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U.S. Supreme Court halts Trump's sweeping tariffs

The US Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's global tariffs in a 6-3 decision on Friday. The ruling targeted tariffs imposed under an emergency powers law, including reciprocal tariffs on nearly every country like India. These aimed to address trade deficits declared as a national emergency in April 2025. The Treasury collected over $133 billion from these import taxes by December. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that the Constitution grants Congress sole power over taxes, including tariffs. The Framers did not give this authority to the Executive Branch.

This marks the first major review of Trump's agenda by a court, which he had influenced with appointments of three conservative justices. The decision does not block tariffs under other laws, though those have stricter limits. Trump called the verdict deeply disappointing and expressed shame over the majority justices. Dissenting justices Alito, Thomas, and Kavanaugh argued the tariffs were lawful based on text, history, and precedent. The ruling leaves open refund claims for companies like Costco, which may pursue them in lower courts.

India, Arab League seek lasting peace in Middle East, avoid criticising Israel

India and the Arab League issued a rare joint statement after the India-Arab League Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Saturday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar co-chaired the event. The statement committed both sides to a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East based on international law, UN resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

They called for a sovereign, independent, and viable State of Palestine on 1967 borders living peacefully alongside Israel. Both affirmed the inalienable rights of Palestinians. Notably, the statement avoided explicit criticism of Israel. It welcomed the 2025 Sharm El-Sheikh Peace Summit outcomes, including the Gaza ceasefire agreement. Arab states like Egypt and Qatar, along with the US and Algeria, received commendation for their roles. The parties urged full compliance and stressed unimpeded humanitarian aid to Gaza, including UNRWA operations. The statement also addressed terrorism without naming Pakistan. Arab foreign ministers strongly condemned the Pahalgam attack on Indian tourists. They reaffirmed zero tolerance for terrorism, cross-border threats, and terror financing.

Both sides pledged mutual support to dismantle terrorist networks and bring perpetrators to justice. This holds significance in international relations as it showcases India's strategic diplomacy in the Middle East. It balances support for Palestine with pragmatic ties and strengthens counter-terrorism cooperation. For polity, it highlights multilateralism in pursuing peace and security.

India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

India's AI Vision: MANAV Framework

During his address at the India AI Impact Summit on February 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined India's MANAV vision for AI. MANAV stands for Moral and ethical systems, Accountable governance, National sovereignty, Accessible and inclusive growth, and Valid and legitimate AI. On Thursday, leading international and domestic AI companies signed the New Delhi Frontier AI Impact Commitments at the summit. This voluntary framework guides evaluations of AI systems for global contexts. It recognises cross-lingual support as key to democratising AI, aligning with India's push against tech concentration. Signatories agreed on two commitments: advanced analysis of real-world AI usage and stronger multilingual, use-case evaluations. Companies include Google, OpenAI, Meta, Anthropic, Microsoft, Sarvam, Gnani, Bharatgen, and Soket AI.

Global South Pitch and Strategic Significance

Home to one-sixth of the world's population, the largest youth cohort globally, and one of the most dynamic technology talent pools, India stands as both a creator and a rapid adopter of emerging technologies. This unique position confers not only scale, but also responsibility in shaping the global AI discourse. In this regard, India's Global South pitch positions it as a bridge between AI-haves and AI-have-nots. Its diverse scale makes it ideal for inclusive AI development. Modi noted that any AI model succeeding in India can deploy globally due to robust data centres and startups. He emphasised that India views AI as a global common good to share openly. He further stressed ethical guidelines, transparent rules, data ownership by generators, and avoidance of monopolies as key to effective utilization of emerging technologies. He contrasted this with views treating AI as a confidential strategic asset. The MANAV framework offers a values-based, home-grown alternative to regulations like the EU AI Act. These steps promote equitable AI governance in international relations.

A common framework to build trust in AI in Asia and India's position

Artificial Intelligence (AI) promises solutions for global challenges like public health, education, and productivity. In South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Asia-Pacific, AI adoption is uneven. Decisions on safety, bias, and accountability often ignore affected communities. Trusted AI systems are key to gains. Without trust, societies reject them, governments resist, and misuse occurs.

AI ecosystems are transnational. They involve global data flows, hardware chains, talent shortages, and weak cybersecurity. Developing nations become mere consumers with little control. Countries craft national AI policies to build responsible ecosystems. Agendas vary by capabilities. South Korea focuses on chips. Singapore leads governance. China stresses state control. India upsills IT workers. Nepal eyes energy-efficient compute.

A common Asian framework is needed. It should measure trust via trusted datasets, resilient infrastructure, AI skills, value chain access, proportionate governance, and cybersecurity. This aligns with global norms like UNESCO ethics and ISO standards.

India can lead with its balanced governance. The AI Impact Summit offers a chance for a shared trust framework. This ensures inclusive development over fragmented asymmetries.

UN's investigation in Sudan finds 'hallmarks of genocide' in El-Fasher

What happened? The UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan has raised serious concerns over the Rapid Support Forces' (RSF) actions in El-Fasher. The RSF captured the city on 26-27 October 2025 after an 18-month siege. During this period, they imposed harsh conditions aimed at destroying non-Arab communities, especially the Zaghawa and Fur. The Mission documented mass killings, widespread rape, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearances. These acts targeted people based on ethnicity, gender, and perceived political affiliation. The RSF used dehumanising rhetoric that signalled intent to wipe out these communities in whole or in part. This pattern echoes earlier attacks on other non-Arab groups but was far more deadly in El-Fasher.

Why it matters?

This situation holds key significance in international relations and global governance. It highlights the risk of genocide, a grave crime under international law that demands urgent civilian protection. The Mission stresses accountability for perpetrators and those aiding them. As fighting spreads to areas like Kordofan, it underscores the need for coordinated global action through bodies like the UN. Such crises test the effectiveness of international mechanisms in preventing atrocities and upholding human rights. For polity, it emphasises the role of fact-finding missions in documenting evidence for justice.

India signs statement condemning Israel's plan for West Bank

What happened? India initially skipped a joint appearance at the United Nations to condemn Israel's plans for expanding settlements in the West Bank. This event occurred on Tuesday in New York, where the Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour read out the statement. Diplomats from Arab nations, BRICS members, Japan, Australia, EU states like Germany, and all UN Security Council permanent members except the US joined it. India's absence surprised observers due to its traditional support for a Palestinian state and past criticism of Israeli settlements. However, a day later on Wednesday night, India signed the joint statement. The Palestinian government noted that over 100 states and organizations, including India, rejected Israel's unilateral measures and annexation moves in West Bank areas under Palestinian Authority control.

Why it matters?

This development carries significance in international relations and India's foreign policy. It reflects the complexities of balancing ties with Israel and Palestine amid upcoming high-level visits, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned trip to Israel. Such shifts highlight diplomatic pragmatism in multilateral forums like the UN. For polity and governance, it underscores how domestic positions on global issues evolve through strategic considerations. The episode also emphasises the role of joint statements in building coalitions against contentious actions, reinforcing norms of international law on occupied territories.

Can Indian IT bridge the AI 'deployment gap'?

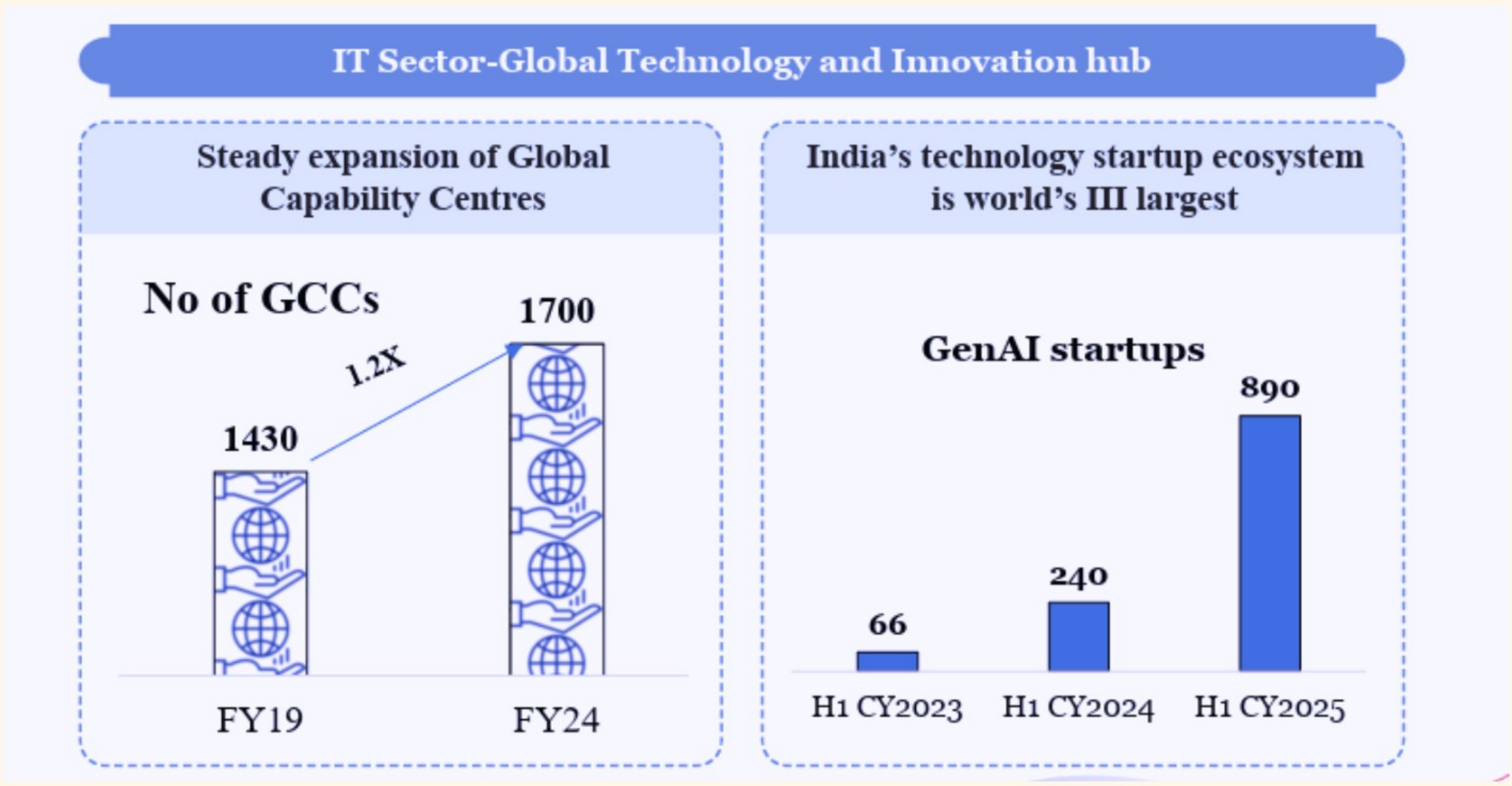
What happened? **Nandan Nilekani, Infosys Chairman, spoke at an Infosys presentation about AI's challenges. He reframed Clayton Christensen's 1990s "technology overshoot" theory as today's AI "deployment gap". This gap occurs when AI advances faster than businesses can implement it. Nilekani said Indian IT firms like Infosys can bridge this gap profitably. Infosys revealed AI generated 5.5% of its December quarter revenue. The company partnered with Anthropic to build enterprise AI solutions for telecom, finance, manufacturing, and software sectors. Nilekani highlighted legacy systems creating problems. These range from 1960s mainframes to 2000s routers, all working in disconnected silos. AI now provides tools to modernise and integrate them effectively. He predicted a shift from "buy" to "build" approaches. Agentic AI layers—tools achieving goals with minimal supervision—will sit atop enterprise applications. Other Indian IT leaders agree humans still guide AI productivity gains.**

What It Means?

This change in status quo creates opportunities within challenges for India's $300-billion IT services sector. AI tools like GPT-5.3 Codex and Anthropic's Opus 4.6 automate coding tasks, causing recent stock market crashes. However, IT firms maintain advantages in custom solutions across the full cycle from strategy to deployment. JP Morgan analysts call assumptions of total AI replacement overly simplistic. Human involvement persists in current productivity boosts, though it may decrease gradually. Legacy system upgrades and agentic AI development favour services companies. Rising AI tech spending helps, but budget reallocations threaten growth targets.

Why Important

The issue matters greatly for India's economy as IT and GCCs drive exports. Global Capability Centres number around 1,600 and represent nearly 40% of services exports. They host 20% of the world's chip designers in cities like Hyderabad and Bengaluru. Hyderabad runs Amazon's largest global backoffice. Bengaluru-Hyderabad employ 20% of Goldman Sachs staff. GCCs increasingly overlap with IT in outsourceable work like design and supply chains. Policymakers worry about low-IP jobs with few Indian CTOs or patents. AI erodes traditional advantages like low-cost engineers, real estate, and flexible labour laws. An IT sector hit today threatens tomorrow's GCC growth. Some multinationals vertically integrate, sidelining domestic firms. Globally, this tests the services model as AI becomes self-improving. India needs upskilling for high-end strategic roles to maintain its competitive edge.



How do graphics processing units work?

What is a GPU? Nvidia launched the GeForce 256 in 1999 as the world's first GPU. GPUs started in gaming to improve visuals and performance. Today, they power the digital economy beyond games. A Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) crunches numbers rapidly for parallel tasks. Unlike CPUs, which handle complex tasks sequentially, GPUs excel at simple calculations on massive data sets. For example, rendering a 1920x1080 screen updates over 120 million pixels per second at 60 frames. Each pixel needs lighting, textures, and shadows computed identically. GPUs use thousands of cores like many teachers grading papers simultaneously.

CPU vs GPU: Key Differences

Core Purpose and Design

The CPU (Central Processing Unit) handles complex, sequential tasks like running operating systems and managing apps. It excels at quick decision-making and switching between jobs. In contrast, the GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) performs many simple calculations in parallel. It shines in repetitive tasks like rendering graphics or AI math.

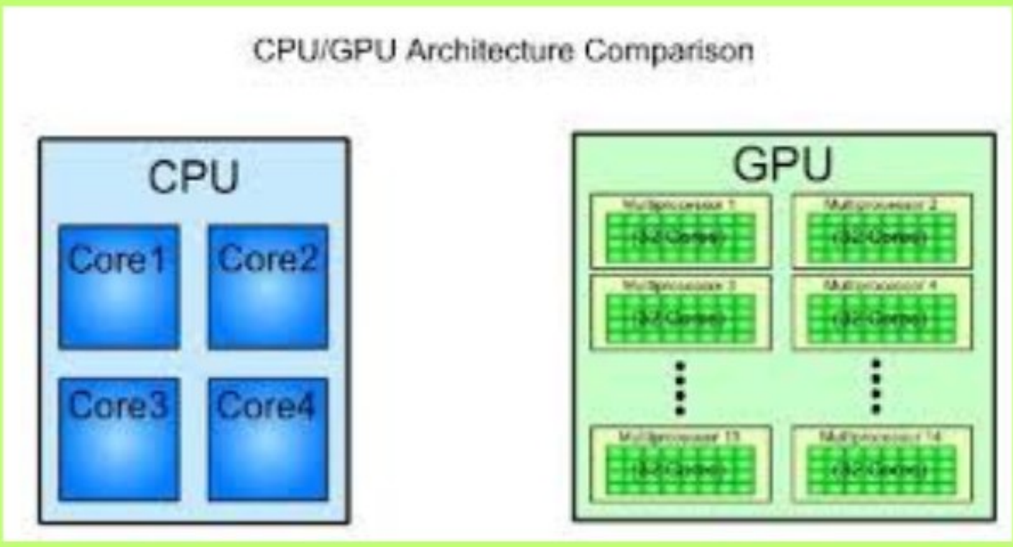
Architecture and Cores - A CPU has few powerful cores (4-16 typically) with large caches and control logic for intricate operations. A GPU packs thousands of smaller cores optimised for uniform workloads. This makes GPUs faster for bulk data processing but slower for branched logic.

Task Examples - CPUs manage everyday computing: browsing, file handling, and single-threaded apps. GPUs power graphics pipelines—vertex processing, rasterisation, shading—and extend to machine learning matrix multiplications or simulations.

Memory and Performance - CPUs use system RAM with moderate bandwidth. GPUs feature high-speed VRAM for massive data throughput, ideal for textures or neural network parameters. GPUs consume more power but deliver superior parallel throughput, like quadrillions of operations per second in tensor cores.

Key Acronyms in CPU-GPU Computing

- CPU (Central Processing Unit): The main brain of a computer. It handles complex, sequential tasks like running programs and making decisions.
- GPU (Graphics Processing Unit): A specialised processor for parallel tasks. It excels at graphics rendering and AI computations with thousands of cores.
- RAM (Random Access Memory): Temporary, fast storage for active data and programs. CPUs access this for general computing needs.
- VRAM (Video Random Access Memory): High-bandwidth memory dedicated to GPUs. It stores textures, models, and frames for quick graphics processing.



Significance for Technology and Economy

GPUs power breakthroughs in AI training, scientific simulations, climate modelling, and data centre operations worldwide. Their shift from gaming to core infrastructure fuels digital economies, enabling everything from autonomous vehicles to drug discovery. Nvidia's dominance sparks governance debates on antitrust measures, as seen in European probes into bundling practices. Energy demands are massive—training one AI model rivals household monthly use—pushing policies for green computing and power grids. Global supply chains expose vulnerabilities, like chip shortages, urging diversified sourcing. For India, this means boosting domestic semiconductor fabs under PLI schemes to harness GPU-driven growth while navigating trade frictions

AI startups reimagine healthcare access

AI Innovations in Healthcare - At the AI Impact Summit, startups showcased AI tools transforming healthcare access. Clinics on Cloud leads with decentralised Health ATMs. These are physical kiosks paired with AI digital infrastructure. They offer instant screenings for over 60 conditions in remote areas. Users get real-time tele-doctor consultations and cloud medical records. CEO Abhay Agarwal compares them to banking ATMs. They decentralise preventive care to ease hospital loads and raise health awareness. Tests measure 40 parameters in 10 minutes with 90-95% lab-like accuracy. Results arrive via WhatsApp or print. Non-invasive checks like ECG and spirometry make it user-friendly.

AI Health Innovators

1. Tranquil AI targets student mental health. NIT Vellore founder Arihant Bhardwaj built it from personal burnout experiences. The platform tracks moods, offers guided journaling, meditation, and sleep tools. An AI chat adapts using consented data like logs. It listens for venting, comforts, or guides as needed.
2. OncoVault simplifies cancer care. This AI app from BigOHealth manages reports. Patients upload scans or photos. AI identifies types, extracts details, and summarises years of treatment chronologically. It aids second opinions with quick doctor reviews. Audio logs capture symptoms easily.
3. Bhargavi empowers remote athletes. Ex-Army officer Amit Oberoi founded it with IIT Delhi inputs. Users record videos with ground cones. AI generates kinograms—skeletal overlays. It analyses joint angles, stride, and biomechanics like lab systems.

Why This Matters for India

India's doctor-patient ratio stands at 1:1511, well below WHO's 1:1000 benchmark, straining rural access. In this scenario, AI tools like Health ATMs can extend screenings to remote kiosks, thereby easing urban overload on medical professionals. At present, there is no comprehensive code on AI innovations in healthcare. Telemedicine Practice Guidelines 2020 legalise virtual consults, while Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) builds a unified health ID ecosystem for seamless records. Mental health crisis worsens with only 0.3 psychiatrists per lakh population against a 4:1000 need. Affordable AI platforms fill this void via personalised interventions. Challenges include data privacy breaches under DPDP Act 2023 scrutiny. Algorithmic bias risks misdiagnosis in diverse populations. Unregulated AI medical devices lack IMDR standards. Robust governance via NITI Aayog oversight ensures equitable, safe scaling.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to the Himalayan rivers joining the Ganga downstream of Prayagraj from West to East, which one of the following sequences is correct? (2024)

a) Ghaghara - Gomati - Gandak - Kosi
b) Gomati - Ghaghara - Gandak - Kosi
c) Ghaghara - Gomati - Kosi – Gandak
d) Gomati - Ghaghara - Kosi - Gandak

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2) Which of the following is / are the characteristics/ characteristics of Indian coal? (2013)

1. High ash content
2. Low sulphur content
3. Low ash fusion temperature
Select the correct answer using the codes given below.
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Reforms

Bridging a divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service'

India's post-Independence civil services focused on generalist administrators for nation-building. These rules ensured stability but were not designed for today's science-driven challenges like climate change, public health, and technology. Scientists entering government service follow outdated administrative rules. This mismatch limits their effective role in policymaking.

Civil services recruitment is competitive and general. Scientific careers demand years of specialized education and research. Yet, scientists lack tailored training, career paths, or authority in government. Their inputs often become reactive, not proactive or long-term. Administrative rules emphasize discipline and neutrality. Scientific work needs questioning policies with evidence. Without safeguards, scientists' advice remains advisory, not integral. This weakens governance in technical sectors.

Many countries like the US, UK, France, Germany, and Japan have dedicated scientific cadres. These protect integrity, ensure transparent advice, and guide evidence-based policies. India needs an Indian Scientific Service (ISS). It would recruit experts through peer review and place them in ministries. Specialized branches could cover environment, health, energy, and more. ISS would complement administrators by providing evidence and foresight. This reform strengthens resilient, science-led governance for India's ambitions.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option b

Downstream of Prayagraj, the correct sequence of Himalayan rivers joining the Ganga from west to east is:

Gomati: Joins the Ganga near Ghazipur (Uttar Pradesh).

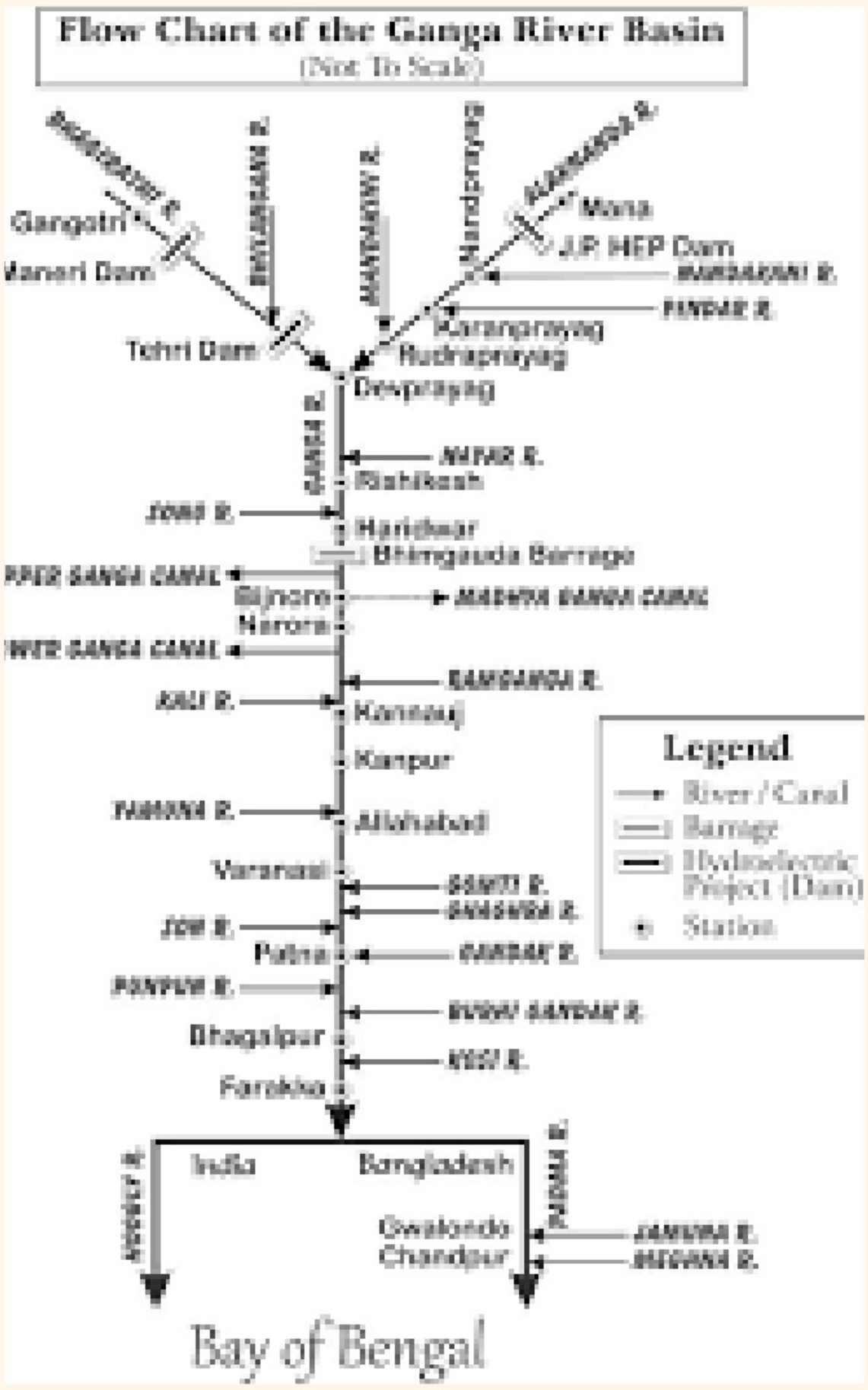
Ghaghara: Joins the Ganga near Chhapra (Bihar).

Gandak: Joins the Ganga near Hajipur (Bihar).

Kosi: Joins the Ganga near Kursela (Bihar).

Ganga River system

Bhagirathi is the source stream of Ganga. It emanates from Gangotri Glacier at Gaumukh at an elevation of 3, 892 m (12,770 feet). Many small streams comprise the headwaters of Ganga. The important among these are Alaknanda, Dhauliganga, Pindar, Mandakini and Bhilangana. At Devprayag, where Alaknanda joins Bhagirathi, the river acquires the name Ganga.



2) Answer is option d

Indian coal exhibits distinct properties that impact its usage, particularly in thermal power generation. It has high ash content, typically ranging from 20–45% in non-coking varieties. This stems from its Gondwana basin origin, where extensive mineral impurities like silica and alumina get trapped during geological formation. High ash reduces calorific value and creates substantial ash disposal challenges for power plants.

A key advantage is its low sulphur content, generally below 1%. Unlike many international coals, this minimises sulphur dioxide (SO_2) emissions during combustion. It helps India comply with cleaner air standards without extensive flue gas desulphurisation systems.

However, Indian coal suffers from low ash fusion temperature. This causes ash to melt at relatively low furnace temperatures (around 1,100–1,200°C). The molten ash forms clinkers or slag, sticking to boiler tubes. This "slagging" reduces efficiency and increases maintenance costs in thermal plants. Coal washeries and beneficiation partially mitigate these issues, but high ash remains a persistent operational constraint.

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN

92 DAYS TO GO