	Sweden 2024	Sweden 2024

Denmark is a founding member of NATO, which is built on the principle of collective defence. Traditionally, this framework worked to deter threats from outside the alliance, but in this case, concerns relate to actions by NATO's most powerful member. Europe has long depended heavily on the U.S. for security, with the U.S. contributing a major share of NATO's military spending, capabilities, and infrastructure in Europe. Although European countries have pledged to increase defence spending, it will take years before they can build sufficient independent capacity. This dependence has further increased after the war in Ukraine, where continued support also relies heavily on U.S. backing.

Who pays for Trump tariffs? Almost exclusively Americans

A recent study by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy titled “America’s Own Goal: Who Pays the Tariffs?” provides a detailed empirical assessment of the economic effects of the new round of tariff measures introduced in 2025. By using high-frequency, shipment-level data, the study examines who actually bears the burden of tariffs and how these measures influence prices, trade volumes, and supply chains.

Based on data from more than 25 million transactions valued at \$4 trillion, the study finds that U.S. customs revenue increased by around \$200 billion in 2025. However, this additional revenue did not come from foreign producers. Instead, about 96% of the tariff burden was borne by American importers and final consumers, effectively turning tariffs into a form of indirect consumption tax. Contrary to the expectation that exporters would reduce prices to remain competitive, foreign suppliers largely kept their prices unchanged.

This meant that fewer goods were supplied to the U.S. market at roughly the same prices. This adjustment mechanism had important consequences for firms within the U.S. economy, especially those that rely on foreign-sourced inputs. Such firms faced both higher costs and supply disruptions. They were forced to choose between absorbing the higher costs and reducing profits, passing the costs on to consumers through higher prices, or shifting to alternative suppliers, which itself involved delays and adjustment costs.

The study gives special attention to Brazil and India, which faced some of the highest tariff rates in 2025, at 50% and 25% respectively. Exporters from both countries did not reduce their prices to offset the tariffs but instead sharply reduced their export volumes. In the case of India, the study compares exports to the U.S. with exports to the EU, Canada, and Australia, which did not impose new tariffs during this period. While prices remained unchanged, Indian exports to the U.S. fell by approximately 18–24% relative to these other destinations.

The findings highlight a consistent pattern: tariff measures mainly operate by compressing trade volumes rather than by lowering foreign prices. The burden is transmitted through higher costs and reduced availability of goods within the importing country, while global supply chains experience disruptions and reorientation.



PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the cultural history of India, the memorising of chronicles, dynasty histories, and epic tales was the profession of who of the following? (2016)

- (a) Shramana
- (b) Parivraajaka
- (c) Agrahaarika
- (d) Magadha

2) With reference to the difference between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2017)

1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare, whereas the people of the Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them.

2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver, and copper, whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron.

3. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse, whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal. Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Case Study **Raja Gopal Sunkara, IAS**



Erode district in western Tamil Nadu faces limited rainfall, a dry climate and erratic water supply, making daily water access a serious concern for its largely rural population. The district's rural water demand is about 74 million litres a day, but actual per capita supply remains much lower, exposing the failure of the conventional overhead tank (OHT) system marked by wastage, poor monitoring and irregular distribution. Confronted with this governance challenge, District Collector Raja Gopal Sunkara adopted a technology-driven, outcome-oriented approach. IoT devices were installed in 50 habitations across 16 villages, using sensors to automatically monitor tank levels, control pumps and valves, and regulate supply based on real-time needs. The data is stored on the cloud and made accessible through the iNeer mobile app to local representatives and operators, ensuring transparency and accountability. This intervention reduced electricity costs by around 40% and increased water supply by over 20%, illustrating how administrative innovation, ethical responsibility and citizen-centric governance can convert a persistent public service problem into a sustainable solution.

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN



122 DAYS TO GO

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option D

Magadha: In ancient India, the term Magadha was associated with a class of bards or professional reciters who specialized in memorizing and narrating chronicles, genealogies, and epic tales. These individuals played a crucial role in preserving oral traditions and historical records before the advent of written texts. They were often employed by kings and nobles to glorify their dynasties and recount heroic tales.

2. Shramana (a): The term "Shramana" refers to a group of ascetics or renunciants in ancient India who rejected Vedic rituals and pursued spiritual liberation. Shramanas were associated with non-Vedic traditions like Jainism and Buddhism, focusing on meditation, renunciation, and self-discipline rather than historical narration.

3. Parivraajaka (b): Parivraajaka refers to wandering ascetics or mendicants who roamed in search of spiritual knowledge and liberation. They were not involved in memorizing or recounting historical or genealogical records.

4. Agrahaarika (c): Agrahaarika refers to individuals associated with Agraharas, which were land grants given to Brahmins by rulers for religious and educational purposes. Agrahaarikans were likely priests, scholars, or teachers but not chroniclers or bards.

2) Answer is option c

1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare, whereas the people of the Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them. This statement is correct. The Rigvedic Aryans were familiar with advanced military equipment like coats of mail and helmets, as mentioned in the Rigveda. In contrast, there is no archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization indicating the use of such warfare equipment.

2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver, and copper, whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron. This statement is incorrect. Both Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people were familiar with gold, silver, and copper. However, the Indus Valley Civilization did not use iron, as it was introduced later during the Vedic period (Iron Age). The Rigvedic period primarily relied on copper and bronze. Iron became more prominent in the later Vedic period. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse, whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal. This statement is correct. The Rigvedic Aryans were horse-centric, and horses played a significant role in their culture, warfare, and religious rituals. In the Indus Valley Civilization, there is no conclusive evidence of horses being domesticated or commonly used.

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