India 'stands firmly' with Israel, Modi tells Knesset

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to *the Israeli Parliament, Knesset* during his Israel visit. In this occasion, Modi condemned Hamas attack strongly. He called October 7 attack barbaric terrorism and declared that India stands firmly with Israel.

Table 1: Top 10 items of export from India to Israel

2000		2022	
Name of the commodity	**Value (in $)**	**Name of the commodity**	**Value (in $)**
Precious metals, pearls and jewellery	273 million	Mineral fuels and oils	1,627 million
Cotton	49 million	Precious metals, pearls and jewellery	1,474 million
Organic Chemicals	23 million	Electrical Machinery and Equipment	299 million
Textiles and Apparel	11 million	Organic Chemicals	174 million
Defence	8 million	Plastics	157 million
Plastics	7.6 million	Steel and Aluminium products	100 million
Edible fruits and nuts	6.6 million	Arms and Ammunitions	89 million
Man-made staple fibres	6 million	Textiles and Apparel	74 million
Electrical Machinery and Equipment	5.3 million	Nuclear reactors	56 million
Coffee, Tea, Spices	4.2 million	Pharmaceuticals	44 million

Source: Compiled by authors from data available at Director General of Foreign Trade

Gaza Peace Initiative
During his visit, Modi voiced India's active support for the Gaza Peace Initiative. The United Nations Security Council endorsed it. He noted that India backs this peace pathway fully. The Initiative addresses Palestine issue. It balances both nations' search for regional peace.

India-Israel Bilateral Ties
Talking about India-Israel bilateral ties, Modi highlighted remarkable cooperation. Nations share progress in water management. Agriculture partnerships grow steadily. Talent exchange programs expand across both countries.

Terror Angle
Recalling India's terror fight, Modi mentioned 26/11 Mumbai attacks. He stressed that India follows zero tolerance policy. No double standards exist in terrorism fight. Modi praised Israel following Abraham Accords. Israel built ties with Arab nations. These moves showed courage and vision.

Jewish History in India
India admires Jewish community's history. Jews faced no discrimination in India. Historic communities thrive in Kerala. Maharashtra and West Bengal host them too. Both nations plan Free Trade Agreement. Digital infrastructure aids cross-border finance. Trade potential remains largely untapped now. Netanyahu thanked Modi for support. He remarked that India stood by Israel in difficulties. Both leaders agreed strong friendship binds both nations.

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Rajasthan overturns 2-child limit for local polls, removes leprosy bar

Rajasthan cabinet made a big change by overturning a 30-year-old panchayat election rule on Wednesday. _People with more than two children can now contest elections. This applies to panchayat and urban local body polls._

Law Minister Jogaram Patel announced that the cabinet amended two key laws. They changed _Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009._

Old rules blocked candidates with more than two children from contesting. Leaders introduced these rules decades ago in an attempt aimed to control population growth then. Government now considers changed circumstances.

Leprosy Bar The cabinet made another amendment too. They removed leprosy as a disqualification criterion. This follows Supreme Court orders. The change gives equal opportunity to all.

Focus area : General Studies II: Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Not poaching, but 'illegal wires': MP govt report on 8 tiger deaths

Madhya Pradesh government submitted a status report highlighting that eight tigers died in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve between November 2025 and February 2026. The report has been moved to Madhya Pradesh High Court, after Wildlife activist Ajay Dubey filed a Public Interest Litigation on the issue.

According to the report, four out of the eight tigers died from electrocution. Three touched live wires in farm fields. One got caught in solar fence. Four other deaths were natural due to ecological and biological factors.

What is the illegal wire issue?

Tigers move out of their usual protected territory during natural dispersal. In such situations, farmers use illegal wires to protect crops.

Accountability Factor

Government officials have reported that system took action in each case. Officials did spot inspections after each incident. They registered forest offence cases, identified and acted against offenders. Legal procedures were also started immediately. The status report found _no poaching evidence_. It clearly highlighted that the electrocution happened outside reserve boundaries. Therefore, there is no case for systemic negligence by reserve management. Field director has warned electricity department that the dilapidated power lines threaten wildlife.

Focus area : General Studies-III: Technology, Economic Development, Bio diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management - Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Key Issue: Human-wildlife conflict near reserves. Illegal farm wires kill dispersing tigers.

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SC: Need some mechanism to make voting mandatory

Chief Justice Surya Kant made remarks on voting while hearing a petition where the petitioners want elections even with one candidate so that voters should use NOTA option to register their opinion. He *suggested a mild compulsory voting system to increase voter turnout.* The bench included Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi. Petitioners challenged Section 53(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Justice Bagchi noted a fact that out of the total population, educated and rich people vote less. On the other hand, poor people vote more often.

CJI agreed with this view and noted that rural areas celebrate voting day. He went on to reiterate that voter turnout needs improvement. In this regard, he suggested that Compulsory mechanism can help although it should not be harsh.

Focus area : General Studies- II: Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations - Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

In a 2017 Supreme Court case, Central government had defended that exercising one's franchise is the fundamental right of every citizen but not a duty. At the time, the Union ministry of law and justice relied on the law commission's report stating that making voting compulsory would be undemocratic. The country's election law provides citizens not only with the right to vote but also to refrain from voting during electoral exercises, it added. The Election Commission had taken a similar stand in court. "Freedom of expression means not only providing voters the right to vote but also the right to not vote," the poll body told the court.

Argentina, Belgium and Brazil are examples of nations with mandatory voting system.

MILAN 2026 concludes successfully

Indian Navy has successfully concluded Exercise MILAN 2026 on 25 February 2026. A closing ceremony happened onboard INS Vikrant. The location was off Visakhapatnam coast. Rear Admiral Alok Ananda presided over it. He serves as Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet.

The theme was 'Camaraderie, Cooperation, Collaboration'. According to government source, participation reached record scale in this edition. Total assets included 42 ships and submarines. Aircraft numbered 29 in total. Foreign navies contributed 18 ships. The exercise had a Harbour Phase and a Sea Phase.

Strategic Importance

Friendly Foreign navies participated in high-tempo tactical manoeuvres alongside Indian Naval Ships, reflecting growing convergence of maritime interests towards ensuring safe and secure seas. Apart from integral helicopters onboard the Friendly Foreign Country ships, maritime patrol aircraft from France, Germany and USA also participated. Participating navies praised Indian Navy's planning. Training objectives were fully met.

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IT sector stocks crash 5% as report warns of SaaS becoming obsolete; down 21% in Feb

Nifty IT index plunged 4.7% on Tuesday amid AI disruption fears of IT jobs. Stock market indices declined sharply on Tuesday. Technology stocks led the fall. Investors sold shares due to trade worries. Amid disruptive geopolitical developments, Artificial intelligence disruptions caused main concern.

IT sector dropped heavily with major tech companies losing most value. In contrast Metal sector rose despite weak market. This showed mixed sector performance.

Analysts noted AI impact and job loss fear as a key factor. Rapid AI growth threatens IT jobs which essentially leads to traditional business models facing disruption. Investors fear valuation changes ahead.

Global trade tensions added uncertainty and it fuelled investors' avoidance of risky positions. Analysts have also noted that IT stocks fell for five days while defensive positioning dominated market sentiment.

Key Themes

AI disrupts technology sector jobs. IT companies face business model threats. Metal sector shows strength. Trade uncertainties affect risk appetite.

AI: India must contend with basic constraints

India aims to lead global AI as displayed at the 2026 AI Impact Summit. *A recent OpenAI reports show Indians heavily use ChatGPT's advanced data analysis, writing, and technical tools, closing the "capability overhang".*

capability overhang

capability overhang refers to the gap between what the latest large language models can do (LLMs) and what they're actually used for.

Infrastructure Hurdles

AI strains power efficiency via costly GPUs and data centre inference. This is an area of concern for India. India's second-largest AI user base faces high electricity costs and capital shortages for local infrastructure. Risk persists of reliance on foreign hyperscalers despite Semiconductor Mission progress.

Human Capital Edge

India boasts strong talent pools while competitive salaries lag global levels, and quality-of-life issues challenge retention against overseas appeal. *AI tools like Claude threaten traditional IT jobs, traditionally a middle-class pathway.*

Government's Strategy

Government frameworks mirror Aadhaar/UPI successes, promoting digital embrace. Policies address infrastructure limits, talent retention, and ecosystem growth to harness India's AI addiction for knowledge economy gains.

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US slaps 126% tariff on solar firms, cites Adani not joining subsidy probe

The US Department of Commerce imposed a 126% countervailing duty (CVD) tariff on Indian solar products on February 20, 2026. This followed a preliminary *anti-subsidy investigation* triggered by two Adani Group companies - *Mundra Solar Energy and Mundra Solar PV* - withdrawing cooperation as mandatory respondents. Their non-participation led to the highest penalty methodology called *'Adverse Facts Available'.*

The investigation found these companies benefited from Indian export promotion schemes including Advance Authorisation, Duty Free Import Authorisation, Duty Drawback, and Export Promotion of Capital Goods (EPCG). It also highlighted India's heavy reliance on Chinese solar imports like polysilicon and wafers. Other Indian manufacturers like Waaree Energies cooperated but still face the same preliminary tariff rate.

Broader view :

India's solar exports to the US surged to $792.6 million in 2024 (9x growth from 2022), with over 90% of PV module exports directed there. The tariff may redirect volumes to domestic markets, creating pricing pressure on Indian OEMs and impacting manufacturer profitability. Initiated on August 6, 2025 by US solar manufacturers' coalition, the probe examined transnational subsidies and export-linked benefits.

'A Google map for electricity': BRPL's 'digital twin' of power grid

Power distribution companies (DISCOMs) are adopting digital twins to manage rising electricity demand from solar panels, electric vehicles, and smart meters. BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) deployed India's first large-scale digital twin in Delhi's Janakpuri division.

What is a Digital Twin?

A digital twin creates a real-time virtual replica of the physical electricity network. It mirrors substations, transformers, feeder lines, and consumer meters on a digital platform. The system receives continuous updates from field equipment.

How it Works

The digital twin integrates data from SCADA systems, along with Geographic information system (GIS) maps, Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, and smart meters into a unified dashboard. Once the data is in order, Artificial intelligence analyses patterns and detects anomalies in the system. Engineers monitor power flows, voltage levels, and load conditions instantly.

Key Differences from Traditional Systems

Conventional grids respond after faults occur through field inspections. Digital twins enable predictive maintenance by flagging equipment stress and forecasting overloads before outages happen.

Benefits

Digital twins reduce outage frequency and duration. They optimise load management, integrate renewable energy, and curb power theft. Globally, such systems cut operational costs by 2-4% and restoration time by 20%.

Focus area : General Studies-III: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

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PRELIMS CORNER :

Q) In the context of solving pollution problems, what is/are the advantage/advantages of bioremediation techniques?

1. It is a technique for cleaning up pollution by enhancing the same biodegradation process that occurs in nature.

2. Any contaminant with heavy metals such as cadmium and lead can be readily and completely treated by bioremediation using microorganisms.

3. Genetic engineering can be used to create microorganisms specifically designed for bioremediation.

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

Q) Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) is a standard criterion for: (2017)

a) Measuring oxygen levels in blood
b) Computing oxygen levels in forest ecosystems
c) Pollution assay in aquatic ecosystems d) Assessing oxygen levels in high altitude regions

CULTURE
Kashmiri Nadru

Nadru, or lotus stem—also known as lotus root—is an indigenously grown food source across Kashmir's picturesque lakes. A porous and fibrous lake vegetable that was once commonly available, Nadru grew to become an irreplaceable ingredient in a traditional Kashmiri kitchen. From regular consumption to festivals, Nadru's earthy and fibrous texture allowed it to be very versatile. Over decades this plant root has grown to become representative of the region, involved in dishes specially cooked during Nowruz, the Iranian New Year which is popularly celebrated across the Kashmir valley.

Beyond being a culinary gem, lotus stem or Nadru has several medicinal properties that elevate its gastronomic importance. Low in saturated fat and cholesterol, it is also a rich source of dietary fibre, nutrients and minerals like vitamin C, vitamin B, vitamin E, potassium, thiamin, phosphorus, iron, copper, manganese and pantothenic acid. Known to be a fat-free vegetable, it is packed with phytonutrients that help in building up a robust immune system and reduce the risk of heart diseases. Nadru is also said to improve blood circulation and help manage blood pressure.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option c

Bioremediation refers to the use of microorganisms, plants, or microbial enzymes to degrade, detoxify, or transform pollutants into less harmful forms. It is an environmentally friendly and cost-effective approach to addressing pollution.

Statement 1: It is a technique for cleaning up pollution by enhancing the same biodegradation process that occurs in nature. This statement is Correct. Bioremediation relies on natural processes of biodegradation, where microorganisms break down organic pollutants. The process can be enhanced by optimizing environmental conditions (e.g., adding nutrients or oxygen) to facilitate microbial activity. This makes bioremediation an effective pollution-control technique.

Statement 2: Any contaminant with heavy metals such as cadmium and lead can be readily and completely treated by bioremediation using microorganisms. This statement is Incorrect. Heavy metals like cadmium and lead cannot be biodegraded because they are elements and cannot be broken down into simpler substances. Bioremediation may help immobilize or transform these metals into less toxic forms, but it cannot completely treat them. Thus, this statement is overly broad and incorrect.

Statement 3: Genetic engineering can be used to create microorganisms specifically designed for bioremediation. This statement is Correct: Advances in genetic engineering have enabled the creation of genetically modified microorganisms that are more efficient at degrading specific pollutants. For example, genetically engineered bacteria can be designed to metabolize oil spills or specific chemical pollutants, enhancing bioremediation efforts.

2) Answer is option c

Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) is a key indicator used in environmental science to measure the amount of oxygen required by microorganisms to decompose organic matter in water. It serves as a standard criterion for assessing pollution levels in aquatic ecosystems.

Why is BOD important?

Definition: BOD is the amount of dissolved oxygen needed by aerobic microorganisms to break down organic matter in a given water sample over a specific period, usually 5 days, at a certain temperature (typically 20°C).

Indicator of Pollution:

- High BOD levels indicate high organic pollution, meaning the water contains a large amount of biodegradable organic material. This can deplete oxygen levels, harming aquatic life.
- Low BOD levels indicate cleaner water with less organic pollution.

Applications of BOD:

- Monitoring wastewater treatment efficiency.
- Assessing the impact of industrial and agricultural discharge on water bodies.
- Tracking pollution in natural water ecosystems.

Limitations of BOD:

- It only measures biodegradable organic matter, not pollutants like heavy metals or toxins.
- Results can take several days due to the 5-day test period.

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