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India and France upgrade ties to strategic partnership

India and France upgraded their bilateral relations to a Special Global Strategic Partnership during talks in Mumbai between PM Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron. The meeting produced 21 key outcomes across defence, technology, critical minerals, health, and skilling.

Defence & Aerospace Boost - The leaders inaugurated the Tata-Airbus H125 helicopter assembly line in Karnataka, producing "the world's only helicopter capable of flying to Mount Everest heights" for global export. Accordingly, the first "Made in India" H125 delivery is expected in 2027. Building on this momentum, defence cooperation is expanding from Rafale jets to submarines, including a BEL-Safran joint venture to manufacture Hammer missiles in India.

Tech & Innovation Platforms - India and France launched Indo-French Centres for AI in Health at AIIMS and Digital Science and Technology, along with the National Centre of Excellence for Aeronautics skilling. Complementing these initiatives, they also kickstarted the India-France Year of Innovation and Innovation Network to foster collaboration.

Strategic Outcomes - India and France instituted an Annual Foreign Ministers Dialogue to regularly review the Horizon 2047 Roadmap implementation. Additionally, they formed a Joint Advanced Technology Group focused on critical and emerging technologies, alongside a Joint Declaration of Intent for Critical Minerals cooperation. Further strengthening economic ties, they amended the Double Tax Avoidance Agreement and signed a T-Hub-Nord France MoU for startup ecosystem collaboration. Emphasizing its global importance, PM Modi described the partnership as a "stability anchor" amid unpredictable world dynamics, capable of spanning "deep oceans to tallest mountains." Echoing this trust, President Macron highlighted mutual faith in the rule of law and commitment to combat terrorism. Thus revitalized, this oldest strategic partnership gains fresh energy to support Atmanirbhar Bharat and shared progress.

Political leaders, officials must foster fraternity: SC

On Tuesday, a three-judge Supreme Court Bench led by CJI Surya Kant, with Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi, urged political leaders and high public officials to uphold constitutional morality, foster fraternity, and avoid stigmatizing communities through divisive speeches. Hearing activist Roop Rekha Verma's petition, the court addressed statements by Chief Ministers, bureaucrats, and police that normalize discrimination, erode equal citizenship, and legitimize exclusionary governance.

Court's Key Observations - India, as a mature 75-year-old democracy, expects its leaders to embody mutual respect and self-respect, rejecting any behavior unbecoming of public office. The Supreme Court called for restraint on communally charged rhetoric "from all sides," stressing leaders' duty to foster national fraternity while acknowledging limits on regulating thought itself. It also highlighted public expectations that democratic institutions align with constitutional ethos, advocating an "objective, contemplative" approach over populism.

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Exercise Vajra Ghaat showcases self-propelled artillery gun system

On Monday, the Indian Army's Southern Command conducted Exercise Vajra Ghaat at the Pokhran Field Firing Range in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan. Spearheaded by the White Tiger Division, the drill validated refined Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) for the K9 Vajra-T self-propelled artillery gun system in desert warfare. It demonstrated swift deployment of heavy artillery in the harsh Thar Desert terrain, enhancing battlefield survivability and operational effectiveness.

The K9 Vajra-T, a 155 mm/52 calibre tracked howitzer, excels in cross-country mobility and versatility across terrains—from sub-zero high-altitude areas to deserts. Equipped with cutting-edge technology, it delivers long-range precision strikes at high rates of fire, catalysing artillery modernisation and deepening India's firepower projection.

On December 20, 2024, the Ministry of Defence signed a Rs 7,628.70 crore contract with Larsen & Toubro (L&T) under the Buy (Indian) category. The deal aligns with Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India, generating over nine lakh man-days of employment across four years while involving MSMEs.

Focus area : UPSC GS III Internal Security - Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

India, France renew defence cooperation for 10 years, call to boost military partnership

India and France renewed their 10-year defence cooperation agreement on Tuesday during the sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue in Bengaluru. The meeting was co-chaired by India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and France's Minister of Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Catherine Vautrin. This renewal strengthens their strategic partnership amid evolving regional security challenges. India specifically requested France to boost indigenous content in the Rafale fighter jets to 50% while expanding maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities within the country. The agreement was formally signed by India's Defence Secretary and France's Deputy Director General for International Relations and Strategy. Both nations also announced Reciprocal Deployment of Officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments to enhance military interoperability.

The ministers discussed key areas like co-development and co-production of defence equipment, emphasizing closer industry ties in niche technologies. They reaffirmed military-to-military cooperation as a core pillar of their partnership. Rajnath Singh highlighted the recent India-EU Security and Defence Partnership as a milestone, urging both nations to leverage it for regional stability and joint capabilities.

A significant outcome was the MoU for joint venture manufacturing of Hammer missiles in India, signed between Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Safran Electronics and Defence. Singh underscored India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region while condemning Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism as a major threat to regional peace.

This dialogue reflects deepening Indo-French alignment in defence manufacturing, technology transfer, and counter-terrorism cooperation.

The 1946 Royal Navy revolt: solidarity amid sharpening polarisation

February 18, 2026, marks the 80th anniversary of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Revolt, a pivotal yet often-forgotten uprising that shook British colonial rule in India. What began as a protest by naval ratings quickly escalated into a widespread show of unity across communities, highlighting both anti-colonial fervor and fleeting Hindu-Muslim solidarity amid rising tensions.

Background

The revolt ignited on February 18, 1946, when hundreds of ratings at HMIS Talwar in Bombay launched a hunger strike over poor food, low wages, and racial discrimination by British officers. News spread rapidly, halting work at 22 ships in Bombay harbor and shore bases in Castle and Fort barracks. Ratings formed a Naval Central Strike Committee, linking local grievances to national demands like freeing Indian National Army soldiers. They marched through streets carrying Subhas Chandra Bose's portrait and hoisted flags of the Congress, Muslim League, and Communist Party.

Hindusthan Standard

INDIAN SAILORS IN REVOLT

SIX HOURS BATTLE WITH BRITISH TROOPS

GRAVE TURN IN R. I. N. MEN'S STRIKE IN BOMBAY

TWENTY SHIPS CAPTURED

Govt. Rushing Strong Naval And Air Reinforcements

"CEASE FIRE" ON BOTH SIDES AFTER CONCLUSION OF TRUCE

POLICE OPEN FIRE ON CROWDS

FIRING ON STRIKERS AT KARACHI

INDIANS RETALIATE WITH NAVAL GUNS

Evolution

By February 21, the initially peaceful strikes turned violent when British forces opened fire on the naval ratings, prompting clashes that drew rebel ships to man their guns in defense. The uprising then expanded rapidly to 78 ships, 20 shore establishments including one in Delhi, and nearly 20,000 ratings across ports like Karachi, Bombay, Madras, Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Kolkata, and the Andamans. It lasted until February 23. Bombay's streets transformed into a battleground of popular support. Hindu-Muslim crowds observed hartals, raided post offices, uprooted tram tracks, and lit bonfires in response to the British firing. Mill workers, students, and locals barricaded areas, torched vehicles, and engaged police in fierce street fights, particularly in Bhendi Bazar and the mill district. These confrontations resulted in around 200 deaths and hundreds injured. Diverse processions waved tricolours, League flags, and red flags, boldly defying colonial order.

Legacy of the 1946 Revolt : Though British forces quelled the revolt using army battalions and armored vehicles, its legacy endures as a powerful symbol of post-war anti-colonial radicalization. The uprising cut through deepening communal divides that had emerged after the Shimla Conference breakdown in 1945. Renowned poet Sahir Ludhianvi evocatively described it as "a flower of hope in a scorched and desolate garden," capturing its fleeting yet profound beauty. Overshadowed by the ensuing Partition violence from August 1946, the RIN Revolt nonetheless reminds us of the united anti-colonial potential that once united diverse groups. Even today, amid resurging inter-communal strains across South Asia, it urges reflection on the enduring power of solidarity.

Politics, security will prevail in how nations make choices: Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar declared on Tuesday that political and strategic considerations will increasingly overshadow economic ones in global decision-making. Speaking at the Global Economic Cooperation 2026 summit organised by the Future Economic Cooperation Council, he described the current era as "possibly the most turbulent in living memory," where long-standing assumptions about politics, strategy, economics, and technology are simultaneously transforming.

Mr. Jaishankar explained that nations and businesses are now prioritising de-risking and diversification across multiple fronts to navigate this volatility. "Economics will give way to politics and security when choices must be made," he asserted, adding that technology would prove even more transformative than ever before. For India, this means relentlessly building national capabilities, tackling growth challenges comprehensively, and balancing short-term crises with long-term opportunities. "The reform express will continue to roll on," he affirmed confidently.

India is responding from a position of strength by engaging international partners more intensively, as evidenced by recently concluded trade deals. The country aims to play a more prominent role in global production, services, technology, skills, and talent markets, influencing both supply and demand dynamics.

Six Features of the Changing World Order

Mr. Jaishankar outlined six key global trends:

- US re-industrialisation at any cost.
- China's unrelenting focus on manufacturing and exports.
- Intensifying and polarising tech competition.
- Redefined energy trade flows.
- New mindsets fostering greater risk-taking.
- Migration and mobility emerging as contentious issues.

This strategic outlook positions India to navigate global turbulence through reforms, partnerships, and enhanced global salience.

Focus area : The Resurgance of Economic Statecraft - Economic Survey 2025-2026

Our partnership strong, says Macron as India-France Year of Innovation is launched

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron jointly launched the India-France Year of Innovation on Tuesday in Mumbai. President Macron described it as the starting point for unprecedented integration between the two knowledge-based economies, built on years of close collaboration across key sectors.

Defence and Make in India Partnership

France has emerged as a steadfast partner in India's Make in India initiative, particularly in defence manufacturing. Macron highlighted how both nations have reinforced technological sovereignty while supporting national industries through countless joint projects. This partnership exemplifies France's commitment to India's self-reliance goals in strategic sectors.

Space Cooperation Milestone

A flagship achievement is the Trishna satellite mission, developed collaboratively in 2024 by ISRO and France's CNES. This project combines scientific excellence with industrial expertise to monitor climate change effectively, demonstrating the power of Indo-French synergy in space technology for global challenges.

Innovation Across Sectors

The partnership extends to practical domains like the farm-to-plate project led by a French institute in Puducherry, which tracks agricultural products for better supply chain efficiency. Cultural collaborations include joint efforts on the National Museum in Delhi and Maritime Museum complex in Gujarat, blending heritage with modern innovation.

AI and Global Leadership

Macron noted that leaders of many global companies hail from India, positioning the country as an innovation powerhouse. He emphasized that the question is no longer whether India innovates, but "who will innovate with India," with France firmly answering as its committed partner. Their co-chairing of the AI Action Summit in Paris (2025) underscores ongoing AI collaboration, with Modi set to host the India AI Impact Summit in Delhi.

This initiative strengthens Indo-French ties in defence, space, agriculture, and AI.

A separate classification for denotified tribes

Current scenario : ***On January 30, 2026, the Union government assured DNT community leaders that the Registrar General and Census Commissioner would enumerate Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) in Census 2027's second phase. However, lacking clarity on methodology, DNT leaders are mobilizing for a dedicated "separate column" in the Census form. This demand, backed by academics, echoes recommendations from successive Commissions examining DNTs' socio-economic plight, highlighting persistent calls for accurate enumeration to address historical marginalization.***

Who are DNTs?

Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) were communities branded as "criminal" by British colonial rulers under the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871. This law targeted groups colonial administrators deemed inherently prone to non-bailable offenses, attributing it to a caste-based "addiction" to crime that supposedly spanned generations. The CTA mandated their registration, surveillance, and control, embedding a hereditary stigma that equated entire tribes with criminality. Though repealed in 1952, this colonial legacy continues to shape their marginalized identity today.

Historical Formation and Evolution

- 1871: CTA enacted alongside first synchronous Census, mandating registration and surveillance of "criminal tribes."
- 1911-1931: Census explicitly enumerated these tribes; 1931 was the last such count.
- 1949: Ayyangar Commission formed pre-independence to examine their conditions.
- 1952: CTA repealed, denotifying communities as DNTs; habitual offender laws introduced, shifting stigma from hereditary criminals to "habitual offenders," perpetuating targeting.
- Post-1952, many DNTs merged into SC, ST, or OBC lists as "Vimukt Jatis," but specific enumeration ceased as post-independence Censuses avoided caste counts beyond SC/ST.

Key Committees and Laws

- **1998: DNT-RAG formed by Mahasweta Devi and G.N. Devy, leading to technical advisory group.**
- **2008: First National Commission (B.S. Renke) recommended Census enumeration for identification.**
- **2017: Idate Commission identified ~1,200 DNTs (assimilated into SC/ST/OBC) plus 268 unclassified; urged permanent body (instead, Welfare Board and SEED scheme launched, underutilized due to certification issues).**
- **State-specific backward class inclusions and habitual offender laws provided partial benefits but sustained discrimination.**

Challenges faced by DNTs

Today DNTs continue to grapple with profound socio-economic backwardness, compounded by persistent certification barriers and the lingering stigma from their colonial past. Despite the Union government's assurance to community leaders that these groups will be enumerated in the second phase of the 2027 Census, there remains no clarity on the methodology, leaving DNT leaders increasingly frustrated and mobilizing for action. They are specifically demanding a dedicated "separate column" in the Census form to grant DNTs a distinct status comparable to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), along with sub-classification to address the uneven backwardness within these diverse communities.

This ongoing struggle vividly reflects the unresolved legacies of colonial-era injustices, where DNTs were once branded as inherent criminals under the Criminal Tribes Act. Community leaders argue that such stigmatization endures today through laws like the Habitual Offenders Act, which shifted the label from hereditary criminals to "habitual offenders" but sustained targeted discrimination. Even as many DNTs have been partially assimilated into SC, ST, or OBC lists—allowing limited access to reservations and state policies—these measures fall short, as core issues like social exclusion, educational deficits, economic marginalization, and political underrepresentation persist for most. The push for constitutional recognition is thus a clarion call for targeted welfare, uniform issuance of DNT certificates, and robust affirmative action.

India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

'India AI Mission 2.0 to focus on UPI-like AI service for MSMES

Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Tuesday that India is advancing to the next phase of its AI Mission. The focus now shifts to developing a bouquet of ready-to-use AI solutions tailored for medium and small businesses across key sectors. These solutions will be accessible through a common digital platform, designed similarly to the UPI ecosystem, making AI technology affordable and scalable for smaller enterprises.

Massive Compute Expansion

India currently boasts 38,000 Graphics Pro cessing Units (GPU) for AI compute capacity, with plans to add 20,000 more GPUs in the coming weeks. In this sector, India has successfully democratized access to a wide cross-section of its population, fostering inclusive AI development.

Sovereign AI Models Excel Globally

Stanford University has ranked India among the top three AI nations globally, validating its technological progress.

IT Sector Transition and Upskilling

Addressing concerns about AI's impact on India's IT services industry, Vaishnaw emphasized collaboration between government, industry, and academia during this technological transition. The Centre is prioritizing upskilling programs to prepare the existing talent pipeline for emerging AI-driven roles, ensuring the workforce remains competitive.

Fair Remuneration for Content Creators

The Minister strongly advocated for news publishers and content creators to receive fair remuneration from AI firms that train their models on publicly available media data. A DPIIT committee white paper (2025) recommended mandatory blanket licensing for AI companies using copyrighted content, with royalty fees determined by a government-constituted panel. If implemented, India would pioneer a statutory licensing regime for AI developers worldwide. This comprehensive approach positions India as a global AI leader while addressing ethical and economic challenges.

AI-linked use cases offer potential for MSMEs to scale up

At the India AI Impact Summit, policymakers highlighted practical AI applications transforming India's industrial sector. These include AI-enabled quality inspection detecting textile weaving/dyeing defects in real-time, predictive maintenance tools minimizing machine downtime, source-tracing AI for contaminated products like cough syrup, and continuous emissions monitoring—all enhancing manufacturing scale, quality, and competitiveness.

MeitY Secretary S. Krishnan emphasized that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs)—numbering over 76 million, with one-fifth in manufacturing—must lead this AI transition. While large firms can finance upgrades, smaller enterprises in traditional sectors like textiles struggle with investment needs. To address this, officials launched an Athena Infonomics study (with National Institute for Smart Government and ministries of MSMEs, textiles, pharmaceuticals) analyzing AI adoption's impact on manufacturing MSMEs.

Textiles Additional Secretary Rohit Kansal asserted that "India's AI battle will be won or lost on the factory shop floor." He explained that long-term economic growth depends on modernizing legacy industries (textiles, food processing, leather) rather than digital natives alone. Productivity gains in MSMEs will drive national income far more than incremental improvements in already-digitized sectors, positioning AI as critical for India's industrial competitiveness.

PRELIMS CORNER :

Q) With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements: (2017)

1. Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism.

2. Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary but existed forever in a latent form.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q) With reference to the religious practices in India, the "Sthanakvasi" sect belongs to (2018)

(a) Buddhism

(b) Jainism

(c) Vaishnavism

(d) Shaivism

TURNING POINT
ABSTENTION AGITATION

Travancore's Nivarthana (Abstention) Agitation of the 1930s was a landmark socio-political movement against caste-based discrimination in governance. The agitation erupted in 1932 after the Legislative Reforms Act (promulgated by Maharajah Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma) retained property-based franchise, favouring upper castes like Nairs, Brahmins, and Kshatriyas. Ezhavas, Christians, Muslims—numerical majorities—boycotted elections for proportional representation and adult franchise.

On December 17, 1932, aggrieved communities formed the All Travancore Samyukta Rashtriya Samiti at L.M.S. Hall, Thiruvananthapuram, drafting demands. On January 25, 1933 (E.J. John presiding), they resolved to abstain. Leaders C. Kesavan, N.V. Joseph, and P.K. Kunju spearheaded it; the group renamed All Travancore Joint Political Congress. SNDP Yogam and All Travancore Ezhava League (Kollam meeting, July 31, 1932, C.V. Kunjiraman chair) pledged support.

Momentum peaked with C. Kesavan's sedition-trial speech at Kozhencherry (May 11, 1935, George Joseph chair), intensifying protests. Government conceded: 1935 Public Service Commissioner ensured communal rotation; franchise widened; seats reserved for Ezhavas, Christians, Muslims. Reforms amended the Act, reducing Nair dominance. Indirectly, it paved way for the Temple Entry Proclamation (November 12, 1936).

1937 elections vindicated abstentionists: SNDP Yogam and Congress candidates triumphed; T.M. Varghese became Deputy President. This mass movement united underprivileged groups, ended constitutional monopoly, and shifted Travancore politics toward direct action and responsible government demands.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option b

Statement 1: Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism. This statement is incorrect.

Sautrantika and Sammitiya are sects of Buddhism, not Jainism.

Sautrantika: A Buddhist school of thought that emphasized the primacy of the Sutras (scriptures) and rejected the Abhidharma as authoritative. They believed in the momentariness of all phenomena.

Sammitiya: A Buddhist sect belonging to the Vibhajyavada tradition, known for its belief in the existence of a "pudgala" (person or self) without contradicting the doctrine of "anatman" (non-self).

Jainism, on the other hand, had sects like Digambara and Svetambara, which are not related to Sautrantika or Sammitiya.

2. Statement 2: Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary but existed forever in a latent form.

This statement is correct.

The Sarvastivadin school of Buddhism held that all dharmas (phenomena) exist in the past, present, and future, but in different forms.

They believed that dharmas were real entities that exist eternally in a latent state, becoming active only under certain conditions. This was a key point of debate with other Buddhist schools, such as the Sautrantikas, who held that phenomena were entirely momentary.

2) Answer is option b

Sthanakvasi Sect: The Sthanakvasi sect is a sect of Jainism, specifically part of the Shwetambara (white-clad) tradition.

It originated in the 17th century as a reform movement within Jainism, emphasizing a return to simplicity and the core teachings of Jainism.

Sthanakvasis avoid idol worship and focus instead on meditation, self-discipline, and the teachings of Jain scriptures.

Jain order had divided into two major sects.

1. The Digambara sect
2. The Svetambar sect

The Digambara sect, in recent centuries, has been divided into the following sub-sects : Bisapantha, Terapanth, and Taranapantha or Samaiyapantha.

the Svetambara sect has also been split into three main sub-sects: Murtipujaka,, Sthanakvasi, and Terapanthi

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Sam Levenson

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