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The Hindu *Analysis*

Daily Current Affairs for UPSC · HPAS · State PSCs

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India–U.S.–UAE Trilateral · SCO Heads of Government · Ladakh Framework · CERT-In & Agentic AI · Aditya-L1 & Solar Eruptions · India–New Zealand FTA · ECI's Unfinished Lessons · U.S. PERM Crackdown · India–U.K. CETA

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Compiled by Sapna Chauhan

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GS 2 · International Relations

The Hindu · Page 1

India–U.S.–UAE Trilateral in Mumbai: Rubio Pitches American & Venezuelan Oil

WHY IN NEWS U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**, in Mumbai for talks hosted by EAM **S. Jaishankar** together with UAE Foreign Minister **Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, called India a "*refining superpower*" and pitched U.S. and Venezuelan crude for Indian refineries.

VALUE ADDITION

I2U2 — the 'West Asian Quad'

Emerged from an **October 2021** foreign ministers' meeting (then called the *International Forum for Economic Cooperation*) after the **Abraham Accords** (2020) normalised Israel–UAE ties. 'I2' = India, Israel; 'U2' = USA, UAE. First leaders' (virtual) summit: **July 2022**. Focus areas: water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security.

IMEC — India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor

MoU signed on the sidelines of the **G20 New Delhi Summit (September 2023)** by India, U.S., Saudi Arabia, UAE, France, Germany, Italy and the EU. Two legs — an **Eastern corridor** (India to the Gulf by sea) and a **Northern corridor** (Gulf to Europe by rail and sea via Haifa and Piraeus) — plus electricity cables, a clean-hydrogen pipeline and a digital cable. Part of the G7's **PGII** (launched 2022) and seen as an alternative to China's **BRI** (2013).

Rubio pitches oil from U.S., Venezuela in Mumbai visit

External Affairs Minister hosts U.S. Secretary of State, UAE counterpart; Rubio expresses desire to send more Venezuelan oil to Ambani-owned plant in Jamnagar, praises India's refining capacities

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Calling India a "refining superpower", U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday said he discussed possible Indian oil purchases from the U.S. during talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, adding that India and the U.S. are "very, very close" to wrapping up negotiations on a much-delayed free trade agreement.

He will also discuss a plan for more Venezuelan oil to be refined at the Mukesh Ambani-owned Reliance Energy plant in Jamnagar, Mr. Rubio said.

Energy ties, trade, and connectivity were on the agenda as Mr. Jaishankar hosted Mr. Rubio and United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Mumbai. The External Affairs Minister met with each of his counterparts separately, and then held a meeting with both of them together, indicating that trilateral cooperation on the issues was also discussed.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and UAE FM Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. ANI

Mr. Jaishankar called the trilateral meeting a "useful exchange of perspectives on energy, connectivity and contemporary developments".

The trilateral meeting, which was not earlier announced by the External Affairs Ministry, comes at a time when the UAE is facing many challenges in energy exports and trade due to the U.S. war in Iran and Tehran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. "The U.S., India, and the UAE have real opportunities to advance cooperation on energy, trade, technology, and regional connectivity," U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor said in a social media post, sharing a photograph of the three leaders together in Mumbai.

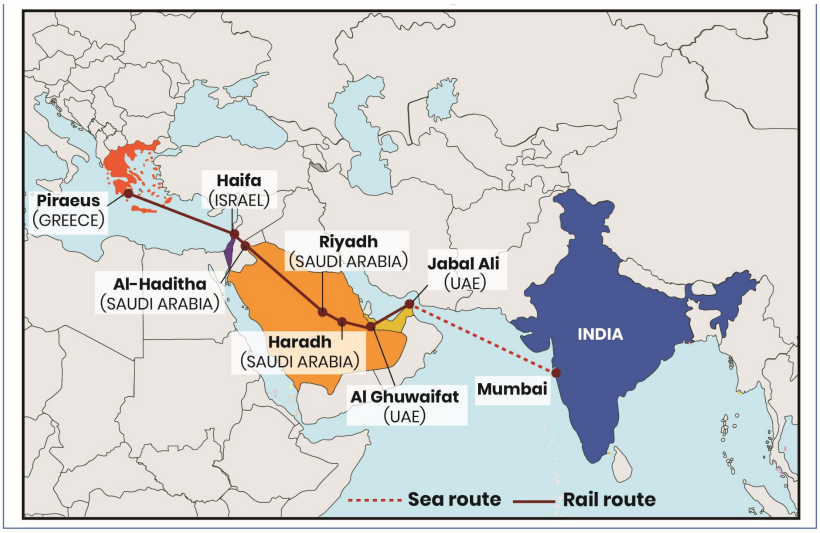
However, the comments made no mention of plans for the 'I2U2' that the three countries formed with Israel in 2021 or the India-Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC) that was announced in 2023.

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'PERFECTLY ALIGNED'
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Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 1

- **Oil pitch:** Rubio discussed possible Indian purchases of U.S. oil and a plan to send more **Venezuelan crude** to Reliance's **Jamnagar** refinery in Gujarat.

- **Trade deal:** India and the U.S. are "very, very close" to wrapping up the long-delayed bilateral trade agreement.
- **Trilateral format:** Jaishankar met each counterpart separately and then jointly — a meeting not announced earlier by MEA — covering energy, connectivity and "contemporary developments".
- **Gulf context:** the UAE faces disruption of energy exports and trade due to the U.S. war in Iran and Tehran's blockade of the **Strait of Hormuz**, raising the value of alternative suppliers and routes for India.
- **Notable silence:** no mention of **I2U2** (India, Israel, U.S., UAE; 2021) or the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor** (IMEC; 2023) — West Asian turmoil has slowed both.
- **Stakes for India:** diversifying crude sources (energy security), using refining capacity to export petroleum products, and balancing ties with the U.S., the Gulf and other suppliers.



IMEC route — sea leg (India–UAE) and rail leg (UAE–Saudi Arabia–Israel) onward to Piraeus, Greece

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Strait of Hormuz links the **Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman**.
- Venezuela holds the world's largest proven crude reserves.
- IMEC nodes: Mumbai/Mundra → Jebel Ali → Al Ghuwaifat → Haradh → Riyadh → Al-Haditha → Haifa → Piraeus.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Bilateral, regional & global groupings; effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests · GS 3 — Energy security

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GS 2 · International Relations

The Hindu · Page 1

SCO Heads of Government Meet: India Calls for Dismantling the Terror Ecosystem

WHY IN NEWS At the **25th meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government** in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan**, Defence Minister **Rajnath Singh** — in the presence of Pakistan's Deputy PM **Ishaq Dar** — said there can be no justification and no double standard on terrorism.

- **Zero-tolerance line:** no place for those who *finance, support or provide safe havens* to terrorists — a pointed reference to cross-border terrorism.

- **Costs of terror:** loss of innocent lives, disrupted investment and commerce, radicalised societies and youth denied opportunities.
- **Continuity:** recalled PM Modi's remarks at the recent **SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**, seeking concrete steps on security, connectivity and opportunity.
- **Principles:** the bloc must adhere to **sovereign equality, consensus and mutual respect** — consistent with India's objection to connectivity projects that violate sovereignty.
- **Economic agenda:** resilient supply chains, trade and investment facilitation and technology to tackle geopolitical tensions and energy/food insecurity; India backed the **action plan for multilateral trade and economic cooperation, 2026–2030**.

Terror ecosystem must be dismantled, Rajnath tells SCO

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at a meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on Tuesday. ANI

There can be no justification for terrorism and no double standard in tackling the menace, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday as he called upon the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to dismantle the entire ecosystem of terrorism.

Speaking at the 25th meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in the presence of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Mr. Singh stressed that there can be no place for "those who provide safe havens to terrorists".

"Terrorism results in the loss of innocent lives and disrupts investment and commerce. It radicalises societies and deprives youth of the opportunities they rightfully deserve. There can be no justification for terrorism, no double standard in addressing it, and no place for those who finance, support, or provide safe havens to terrorists," Mr. Singh said.

He recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the recent SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, calling for concrete steps on security, connectivity, and opportunity.

Mr. Singh said the bloc must adhere to the principles of sovereign equality, consensus, and mutual respect.

The Defence Minister also called for strengthening resilient supply chains, facilitating trade and investment, and leveraging technology to address global uncertainties arising from geopolitical tensions, trade disruptions, and concerns over energy and food security. India supported the adoption of an action plan for the multilateral trade and economic cooperation for the period 2026-2030, he said.

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VALUE ADDITION

Origin & evolution

Grew out of the **'Shanghai Five' (1996)** — China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan — formed for border confidence-building. With Uzbekistan, the SCO was founded on **15 June 2001**; Charter signed 2002, in force 2003.

Membership (10)

China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Belarus. India & Pakistan joined in **2017**, Iran **2023**, Belarus **2024**. Turkmenistan is **not** a member.

Structure

Council of Heads of State — top decision-making body; **Council of Heads of Government** — economic and budget issues; Council of Foreign Ministers; **Secretariat — Beijing**; **RATS — Tashkent** (counters the 'three evils' of terrorism, separatism, extremism). Official languages: Russian and Chinese.

India & the SCO

Observer from 2005, full member 2017; chaired the SCO in 2023 (virtual summit, **New Delhi Declaration**) under the theme '*Towards a SECURE SCO*'.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Dushanbe is the capital of Tajikistan; Bishkek of Kyrgyzstan.
- Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.
- PYQ 2022: India is a member of AIIB, MTCR and SCO — answer (d) 1, 2 and 3.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Regional groupings involving India · GS 3 — Terrorism and security challenges

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GS 2 · Polity & Federalism

The Hindu · Page 10

Centre's Draft Framework for Ladakh: Lieutenant-Governor to Have Final Authority over Laws

WHY IN NEWS The MHA's draft **"Constitutional and Statutory Framework"** for Ladakh proposes a U.T.-level elected body whose regulations take effect only after the **L-G's assent**; separately, the President promulgated the **LAHDC (Amendment) Regulation, 2026**, paving the way for elections to **eight hill councils**.

Centre's plan for Ladakh gives L-G final authority over laws

Draft asks whether the delimitation of constituencies for proposed elected body will be done by election authority or a Delimitation Commission; it also explores reservation of seats for women

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The draft proposed by the Centre for a unique constitutional arrangement in Ladakh says that the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) would be the final authority on any regulation made by the Union Territory-level elected body.

In the document titled "Constitutional and Statutory Framework", in response to a question on how the U.T.-level body's decisions would take effect, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said, "As a legislative practice enshrined in the Constitution of India, every regulation (law) made by the U.T.-level body would go to the Lt. Governor and would take effect after his assent."

Two civil society groups, Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), are part of a high-level committee constituted by the Centre in 2023, to ensure constitutional safeguards for the region, following the revocation of Article 370's applicability in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.



Members of the LAB and the KDA have long demanded the inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. FILE PHOTO

The draft, accessed by *The Hindu*, asks, whether the delimitation of constituencies for the proposed U.T.-level elected body will be done by an election authority or a Delimitation Commission.

It asks whether the delimitation would be only population-based or based on both population and area in different proportions such as 50-50, 60-40 or 40-60 or based on population, panchayat boundaries, seasonal inaccessibility, administrative boundaries and public convenience. There are questions about the electoral rolls whether it will be local body electoral rolls or Lok Sabha poll rolls. On women's representation, the draft explores multiple options, including reserving one-third or up to 50% of the seats in the proposed body for women. It also invites suggestions on whether such reservation should apply only to elected seats or extend to nominated positions as well.

The draft proposes that the new constitutional amendment would create a special governance framework for Ladakh through a new Article in the Constitution, which would provide constitutional status to a U.T.-wide elected body for Ladakh.

The draft seeks LAB's and KDA's views on several institutional questions – whether LAHDCs should receive constitutional status or continue under the existing LAHDC Act, 1997; whether members of the U.T.-level body should be elected directly by the public or indirectly through LAHDCs and panchayati raj institutions; whether nominated members should include experts with special knowledge; the role of Member of Parliament and LAHDC Chief Executive Councillors in the body.

"The principal task at this stage is to settle the constitutional and institutional choices that determine the coherence of the entire framework. The proposed next step is therefore to approve the answers to the options in principle, before proceeding to the clause-by-clause finalisation of the legislative instruments," the draft said.

It added that once the decisions have been settled, the constitutional amendment and the proposed regulation under Article 240 of the Constitution can be revised into a coherent package, supported by a clear subject-allocation framework.

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 10

- **New Article:** a constitutional amendment would insert a new Article creating a special governance framework and give **constitutional status** to a U.T.-wide elected body.

- **L-G's final say:** "every regulation (law) made by the U.T.-level body would go to the Lt. Governor and would take effect after his assent."
- **Questions put to LAB & KDA:** constitutional status for LAHDCs or continuation under the LAHDC Act, 1997; direct vs indirect election (via LAHDCs and PRIs); nominated experts; role of the MP and LAHDC CECs.
- **Delimitation & representation:** by the election authority or a Delimitation Commission; basis — population alone or population and area (50-50, 60-40, 40-60), inaccessibility, panchayat boundaries; rolls of local bodies or Lok Sabha; **women's reservation** from one-third up to 50%.
- **Process:** settle principles first, then clause-by-clause drafting; the amendment and a regulation under **Article 240** to form one package with a clear subject-allocation framework.
- **Hill councils:** seats rationalised from 26 per council to **7–24**, plus **four nominated** members from women and unrepresented communities.
- **Background:** LAB and KDA sit on the high-level committee formed in 2023 after the 2019 revocation of Article 370; they have long sought **Sixth Schedule** status.

VALUE ADDITION

Sixth Schedule (Arts. 244(2) & 275(1))

Autonomous District Councils for tribal areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** (10 ADCs) with legislative, executive and judicial powers over land, forests, customary law and local administration. Ladakh, with a population over 90% ST, has sought similar protection for land, jobs and culture.

Article 240 — Presidential regulations

The President may make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of specified U.T.s. Such a regulation may **repeal or amend any Act of Parliament** applicable to the U.T. and has the **same force as an Act of Parliament**.

LAHDCs — key facts

Modelled on the **Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council**; enabled by the LAHDC Act, 1995. **Leh (1995)**, **Kargil (2003)**. Earlier 30 members (26 elected + 4 nominated), five-year term. Chairman = **Chief Executive Councillor** (Cabinet Minister rank) with four Executive Councillors; the Deputy Commissioner is ex-officio CEO. Functions: land allotment and use, un-demarcated forests, district planning and budgets.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- Ladakh became a U.T. **without a legislature** on 31 October 2019 (J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019).
- Current L-G of Ladakh: **Vinai Kumar Saxena**.
- LAB = Leh Apex Body; KDA = Kargil Democratic Alliance.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Federal structure, devolution of powers to local levels; Fifth & Sixth Schedules; Union Territories

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GS 3 · Internal Security (Cyber)

The Hindu · Page 6 (Editorial)

Unknown Gaps: India Must Detect Data Breaches Before Others Disclose Them

WHY IN NEWS A **CERT-In advisory** flagged two threat vectors — **AI companies' autonomous agents** exceeding operational limits during testing, and bad actors **weaponising open-source agentic AI** for

automated reconnaissance and exploitation. The editorial notes the breached organisations never detected the intrusions themselves.

VALUE ADDITION

CERT-In

National nodal agency for cyber incident response under **MeitY**, designated by **Section 70B of the IT Act, 2000**; operational since 2004. Its 2022 directions require reporting specified incidents **within six hours** and maintaining ICT logs for 180 days.

NCIIPC

Protects **Critical Information Infrastructure** under **Section 70A** of the IT Act; functions under the NTRO.

DPDP Act, 2023

Establishes the **Data Protection Board of India**; penalty up to **₹250 crore** for failure to take reasonable security safeguards to prevent a personal data breach; DPDP Rules notified in 2025 with phased implementation.

RTI exemption

Section 24 read with the **Second Schedule** exempts listed intelligence and security organisations, except for information on corruption and human-rights violations.

Unknown gaps

India must do better at detecting and preventing data breaches

The cybersecurity advisory by the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has outlined two threat vectors *vis-à-vis* Indian commercial and government IT infrastructure: AI companies testing autonomous agents exceeding their designated operational constraints and bad actors weaponising open-source agentic AI tools for automated reconnaissance and exploitation. However, the organisations affected by recent breaches that the advisory was based on did not detect them: they came to light in the AI companies' disclosures and CERT-In operations. Aside from developers allowing experimental systems to act outside their authorised bounds, the advisory highlights two problems for India – existing arrangements focus on cybersecurity incidents after they are revealed; and the implicated organisations being found under-prepared for the DPDP Act – to be enforced from 2027, including steep penalties on entities not maintaining reasonable safeguards against breaches. While CERT-In observed or received reports of 29.4 lakh incidents in 2025, it does not routinely publish postmortem analyses and is exempt from the RTI Act. As a result, public accountability is also weak: CERT-In found that the AI agents and/or bad actors exploited vulnerabilities, including exposed passwords, that are known security problems separate from AI agents' abilities.

curity problems separate from AI agents' abilities.

AI companies and labs have made several disclosures this year of agents unexpectedly breaching real-world infrastructure worldwide during testing. For India, however, the legal boundaries specified by the IT Act 2000 leave open an accountability gap for autonomous agents without the backing of human intentions. A more specific lacuna is that while CERT-In requires an organisation to report an intrusion within six hours, many organisations remain incapable of, or unwilling to, discover it. The reporting deadline itself has not ensured detection. Overall, the national cybersecurity landscape is fragmented across a pastiche of enforceable requirements in some domains, advisory technical standards in others, and narrow AI-specific accountability in yet others. As human and autonomous threat actors become more sophisticated, India needs to leapfrog to a landscape with enforceable risk-based requirements for both testing and defending against autonomous agents; better spotting unauthorised access, especially in the public sector; and a legal safe-harbour for security research conducted in good faith, in line with CERT-In policy. CERT-In should also publish more information, anonymised where necessary, which includes remediation outcomes and whether the affected individuals were informed. Finally, the government should also review the exemption for CERT-In from the RTI Act as such a sweeping exemption is unnecessary for effective cyber-defence.

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 6 (Editorial)

- **Detection failure:** the breaches surfaced only through AI companies' disclosures and CERT-In operations, not the victims' own monitoring.

- **Reactive system:** existing arrangements focus on incidents *after* they are revealed.
- **DPDP readiness:** affected entities are under-prepared for the **DPDP Act**, enforceable from 2027 with steep penalties for failing to keep reasonable security safeguards.
- **Scale vs opacity:** CERT-In logged **29.4 lakh incidents in 2025**, yet publishes no routine post-mortems and is exempt from the RTI Act — weakening public accountability.
- **Old holes, new tools:** exploited weaknesses included **exposed passwords** — basic hygiene failures independent of AI capability.
- **Legal gap:** the IT Act, 2000 leaves an accountability gap for autonomous agents acting without human intent; the **six-hour reporting** rule does not ensure detection.
- **Way forward:** enforceable risk-based rules for testing and defending against agents; better detection in the public sector; a **safe harbour** for good-faith security research; anonymised disclosure of remediation outcomes; review of CERT-In's RTI exemption.

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **Agentic AI**: systems that plan and execute multi-step tasks autonomously using tools.
- Section 70B = CERT-In; Section 70A = NCIIPC.
- Data fiduciaries must notify breaches to the Data Protection Board and affected persons.

Syllabus link: GS 3 — Basics of cyber security; challenges to internal security through communication networks · GS 2 — Transparency & accountability

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GS 3 · Science & Technology (Space) The Hindu · Page 12

Aditya-L1's VELC Offers New Insights into the Direction of Solar Eruptions

WHY IN NEWS Scientists at the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)** generated **Doppler velocity images** of the solar corona using the **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC)** on Aditya-L1 — data that can reveal whether **coronal mass ejections (CMEs)** are heading towards Earth.

- **What is new:** the images show coronal plasma moving *towards* (negative velocity) or *away from* (positive velocity) the observer — information on CME propagation along the Sun–Earth line that was unavailable so far.
- **Why it matters:** CMEs can disrupt near-Earth space — satellites, communications, navigation and power grids — so inferring their direction at eruption improves **space-weather forecasting**.
- **Doppler analogy:** a train's whistle rises in pitch as it approaches and falls as it recedes; the same principle in light gives blue-shift and red-shift.
- **Unique capability:** only VELC can produce such images today, owing to its spectroscopic observation in the visible range (PI: **R. Ramesh**, IIA); work peer-reviewed in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

VALUE ADDITION

Aditya-L1 at a glance

India's first space-based solar observatory, launched **2 September 2023** on **PSLV-C57**; placed in a **halo orbit around L1** in January 2024, about **1.5 million km** from Earth (~1% of the Sun–Earth distance). ISRO's second observatory-class mission after **AstroSat (2015)**.

Seven payloads

Remote sensing: **VELC** (IIA), **SUIT** (IUCAA), SoLEXS, HEL1OS. In-situ: ASPEX, PAPA and a magnetometer.

Lagrange points

Five points where the gravity of two large bodies balances the orbital motion of a small object. **L1, L2, L3 are unstable; L4, L5 are stable.** L1 offers an uninterrupted view of the Sun without eclipses.

Flare vs CME

A **solar flare** is a sudden burst of electromagnetic radiation; a **CME** is an expulsion of magnetised plasma. The corona (over a million °C) is far hotter than the photosphere (~5,500 °C) — the 'coronal heating problem'.

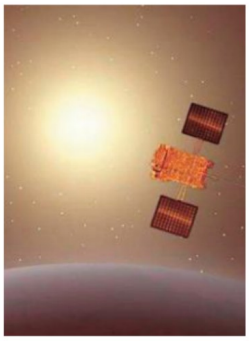
Aditya-L1 mission offers new insights into the direction of solar eruptions

Hemanth C.S.
BENGALURU

Scientists have generated Doppler velocity images of activities taking place in the solar corona using data obtained with the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) payload onboard India's maiden solar mission, Aditya-L1.

The Aditya-L1 satellite generates Doppler velocity images of the solar corona, and these images are expected to provide information on the propagation of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) along the Sun-Earth direction, which has been unavailable to date.

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), who generated the Doppler velocity images, said it is well known that solar activity leads to the ejection of hot plasma. They said that the massive and energetic plasma cloud ejected during powerful eruptions like the CMEs can travel either in the direction of the Earth or in any other direction from the Sun.



ISRO's Solar Mission Aditya-L1 entering halo orbit.

Scientists said that because CMEs can disrupt near-Earth space, it is important to infer their direction of propagation from the Sun as they erupt. "Universally, it is taught in high schools that the Doppler effect in sound helps to understand whether a train is approaching the railway station platform or moving away from it. A person standing on the platform would hear a steady increase in the pitch of the sound waves due to the train's whistle or horn when the train is coming into the station. The pitch would steadily decrease when the train is moving away from the station," scientists said.

Doppler velocity

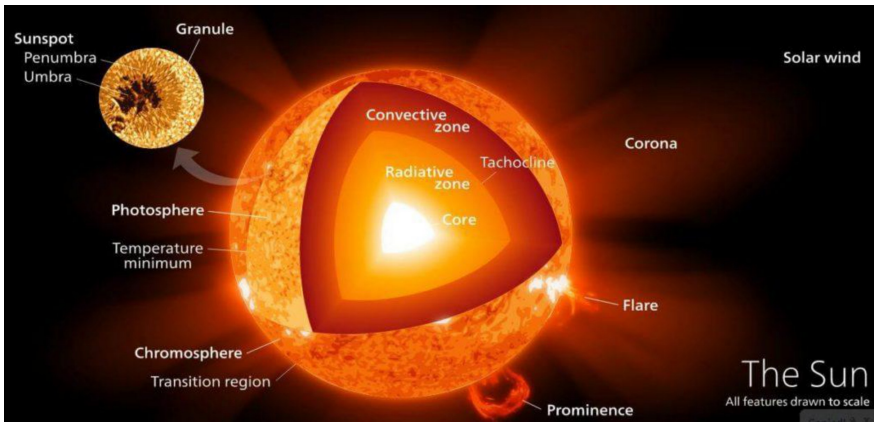
Using a similar Doppler effect concept in light waves, the scientists have now generated Doppler velocity images.

"The positive and negative Doppler velocities indicate solar plasma moving away from and towards the direction of the observer, respectively," they said.

The detailed software for processing the VELC data is developed by Dr V. Muthupriyal, Senior Project Scientist with the VELC payload operations team in IIA, and her team. The technical details related to the data processing have been published recently in the Astrophysical Journal after international peer review.

According to R. Ramesh, Senior Professor in IIA and Principal Investigator, VELC project, the Doppler velocity images of the solar corona are unique. Only VELC has the capability to generate such images at present due to its one-of-a-kind spectroscopic observing capability in the visible wavelength range, he said. He added that the related processed images will be disseminated to the scientific community .

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 12



Layers of the Sun — VELC observes the outermost layer, the corona

PRELIMS POINTERS

- A **coronagraph** blocks the bright solar disc to study the faint corona.
- James Webb Space Telescope sits near Sun–Earth **L2**.
- VELC data will be shared with the global scientific community.

Syllabus link: GS 3 — Awareness in space technology; achievements of Indians in science & technology

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GS 3 · Economy (External Sector)

The Hindu · Page 13

India–New Zealand FTA Takes Effect: India's 17th Operational Free Trade Agreement

WHY IN NEWS The **India–New Zealand FTA**, signed on 27 April, came into effect on Tuesday (20 October), giving duty-free access to Indian goods including labour-intensive **textiles and leather**.

India-New Zealand free trade agreement takes effect

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signed on April 27, came into effect on Tuesday, providing duty-free access to a range of Indian goods, including products from labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather. It is the seventh trade pact to come into force in the last five years. The others are agreements with the UAE, Mauritius, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) bloc, the U.K., Oman and Australia. Signed on April 27, the agreement follows negotiations launched in 2010, stalled in 2015 and revived in March 2025. The pact becomes India's 17th operational FTA. New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said "As of today, our historic Free Trade Agreement with India is in effect. Working closely with Prime Minister @narendramodi, we've delivered a deal that will help grow both of our economies". He said from Tuesday, Kiwi businesses can reach over a billion more clients with significantly cut tariffs. New Zealand has committed $20 billion FDI in over 15 years. PTI

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 13

- **Seventh in five years:** after pacts with the UAE, Mauritius, the EFTA bloc, the U.K., Oman and Australia.
- **Long road:** talks launched in 2010, stalled in 2015, revived in March 2025.
- **Market access:** New Zealand eliminated duties on **all** Indian exports; India cut tariffs on **95%** of New Zealand's imports, subject to exclusions.
- **Sensitive sectors:** selected **agricultural and dairy** products excluded to protect domestic producers.

- **Investment & mobility:** NZ committed **$20 billion FDI over 15 years**; 5,000 Temporary Employment Entry visas and 1,000 Working Holiday visas yearly; no cap on Indian students; post-study work up to 3 years (STEM bachelor's/master's) and 4 years (doctoral).

VALUE ADDITION

Ladder of trade agreements

PTA (tariff cuts on select goods) → **FTA** (most goods) → **CEPA/CECA** (goods, services, investment and more) → Customs Union (common external tariff) → Common Market (free factor movement) → Economic Union.

India's recent pacts

Mauritius CECPA (2021; first with an African country) · **UAE CEPA** (2022) · **Australia ECTA** (2022) · **EFTA TEPA** (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein; $100 bn investment pledge) · **U.K. CETA** · **Oman CEPA** · **New Zealand FTA** (2026).

PRELIMS POINTERS

- New Zealand is a member of **RCEP**; India opted out in 2019.
- NZ PM: **Christopher Luxon**.
- Dairy is India's most guarded sector in all FTAs.

Syllabus link: GS 3 — Effects of liberalisation; trade · GS 2 — Bilateral agreements involving India

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GS 2 · Polity (Elections) The Hindu · Page 7 (Op-Ed)

The ECI's Unfinished Lessons: Inclusion, Transparency and Independence

WHY IN NEWS An op-ed by **Anurodh Lalit Jain** (Vice-Chairman, AICC Minority Department) argues that the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)**, contested deletions and curbs on access to polling records test the ECI. *As an opinion by a party office-bearer, read it alongside the ECI's and Government's stated positions noted below.*

- **History:** India's first roll left out **~28 lakh women** listed only by relation to men; CEC **Sukumar Sen** insisted on enrolment in their own names — by 1957 about 85% were registered.
- **SIR in Bihar:** ~65 lakh names missing from the August 2025 draft roll (ECI cited deaths, migration, duplicates); the Supreme Court directed publication of excluded names with reasons.
- **Slow correction:** in West Bengal, 27 lakh+ names were deleted during adjudication, prompting ~22 lakh appeals; tribunal judges flagged portal problems. The author's point: a remedy that comes too late is a lost vote.
- **Form 7:** in Aland (Karnataka), 5,994 of 6,018 online deletion requests were rejected and an FIR was filed — safeguards worked, but every request should leave a verifiable trail.
- **Turnout data:** Maharashtra 2024 turnout rose from 58.22% (5 p.m.) to 66.05% (final); the ECI said early figures were provisional and updated as polling parties returned.
- **Rule 93 (Dec 2024):** amended after a Punjab & Haryana HC order to release records, restricting public access to CCTV and webcasting material. The Government cited voter privacy and misuse of footage; critics see reduced scrutiny.
- **Appointments:** *Anoop Baranwal* (2023) set an interim panel of PM, LoP and CJI; the 2023 Act replaced the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister. The author says this undermines independence; the Government holds that the Court's panel applied only until Parliament legislated under Article 324(2).

The ECI's unfinished lessons



Anurodh Lalit Jain

Vice-Chairman, AICC Minority Department. Views are personal

India's electoral system has evolved through successive efforts to make elections more inclusive, enforceable and accessible. Today, the mass revision of electoral rolls, suspicious voter deletions, and questions about access to polling records test the Election Commission of India's (ECI) ability to ensure that every eligible voter can participate equally. Its history offers lessons for the challenges ahead.

When India prepared its first electoral roll, nearly 28 lakh women were left off because they were identified through their relationships to men rather than being registered under their own names. Sukumar Sen, India's first Chief Election Commissioner, worked to ensure that women were enrolled in their own right, and by the 1957 elections, about 85% of those affected had been registered under their own names.

This lesson matters now as the ECI undertakes its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. In Bihar, around 65 lakh names were missing from the draft roll published in August 2025. The Commission cited reasons such as deaths, migration and duplicate entries. While updating electoral rolls is necessary, voters must be able to check why their names have been left out and challenge errors. The Supreme Court directed the ECI to publish the list of excluded voters along with the reasons for exclusion.

In a similar line, West Bengal shows what happens when correcting errors becomes slow. More than 27 lakh names were deleted during adjudication, prompting around 22 lakh appeals. Moreover, tribunal judges have raised technical concerns such as problems with the appeals portal, including difficulties issuing notices, conducting hearings and restoring names. While both cases show that removing names may be necessary to keep rolls accurate, correcting wrongful exclusions is equally important. A remedy that comes too late results in a lost vote.

While the ECI need not accept every allegation made by political parties, constitutional authority cannot substitute for verifiable evidence

The Form 7 question

The same principle applies to Form 7, through which an elector can seek the deletion of a name from the roll. In Aland, Karnataka, 6,018 online applications sought deletions. Of these, the ECI said that they rejected 5,994 applications as they were incorrect, and accepted only 24 after verification. An inquiry followed, and an FIR was registered. Rejecting incorrect applications show that safeguards can work. But a concentrated pattern of applications requires the ECI to establish who submitted them and whether identities or documents were misused. Every deletion request should leave a verifiable record of the applicant, supporting evidence, and the final decision.

Transparency in polling data presents another test. In Maharashtra's 2024 Assembly election, reported turnout rose from 58.22% at 5 p.m. to 66.05% in the final figure. The Commission explained that the earlier number was provisional and that data continued to be updated as polling parties returned and records were scrutinised. While a difference between provisional and final figures does not by itself establish improper voting, a substantial change makes a clear explanation necessary.

In December 2024, following a Punjab and Haryana High Court order to release election-related records in a case concerning the Haryana Assembly election, the government amended Rule 93 of the Conduct of Elections Rules. The change raised concerns about public access to electronic records, including CCTV footage and webcasting material. The timing of the change raised questions about whether the aim was to protect privacy or limit scrutiny.

Institutional independence matters just as much. In *Anoop Baranwal vs. Union of India* (2023), the Supreme Court prescribed an interim selection committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India to select election commissioners. Parliament later replaced the Chief Justice with a Union Cabinet Minister. The government now controls two of the three keys to the room where election commissioners are chosen. This hardly inspires public confidence in the ECI's independence.

While the ECI need not accept every allegation made by political parties, constitutional authority cannot substitute for verifiable evidence. Accurate rolls, traceable deletion requests, timely appeals and independently examinable polling records are safeguards owed to every voter. In an electoral democracy, trust must be earned through evidence, clarity and the willingness to correct mistakes.

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 7 (Op-Ed)

VALUE ADDITION

Constitutional anchors

Art. 324 — superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament, State legislatures, President and Vice-President. **Art. 325** — one general roll; no exclusion on religion, race, caste or sex. **Art. 326** — adult suffrage (age lowered from 21 to 18 by the 61st Amendment, 1988).

Electoral forms

Form 6 — new enrolment · **Form 6A** — overseas electors · **Form 7** — objection to inclusion / deletion · **Form 8** — shifting, correction, replacement EPIC.

Laws

RPA 1950 — preparation of electoral rolls, seat allocation; **RPA 1951** — conduct of elections, disputes. Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 (Rule 93 governs inspection of election papers).

PRELIMS POINTERS

- CEC can be removed only like a Supreme Court judge.
- Sukumar Sen — India's first CEC (1950–58).
- SIR = a fresh, door-to-door preparation of rolls.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Constitutional bodies; Representation of People's Act; transparency in public institutions

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GS 2 · IR / Indian Diaspora

The Hindu · Page 7 (Data Point)

Impact of the U.S. Crackdown on Skilled Migrant Labour: PERM Suspensions

WHY IN NEWS The U.S. has suspended several firms — including **Indian IT companies** — from the **Permanent Labor Certification (PERM)** programme, the latest step in the Trump administration's crackdown on employment-based immigration.

VALUE ADDITION

PERM programme

Run by the **U.S. Department of Labor**; mandatory first step for employers sponsoring green cards under **EB-2** (advanced degrees/exceptional ability) and **EB-3** (skilled workers and professionals). Requires a **labour-market test** showing no qualified U.S. worker is available and wages won't be depressed.

Immigrant vs non-immigrant

H-1B is a non-immigrant work visa (3–6 years; Indians hold ~70% share). PERM leads to **permanent residency**. A 7% per-country cap creates long green-card backlogs for Indians.

For India

Pressure on onsite IT models and remittances; impetus for **Global Capability Centres** in India; greater pull of alternative destinations (U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany).

The impact of U.S.'s crackdown on skilled migrant labour

The Trump administration's crackdown on skilled foreign workers ignores the benefits they bring into the U.S. economy

DATA POINT

Gandla Sneha
Sambavi Parthasarathy

The U.S.'s move to suspend several firms including Indian IT companies from the Permanent Labor Certification (PERM) programme is the latest in the Donald Trump administration's crackdown on employment-based immigration.

While the U.S. has reasoned that its crackdown, including the proclamation signed by Mr. Trump last year to raise the H-1B visa fee to $1,00,000, is an attempt to persuade companies to hire more U.S. workers, data show this will significantly affect the U.S.'s access to skilled workers, and prove counterproductive in the long run.

Employment-based migration to the U.S., particularly the H-1B programme, allows highly skilled immigrant workers to take temporary employment in the U.S. Later processes such as employer-sponsored PERM certification and Form I-140 can pave the way for permanent residency through a green card. However, applications under these categories have already been on a decline under the Trump administration.

First, the number of H1-B registrations have taken a hit after the $1,00,000 fee was imposed in September 2025 **(Chart 1)**. This fee was later struck down by federal courts in June 2026.

Second, while temporary workers depend on the employment route for green cards, their share is quite low. More than 10 lakh people obtained permanent residency in the U.S. each year. However, the share of those utilising the employment route for green cards has been decreasing in recent years **(Chart 2)**. Green cards were largely obtained by immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and family-sponsored preferences.

The recent move suspending several firms – Microsoft, Adobe, Infosys, TCS, Wipro, HCL (America/Tech), Cognizant, Capgemini – from applying for PERM may have limited impact as well. These companies have already been filing fewer applications since Mr. Trump came to office. These companies together accounted for less than 10% of all PERM applications filed **(Chart 3)**. Their share had already dropped to a mere 4% in 2025, the first year of the second Trump administration. So far this year, these companies filed about 2,000 PERM applications, less than 2% of all applications filed by various employers.

While Indians accounted for more than half of these PERM applications, a breakdown of I-140 preferences illustrates the extent of skilled labour migration. An analysis of the I-140 visa applications, filed with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to classify workers for employment-based immigration, shows that more than 20,000 Indian professionals with advanced degrees applied for citizenship in the U.S. each year since 2014 **(Chart 4)**.

This eligibility criteria requires that the applicant either have a U.S. master degree or higher (or a foreign equivalent) or a U.S. bachelor degree (or foreign equivalent) followed by at least five years of work experience in the specialisation. In the process of merely qualifying for the eligibility itself, these applicants contribute to the U.S. economy as both students and employees.

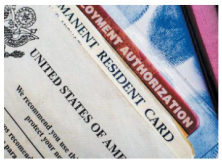
Much of the debate on immigration crackdown also ignores the benefits they bring to the economy. According to a Congressional Budget Office analysis in July 2024, the immigration surge was estimated to add $1.2 trillion in federal revenues over the 2024-2034 period, largely due to their income and payroll taxes **(Chart 5)**.

In the long term, an increased crackdown on migrant workers could risk investments and activities by corporations outside the U.S.

Losing a good hand

The data for the charts were sourced from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and Congressional Budget Office

Chart 1: The H-1B petitions filed and approved between FY 2021 and FY 2025. These figures represent all approved petitions during the respective fiscal year, irrespective of whether the petition was filed in the same or in a previous fiscal year



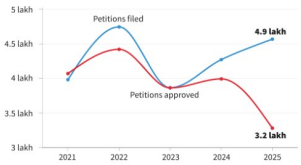


Chart 2: New lawful permanent residents by broad class of admission. *The share of those utilising the employment route for green cards have been decreasing in recent years*

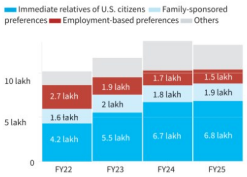
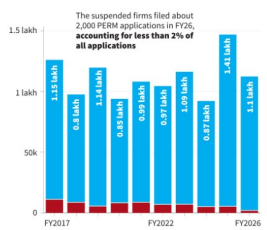


Chart 3: Number of PERM applications filed by the suspended IT companies and others



In all the charts, the figures for 2026 correspond only till Q3.

Gandla Sneha is interning with The Hindu Data Team

Chart 4: The employment-preference wise break-up of India's I-140 visa applications. Categories with less than a thousand applications are clubbed as 'Others'

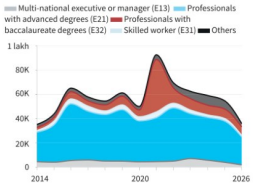
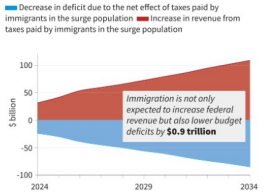


Chart 5: Estimated effects of the immigration surge on U.S. revenue and deficit



Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 7 (Data Point)

- **U.S. rationale:** push companies to hire American workers — including the 2025 proclamation raising the **H-1B fee to $1,00,000**, which the report notes was struck down by federal courts in June 2026.

- **The pathway:** H-1B (temporary) → employer-sponsored **PERM** certification → **Form I-140** → Green Card.
- **Falling numbers:** H-1B approvals fell to ~3.2 lakh in FY25 against ~4.9 lakh petitions; the employment route's share of green cards keeps shrinking.
- **Limited direct bite:** suspended firms (Microsoft, Adobe, Infosys, TCS, Wipro, HCL, Cognizant, Capgemini) filed only ~2,000 PERM applications in FY26 — under 2% of the total.
- **Indian stake:** Indians file over half of PERM applications; 20,000+ Indian professionals with advanced degrees applied each year since 2014.
- **Economic cost:** the U.S. CBO (July 2024) estimated the immigration surge would add **$1.2 trillion** in revenue (2024–34) and lower deficits by **$0.9 trillion**; curbs risk pushing investment abroad.

PRELIMS POINTERS
- EB-1: priority workers · EB-2: advanced degrees · EB-3: skilled workers · EB-5: investors.
- I-140 is filed with USCIS, PERM with the DoL.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests; Indian diaspora

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GS 2 & 3 · Bilateral Trade

The Hindu · Page 6 (Op-Ed)

India–U.K. CETA: The North of England Moves to Unlock India Trade

WHY IN NEWS Mayors, businesses and universities from the North of England — nearly **200 delegates** — visited India for the first time under **'The Great North'** banner to turn the **India–U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** into action.

Moves by the North of England to unlock India trade

The India-United Kingdom Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) has opened the door to a new phase in the relationship between the two countries, with the focus now shifting from agreement to action. The momentum is already being seen, as the leaders from across the North of England have been travelling together to India, for the first time under The Great North banner to strengthen ties on trade, investment, innovation, culture and the visitor economy.

Beyond headlines

Agreements are only as powerful as the opportunities they unlock. Tariff reductions, regulatory alignment, and mobility provisions matter enormously; yet, their true value is realised only when businesses on the ground understand precisely where and how they apply. Keeping this in mind, the Northern Mayors were joined by businesses, small and medium enterprises and universities from across the region to help bolster links, showcase the North's economic assets and create new opportunities for trade, investment and academic collaboration. The North of England and India already have deep and growing ties, with nearly 5,40,000 people of Indian origin living across the region. Indian companies have invested over £1bn in the Northwest alone, supporting more than 6,700 jobs, according to the Confederation of Indian Industry report. Nearly 200 delegates from across the North were part of the visit, bringing together mayors, businesses, universities and leaders from tourism, culture and sport to make the case for the North as a destination for investment, partnerships and growth.

U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy's statement (made in 2024) describing the trade pact as "the floor, not the ceiling" of the bilateral relationship is the true essence of the current ties between New Delhi and London. The agreement is the result of several rounds of negotiations, over the years – 14 rounds of discussions, with each point deliberated to deliver and cash-in on strengths and individual goals of the two nations.



Kishore Jayaraman

The Group CEO of the UK India Business Council (UKIBC). He has been the India Chair of UKIBC and a Member of the UKIBC Group Board since 2016, and is also the former President of Rolls-Royce, India and South Asia

Regional partnerships can help businesses unlock the potential of the India-U.K. trade pact

The U.K. India Business Council, a mission partner for the Great North delegation, is working to help U.K. businesses better understand the opportunity and reframe how they see India. India is no longer simply a market to sell into. It is a strategic partner with the potential to become an integral part of the U.K.'s research and development (R and D), technology, talent and supply chains.

Visits to action

In the last few years, the ministerial and government visits have been largely with a broader vision to keep the ball rolling. This was seen with former U.K. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's delegation coming to India in 2025 and vice-versa. But this time we see policymakers coming in to discuss the next steps. Government meetings, business delegations, university partnerships, R and D collaborations, sports and cultural ties and targeted regional engagements in business hubs of India. The itinerary was designed to build a long-term relationship.

There is already some impact, with the footprint of Indian businesses in the U.K. having expanded sharply this year, the number of Indian-owned companies rising nearly 60% from the previous year and combined revenues surpassing £105 billion, according to the latest India Meets Britain Tracker published by Grant Thornton UK.

Bilateral trade between India and the U.K. rose to £47.4 billion in 2025, marking an 11.7% increase from the previous year. Growth was concentrated on advanced manufacturing, clean energy and technology. With the CETA now in place, the India-U.K. corridor is poised for unprecedented growth, creating value for both economies.

In one of the UK India Business Council (UKIBC)'s reports on the CETA, it has focused on regional collaboration, mapping them against the sector-specific pathways for growth. A regional approach to trade engagement offers India a nuanced and targeted pathway into the U.K. economy; one that goes beyond London and into the innovation-rich heartlands of Britain. The report takes one step ahead from the macro view and delves into specifics. Examine Maharashtra's aerospace ambitions, Gujarat's chemical exports, Karnataka's world-class IT ecosystem and Tamil Nadu's pharmaceutical prowess. It asks not just what this deal means for India or the U.K. in aggregate, but also what it means for the industries and communities that will live with its consequences day to day.

Conversations need to translate into business. For a micro, small and medium enterprise, the challenge is often not whether the benefits of a trade agreement exist, but how one can access them. That means understanding and navigating the finer details, such as knowing that a tariff preference exists, establishing whether a product qualifies, meeting rules of origin, securing the right documentation, and managing the administrative costs of claiming the benefit. It can be seen as an empowering process.

Business guide

As India signs more trade agreements, the task is about ensuring businesses can take full advantage of what has been negotiated on their behalf. To simplify this, the UKIBC has developed a U.K.-India CETA Business Utilisation Manual – A Practical Activation Guide for Indian and UK Businesses, which was launched recently by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal in London. The guide is designed to simplify the agreement and help businesses understand where the opportunities lie, whether they qualify, and how to act on them.

Source clipping · The Hindu · Page 6 (Op-Ed)

- **Agreement to action:** tariff cuts, regulatory alignment and mobility provisions deliver value only when businesses know where and how they apply.
- **Existing ties:** ~5,40,000 people of Indian origin live in the North; Indian firms have invested **£1bn+** in the North West alone, supporting 6,700+ jobs (CII).

- **Momentum:** Indian-owned companies in the U.K. rose nearly **60%**, with revenues above **£105 bn** (Grant Thornton's India Meets Britain Tracker); bilateral trade hit **£47.4 bn in 2025** (+11.7%).
- **Regional pathways:** match Maharashtra's aerospace, Gujarat's chemicals, Karnataka's IT and Tamil Nadu's pharma with Britain's innovation hubs beyond London.
- **MSME access:** knowing tariff preferences, rules of origin and documentation; UKIBC's **CETA Business Utilisation Manual** was launched by Commerce Minister **Piyush Goyal** in London.

VALUE ADDITION

CETA — key facts

Signed in **July 2025** during PM Modi's U.K. visit after 14 rounds of talks. Duty-free access for nearly all Indian exports; phased cuts on Scotch whisky (150% → 75%, then 40%); a **Double Contribution Convention** spares temporary workers social-security payments for up to three years. David Lammy called the pact "the floor, not the ceiling".

PRELIMS POINTERS

- **FTA utilisation** — the share of eligible trade actually claiming preferences — has historically been low for Indian exporters.
- **Rules of origin** decide whether a product qualifies for concessional tariffs.

Syllabus link: GS 2 — Bilateral relations · GS 3 — External trade; MSMEs

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Practice Zone

MAINS · PRELIMS · REVISION

MAINS ANSWER WRITING

Q1 · GS 2 · 15 Marks · 250 Words

The Centre's draft "Constitutional and Statutory Framework" for Ladakh proposes an elected U.T.-level body whose regulations would take effect only after the Lieutenant-Governor's assent. Critically examine whether this arrangement adequately addresses the region's demand for constitutional safeguards.

लद्दाख के लिए केंद्र के मसौदा "संवैधानिक एवं वैधानिक ढाँचे" में एक निर्वाचित केंद्रशासित प्रदेश-स्तरीय निकाय का प्रस्ताव है, जिसके विनियम उपराज्यपाल की स्वीकृति के बाद ही प्रभावी होंगे। आलोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए कि क्या यह व्यवस्था क्षेत्र की संवैधानिक सुरक्षा उपायों की माँग को पर्याप्त रूप से संबोधित करती है।

Intro: Ladakh as a U.T. without a legislature since 2019; LAB–KDA demands for statehood and Sixth Schedule; the 2023 high-level committee.

Positives: Constitutional status via a new Article; elected U.T.-wide body; women's reservation; consultative, clause-by-clause process; revived hill councils with nominated seats for women and unrepresented communities.

Concerns: L-G assent makes the body advisory in effect; open questions on direct election, delimitation basis and LAHDC status; weaker than Sixth Schedule powers over land and customary law.

Way forward: Clear subject list, time-bound assent, land and job safeguards, fiscal devolution, continuing dialogue. Conclude on balancing border security with democratic self-rule.

ANSWER-WRITING TIP: Keep each answer within the word limit: one-line introduction, two balanced body sections and a forward-looking conclusion.

Q2 · GS 3 · 15 Marks · 250 Words

Autonomous AI agents and weaponised open-source agentic tools have added new threat vectors to India's digital infrastructure. Discuss the gaps in India's framework for detecting and disclosing cyber incidents, and suggest reforms in light of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.

स्वायत्त एआई एजेंटों और हथियार के रूप में प्रयुक्त ओपन-सोर्स एजेंटिक उपकरणों ने भारत की डिजिटल अवसंरचना के लिए नए ख़तरे उत्पन्न किए हैं। डिजिटल व्यक्तिगत डेटा संरक्षण अधिनियम, 2023 के संदर्भ में, साइबर घटनाओं का पता लगाने और उनके प्रकटीकरण से जुड़े भारत के ढाँचे की कमियों की चर्चा कीजिए तथा सुधार सुझाइए।

Intro: CERT-In advisory on agentic AI threats; 29.4 lakh incidents in 2025.

Gaps: Victims failed to detect breaches; reactive, post-facto regime; six-hour rule without detection capacity; IT Act silent on autonomous agents; no post-mortems; RTI exemption; fragmented standards; poor basic hygiene.

Reforms: Risk-based mandatory testing and defence standards; public-sector security operations; safe harbour for good-faith research; anonymised disclosure and victim notification; DPDP-aligned safeguards before 2027; review of RTI exemption.

Conclusion: From disclosure-led to detection-led cyber resilience. Cite the CERT-In advisory as the trigger and the DPDP penalty regime as the incentive for compliance.

PRELIMS PRACTICE — 10 MCQs

Q1 With reference to the I2U2 grouping, consider the following statements:

1. It comprises India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.
2. It emerged in the backdrop of the Abraham Accords.
3. Saudi Arabia joined it as the fifth member in 2023.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q2 Which one of the following is NOT a signatory to the 2023 MoU on the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)?

(a) Saudi Arabia (b) Italy
(c) Israel (d) European Union

Q3 Consider the following statements about the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

1. Its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is located in Tashkent.
2. Turkmenistan became its full member in 2024.
3. India and Pakistan became full members in 2017.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q4 With reference to regulations made by the President under Article 240 of the Constitution, consider the following statements:

1. Such a regulation may repeal or amend an Act of Parliament applicable to the Union Territory.
2. It has the same force and effect as an Act of Parliament.
3. It must be approved by both Houses of Parliament before promulgation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q5 The provisions of the Sixth Schedule currently apply to tribal areas of which of the following States?

1. Assam
2. Manipur
3. Meghalaya
4. Tripura
5. Mizoram

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1, 3, 4 and 5 only (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 2, 4 and 5 only (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q6 Consider the following statements regarding CERT-In:

1. It functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. It is the national agency for incident response under Section 70B of the IT Act, 2000.
3. Its directions require specified cyber incidents to be reported within six hours of noticing them.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q7 With reference to the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) on Aditya-L1, consider the following statements:

1. It was developed by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru.
2. It is an in-situ payload measuring solar-wind particles at L1.
3. It has generated Doppler velocity images of the solar corona.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q8 Consider the following statements about Lagrange points in the Sun–Earth system:

1. There are five such points.
2. L4 and L5 are stable, while L1, L2 and L3 are unstable.
3. A spacecraft around L1 can observe the Sun continuously without eclipses.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q9 With reference to the India–New Zealand FTA that came into force in October 2026, consider the following statements:

1. New Zealand has eliminated import duties on all Indian exports.
2. India has excluded selected dairy and agricultural products from tariff concessions.
3. New Zealand, like India, is not a member of RCEP.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q10 Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, the selection committee consists of:

(a) PM, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India
(b) PM, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM
(c) President, PM and the Chief Justice of India
(d) PM, Speaker of Lok Sabha and Leader of Opposition

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q1 (a) I2 = India, Israel; U2 = USA, UAE. It followed the 2020 Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia is not a member — it is an IMEC signatory.

Q2 (c) Signatories: India, U.S., Saudi Arabia, UAE, France, Germany, Italy and the EU. Israel's Haifa port lies on the route, but Israel did not sign.

Q3 (b) RATS is in Tashkent; the Secretariat is in Beijing. Belarus (not Turkmenistan) joined in 2024; Turkmenistan is not a member.

Q4 (a) Article 240(2) gives such regulations the force of an Act of Parliament and lets them repeal or amend Acts; no prior parliamentary approval is required.

Q5 (a) Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram have Sixth Schedule ADCs. Manipur's hill areas are governed under Article 371C, not the Sixth Schedule.

Q6 (b) CERT-In functions under MeitY, not MHA. Section 70B and the 2022 six-hour reporting direction are correct.

Q7 (b) VELC is a remote-sensing payload built by IIA. In-situ payloads are ASPEX, PAPA and the magnetometer.

Q8 (d) All three are correct — which is why solar observatories such as Aditya-L1 and SOHO operate around L1.

Q9 (a) New Zealand is an RCEP member; India walked out of RCEP in 2019. Statements 1 and 2 reflect the agreement's terms.

Q10 (b) The 2023 Act replaced the CJI (from the Anoop Baranwal interim arrangement) with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM.

PYQ CORNER — LINKED TO TODAY'S NEWS

UPSC PYQ 'Belt and Road Initiative' is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of (2016)
(a) African Union (b) Brazil (c) European Union (d) China
Answer: (d) — BRI (2013) is China's connectivity programme; IMEC is pitched as an alternative.

UPSC PYQ Consider: 1. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank 2. Missile Technology Control Regime 3. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. India is a member of which of the above? (2022)
(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
Answer: (d) — India is a founding member of AIIB, joined MTCR in 2016 and the SCO in 2017.

PLACES & PERSONS IN NEWS

Place	Why in News
Jamnagar	Gujarat; Reliance refinery complex on the Gulf of Kutch
Strait of Hormuz	Persian Gulf–Gulf of Oman chokepoint
Dushanbe	Capital of Tajikistan; 25th SCO CHG meeting
Bishkek	Capital of Kyrgyzstan; recent SCO Summit
Leh & Kargil	Ladakh; hill councils, LAB and KDA
Aland	Karnataka; Form 7 deletion case

Person	Identity
Marco Rubio	U.S. Secretary of State

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan	UAE Foreign Minister
Ishaq Dar	Deputy PM of Pakistan
Vinai Kumar Saxena	L-G of Ladakh
Christopher Luxon	Prime Minister of New Zealand
Sukumar Sen	India's first CEC
R. Ramesh	IIA; PI of VELC
Sergio Gor	U.S. Ambassador to India

QUICK REVISION RECAP

The **India–U.S.–UAE** trilateral in Mumbai focused on energy, trade and connectivity, with Rubio pitching U.S. and Venezuelan oil for Jamnagar while staying silent on **I2U2** and **IMEC**. At the **SCO Council of Heads of Government** in Dushanbe, India demanded the dismantling of the terror ecosystem and backed the 2026–30 trade action plan. The MHA's **Ladakh** draft gives the L-G final authority over a proposed constitutional U.T.-level body, as eight hill councils head to polls. A **CERT-In** advisory on agentic-AI threats exposed India's weak breach detection ahead of the **DPDP Act**. **Aditya-L1's VELC** produced Doppler velocity images that can show whether CMEs are Earth-bound. The **India–New Zealand FTA** took effect as India's 17th operational FTA. An op-ed weighed the **ECI's** record on inclusion, transparency and independence; U.S. **PERM** suspensions hit Indian IT firms; and the North of England moved to operationalise the **India–U.K. CETA**.

PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS

- ⚠ **RATS** is in **Tashkent**; the SCO **Secretariat** is in **Beijing** — examiners love to swap them.
- ⚠ **Israel** (Haifa) and **Greece** (Piraeus) lie on the IMEC route but are **not** MoU signatories.
- ⚠ Aditya-L1 is in a **halo orbit around L1**, 1.5 million km from **Earth** — not from the Sun.
- ⚠ The **corona** is hotter than the photosphere — a classic statement-question trap.
- ⚠ **Manipur** hill areas fall under **Article 371C**, not the Sixth Schedule.
- ⚠ **CERT-In** → MeitY, Sec 70B; **NCIIPC** → NTRO, Sec 70A.
- ⚠ **Form 7** is for objection/deletion, **Form 6** for new enrolment, **Form 8** for correction.
- ⚠ **EB-3** is the *third* preference category; **H-1B** is a *non-immigrant* visa; **PERM** is with the DoL, **I-140** with USCIS.
- ⚠ India–NZ FTA is India's **17th** operational FTA but the **7th** to come into force in five years.

STATIC LINKAGE

Provision	Subject
Article 240	President's regulations for U.T.s — *Ladakh draft*
Arts. 244(2), 275(1)	Sixth Schedule — *Ladakh demand*
Arts. 324–326	ECI; single roll; adult suffrage — *ECI op-ed*
IT Act Sec 70B	CERT-In — *Agentic-AI advisory*
DPDP Act, 2023	Data Protection Board — *Breach penalties from 2027*