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The Hindu Analysis

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Six stories decoded for Prelims & Mains

◆ IN THIS EDITION ◆

01	Operation Trident: ₹100-crore Narco-Hawala Racket Busted	GS 3
02	Ashoke Sen — First Indian to Win the Oskar Klein Medal	Prelims
03	Snow Leopard: India Counts 718 “Ghosts of the Mountains”	GS 3
04	Free Bus Travel Has Given Women More Mobility	GS 2
05	H-1B & U.S. Immigration Curbs May Outlast Trump	GS 2
06	India–Poland: New Avenues, Old Third-Party Frictions	GS 2
★	Practice Zone — 2 Mains · 10 MCQs · Recap · Traps	PRACTICE

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GS 3 · INTERNAL SECURITY The Hindu · Page 1

01 Operation Trident: ₹100-crore Narco-Hawala Network Busted in the Northeast

WHY IN NEWS

Central agencies and the police of **Assam, Mizoram and Manipur** carried out simultaneous raids at **38 locations** on October 23 under **"Operation Trident"**, arresting **18 persons** and detecting **₹100 crore** in hawala transactions linked to an international narco-cartel operating out of Myanmar.

- **The operation:** Searches covered Aizawl, Champhai and Zokhawthar (Mizoram), Churachandpur (Manipur) and the Cachar region (Assam). Union Home Minister Amit Shah called it another "lethal blow" to drugs and reiterated the mission of eradicating every drug network by **December 31, 2029**.
- **Modus operandi:** Local carriers were hired by Myanmar-based organisers to move consignments; payments were routed through hawala accounts receiving drug proceeds from across the Northeast; bank accounts in Champhai, Aizawl and Lawngtlai received drug money that was later settled with suppliers in Myanmar (ED findings).
- **Why the Northeast:** Proximity to the **Golden Triangle** (Myanmar–Laos–Thailand), a porous 1,643-km India–Myanmar border, hilly terrain, ethnic kinship across the border and the instability in Myanmar after the 2021 coup make the region a transit and consumption hub. The MHA now calls the Golden Triangle the **"Death Triangle"** and the Golden Crescent the **"Death Crescent"** to strip away their glamour.
- **What is hawala?:** An informal value-transfer system that originated in South Asia around the **8th century** as a remittance mechanism. Two *hawaladars* in different places transfer value **without physically moving money** — e.g., a worker in Muscat deposits cash with a hawaladar, gets a token, and the recipient in Lucknow collects the equivalent from another hawaladar. Accounts are settled later through cash, property or services.
- **Why it is dangerous: Internal security** — fuels terror financing, organised crime and illegal cross-border flows; **economic** — tax evasion and revenue loss, and it undermines the RBI's monetary control and capital-flow regulation; **regulatory** — no framework, so investors and enforcers face uncertainty; **global norms** — clashes with FATF's AML–CFT standards.
- **Way forward:** Follow-the-money policing through FIU-IND and ED; full use of the four-tier NCORD mechanism; smart fencing and technology along the Myanmar border; tracking crypto and trade-based laundering; community-led de-addiction under Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan; and intelligence-sharing with Myanmar and BIMSTEC partners.

VALUE ADDITION

NDPS Act, 1985
Core anti-drug law; **PIT-NDPS Act, 1988** allows preventive detention of traffickers.

PMLA, 2002
Enforced by the **Enforcement Directorate**; drug proceeds are "proceeds of crime".

FEMA, 1999
Hawala is an unauthorised foreign-exchange dealing and is **illegal in India**.

NCB
Narcotics Control Bureau, set up in **1986** under the MHA; nodal agency for drug law enforcement.

MANAS
National narcotics helpline **1933**; Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan launched on 15 Aug 2020.

FATF
India a member since **2010**; its 2024 mutual evaluation placed India in "regular follow-up".

18 held, ₹100 crore traced in Northeast drug raids: govt.

Home Ministry says Central agencies, police target international 'narco-hawala' network in Aizawl, Champhai, Zokhawthar in Mizoram, Churachandpur in Manipur, and the Cachar region of Assam

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a major crackdown on drug trafficking, enforcement agencies have conducted simultaneous raids at 38 locations across Assam, Mizoram, and Manipur, leading to the arrest of 18 accused persons and the detection of ₹100 crore in "hawala" transactions in connection with an international "narco-hawala" racket.

Congratulating the anti-narcotics team comprising Central agencies and police forces of the three States, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Narendra Modi government had dealt another "lethal blow" to drugs with "Operation Trident".

"Our agencies launched a barrage of simultaneous crackdowns across 38 locations in Assam, Mizoram, and Manipur on October 23, smashing an international narco-cartel," Mr. Shah said in a post on X.

Coordinated action

The operation led by the Narcotics Control Bureau in coordination with the State police and Directorate of Enforcement resulted in the freezing of 1,424 bank accounts, the attachment of assets estimated at ₹17.82 crore, the seizure of 500 detonators, and ₹12 lakh in cash, and the arrest of 18 people, a release by the Union Home Ministry said on Sunday.

The coordinated operation after days of collating confidential intelligence comprehensively covered major urban centres and sensitive border corridors such as Aizawl, Champhai, and Zokhawthar in Mizoram, Churachandpur in Manipur, and the transit corridor in the Cachar region of Assam, the Ministry said.

"The network trafficked narcotics across the borders of India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh through the Death Triangle Corridor. The offensive attests to India's Himalayan resolve to realise the mission of eradicating every drug network by December 31, 2029. India will hammer until the last nail is driven into the coffin of drug cartels," Mr. Shah said.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

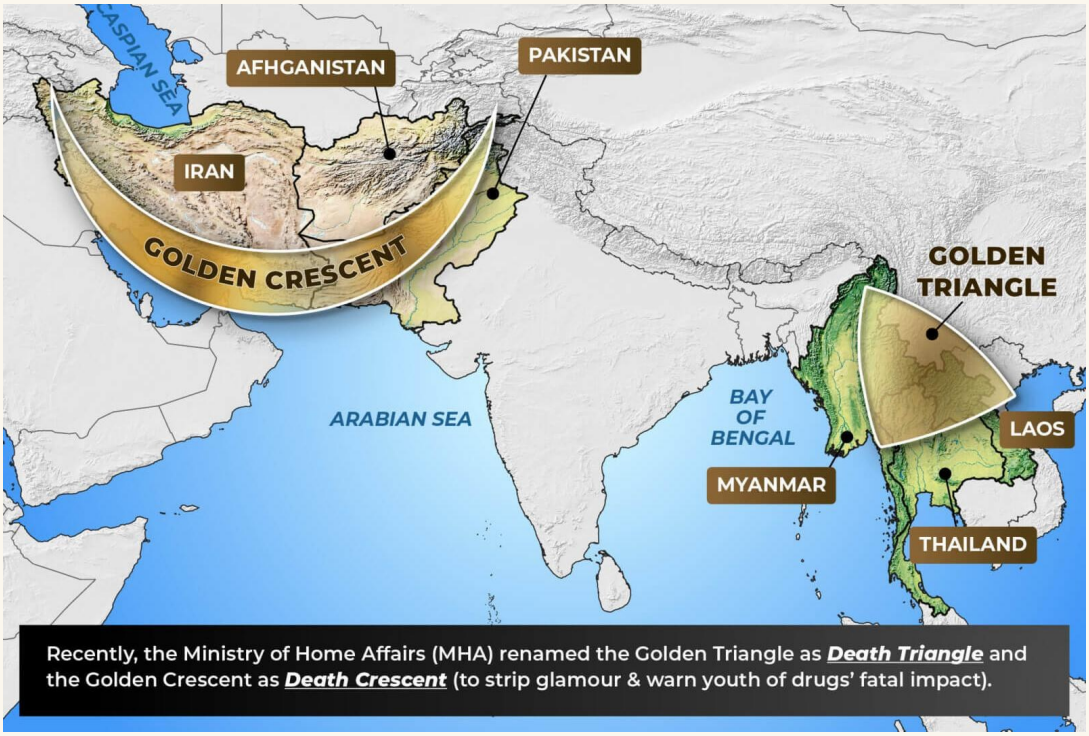
Drug control

Central agencies carried out searches over alleged trafficking of drugs from Myanmar and 'hawala' settlements of proceeds

- Local carriers were hired by Myanmar-based organisers to move consignments
- Payments routed through 'hawala' accounts receiving drug proceeds from across the Northeast
- Bank accounts in Champhai, Aizawl, and Lawngtlai of Mizoram received drug money and settled with suppliers in Myanmar, says the ED

"The offensive attests to India's Himalayan resolve to realise the mission of eradicating every drug network by Dec. 31, 2029"
AMIT SHAH
Union Home Minister

▲ Source: The Hindu



MAP CHECK

Golden Triangle (Myanmar–Laos–Thailand) and Golden Crescent (Afghanistan–Iran–Pakistan) — the two major illicit-opium belts flanking India.

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ Champhai & Zokhawthar — Mizoram border points facing Myanmar's Chin State across the **Tiau river** ◆ Golden Crescent = Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan ◆ Golden Triangle = Myanmar, Laos, Thailand

SYLLABUS LINK GS 3 — Linkages of organised crime with terrorism; money laundering and its prevention; security challenges in border areas.

◆ ◆ ◆

PRELIMS · SCIENCE & TECH The Hindu · Page 12

02 Ashoke Sen Becomes First Indian to Win the Oskar Klein Medal

WHY IN NEWS

String theorist **Ashoke Sen**, professor at the **International Centre for Theoretical Sciences (ICTS), Bengaluru**, has been awarded the **Oskar Klein Medal** — one of the highest honours in theoretical physics — becoming the **first Indian** to receive it.

- **The medal:** Awarded every year since **1988** by **Stockholm University** and the **Nobel Committee for Physics** of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. It honours Swedish physicist Oskar Klein, known for the Klein–Gordon equation and Kaluza–Klein theory.
- **Sen's work:** Showed that several apparently different string theories are **mathematically equivalent**, pointing to a single underlying physics. Other landmark contributions: **S-duality**, the **Sen conjecture** on unstable D-branes, and the **entropy function formalism** for black holes.

Theoretical physicist Ashoke Sen wins Oskar Klein Medal

Vasudevan Mukunth

Theoretical physicist Ashoke Sen has been awarded the 2026 Oskar Klein Medal, becoming the first Indian laureate to receive the honour, awarded by Stockholm University and the Nobel Committee for Physics of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The Medal recognises significant contributions to theoretical physics. Dr. Sen is the ICTS-Infosys Madhava Chair Professor at the International Centre for Theoretical Sciences (ICTS), Bengaluru. He also delivered the memorial lecture accompanying the Medal in Stockholm on October 22, titled "Gravity from Strings and Strings from Gravity".

In his career, Dr. Sen has focused on string theory, which is the name of an attempt by physicists to describe matter and nature's fundamental forces, including gravity, within a single framework called quantum gravity. Currently, they are split across two frameworks, quantum physics and relativity. String theory offers ways to reconcile them, but while it is mathematically a highly evolved theory, it has been unable to make predictions that can be confirmed with experiments using today's technologies.

Ashoke Sen is the first Indian to win this award. R. RAVINDRAN

In the 1980s, Dr. Sen helped establish how the equations describing hypothetical strings moving through space could relate to the equations that describe the physical fields that surround it. In the 1990s, he helped show that two apparently different ways to describe physical forces were really equivalent, an idea called S-duality.

Sen conjectures

He also proposed three related ideas, together called the Sen conjectures, in 1999 that gave physicists new ways to understand the behaviour of the strings of string theory. Dr. Sen graduated from Presidency College in Kolkata before going to IIT-Kanpur and thereon to earning his Ph.D. from Stony Brook University, New York, in 1982. After working at institutions including the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Mumbai and the Harish-Chandra Research Institute (HRI) in Prayagraj, he moved to ICTS in 2021.

For his work, he has won the S.S. Bhatnagar Prize (1994), the Infosys Prize (2009), the Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics (2012), and the Dirac Medal (2014).

He also received the Padma Shri in 2001 and the Padma Bhushan in 2013.

The impact of Dr. Sen's contributions has exceeded their own ambit. In one 2014 interview, U.S. theoretical physicist Edward Witten – widely considered to be the greatest living mathematical physicist – called one of Dr. Sen's papers "short but brilliant" and that it "convinced me that the duality had to be right". Dr. Witten also said Dr. Sen's findings had inspired work that paved the way for more breakthroughs in understanding how subatomic particles interact with each other.

He has also done important work on black holes. Physicists had long known that these enigmatic cosmic beasts had entropy but could not explain its origins in their physical theories. Dr. Sen developed mathematical methods to make sense of a black hole's microscopic states in a way that could account for its observable, macroscopic characteristics.

Together, many physicists agree, his contributions have considerably advanced the theories physicists use to understand quantum gravity.

The Oskar Klein Medal and the accompanying Memorial Lectures was launched in 1988 to honour the Swedish physicist Oskar Klein (1894-1977). In 1926, Klein, building on the work of German mathematician Theodor Kaluza, explored whether electromagnetism and gravity could be described in a common framework by introducing an extra dimension of space. The result, known as Kaluza-Klein theory, exerted a significant influence on later attempts by physicists – including string theory – to unify these forces.

India in particular has an influential community of string theorists, especially at TIFR Mumbai, ICTS Bengaluru, HRI Prayagraj, and the Indian Institute of Science Education Research in Pune. Aside from Dr. Sen, the community's notable members include Nabamita Banerjee, Shiraz Minwalla, Sunil Mukhi, P. Ramadevi, and Spenta Wadia.

▲ Source: The Hindu

VALUE ADDITION

ICTS
A centre of the **Tata Institute of Fundamental Research** (TIFR), located in Bengaluru.

Dirac Medal (ICTP)
Given by the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, on Dirac's birthday, 8 August.

Boltzmann Medal
Top prize in statistical physics, awarded by IUPAP once every three years.

Breakthrough Prize
US$3 million award, among the richest in science; Sen won in the first edition (2012).

- **String theory in brief:** It posits that fundamental particles are not points but tiny, one-dimensional **vibrating strings**. It is a leading attempt to reconcile quantum theory with gravity and arrive at a grand unified theory explaining all particles and forces, from subatomic scales to galaxies.

- **Career & honours:** Worked at TIFR and the Harish-Chandra Research Institute before ICTS. Fellow of the Royal Society (**1998**); Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize (1994), Padma Shri (2001), Infosys Prize (2009), Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics (2012), Padma Bhushan (2013) and Dirac Medal (2014).
- **A rising streak:** Earlier this year theoretical physicist **Deepak Dhar** won the Dirac Medal — the second Indian after Sen. Dhar had earlier received the **Boltzmann Medal**, making him the only Indian to hold both.

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ First Indian — Oskar Klein Medal: Ashoke Sen ◆ Only Indian with both Dirac & Boltzmann medals: Deepak Dhar ◆ S-duality = strong–weak coupling duality

SYLLABUS LINK GS 3 — Achievements of Indians in science & technology; awareness in the field of physics and fundamental research.

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GS 3 · ENVIRONMENT

International Snow Leopard Day

03 Snow Leopard: India Counts 718 "Ghosts of the Mountains"

WHY IN NEWS

On **International Snow Leopard Day (October 23)**, the Environment Ministry highlighted India's first **Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI)**, which recorded **718 snow leopards**, including **477 in Ladakh**.

▲ Snow leopard in its rocky alpine habitat.

- **The species:** A solitary apex carnivore (*Panthera uncia*), called the "Ghost of the Mountains", adapted to the frigid, rugged terrain of the high mountains of Central and South Asia.
- **Habitat:** Usually **3,000–5,400 m** in the Himalaya, and as low as 1,000 m in Mongolia and Russia. Prefers cold, dry alpine and sub-alpine zones with sparse vegetation and steep, broken terrain — cliffs, ridges, rocky outcrops and ravines that give stalking cover.

- **Status & range: IUCN: Vulnerable.** Found in **12 range states** — Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. **China holds about 60%** of the global habitat.
- **India's efforts: Project Snow Leopard (2009)** promotes landscape-level conservation with community participation; **SPAI** gave the first scientific national estimate; India is part of the **Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Programme** of all 12 range countries.
- **Threats:** Retaliatory killing over livestock losses, poaching for pelts and bones, decline of wild prey such as blue sheep (bharal) and ibex, free-ranging dogs, unplanned infrastructure and climate-driven shrinking of alpine habitat.

VALUE ADDITION

Legal status
Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; **CITES Appendix I**; CMS Appendix I.

Why Oct 23?
Marks the **Bishkek Declaration (2013)** adopted at the Global Snow Leopard Forum, Kyrgyzstan.

SPAI
Conducted 2019–23 with WII as the nodal body; results released in January 2024.

HP link
The snow leopard is the **State Animal of Himachal Pradesh**; Spiti (Kibber WLS) is a key landscape.

IUCN shift
Down-listed from **Endangered to Vulnerable in 2017**.

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ Range in India: Ladakh, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh ◆ Main prey: bharal (blue sheep), Himalayan ibex ◆ Hemis NP (Ladakh) — famed snow-leopard habitat

SYLLABUS LINK GS 3 — Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; biodiversity and species protection.

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GS 2 · SOCIAL JUSTICE | GS 3 The Hindu · Page 7

04 Free Bus Travel Has Given Women More Mobility

WHY IN NEWS

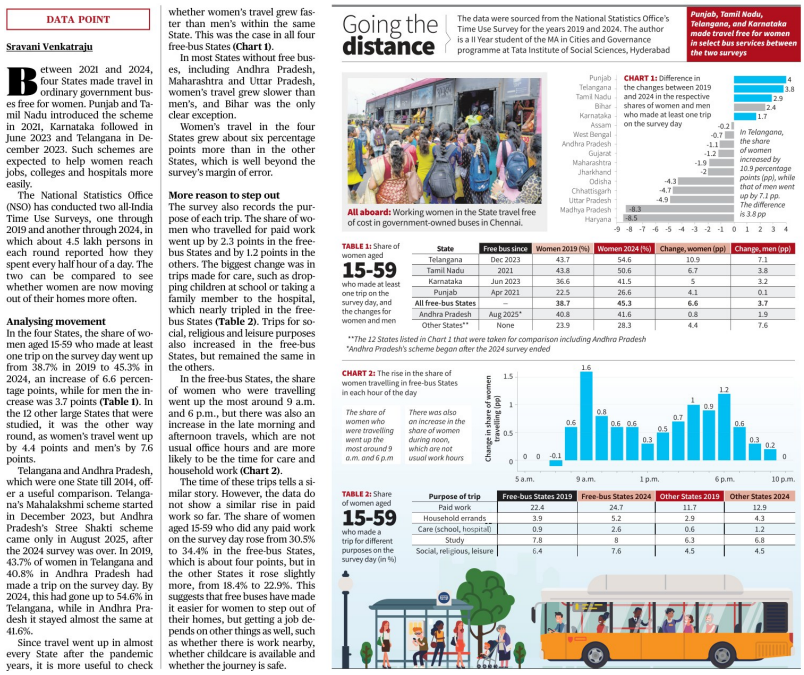
A comparison of the two all-India **Time Use Surveys (2019 and 2024)** of the National Statistics Office shows that women in States offering **fare-free bus travel** began travelling out of their homes noticeably more than men did.

- **The schemes:** Between 2021 and 2024, four States made travel in ordinary government buses free for women — **Punjab and Tamil Nadu (2021)**, **Karnataka (June 2023)** and **Telangana (December 2023)** — to help women reach jobs, colleges and hospitals.
- **The data source:** The NSO's Time Use Surveys asked about **4.5 lakh persons** in each round how they spent every half hour of a day, allowing a before–after comparison of trips made outside the home.
- **Key finding:** In the four free-bus States, women aged 15–59 making at least one trip rose from **38.7% (2019) to 45.3% (2024)** — up 6.6 points against 3.7 points for men. In 12 other large States it was the reverse: women +4.4 points, men +7.6 points.

- **A natural experiment:** Telangana's **Mahalakshmi** scheme began in December 2023, while Andhra Pradesh's **Stree Shakti** came only in August 2025, after the survey. Women making a trip rose from 43.7% to **54.6%** in Telangana but barely moved in Andhra Pradesh (40.8% → 41.6%).
- **Reading the evidence:** Since travel rose almost everywhere after the pandemic, the fair test is whether women's travel grew faster than men's within the same State — and it did in all four free-bus States.
- **The debate: For:** lowers "mobility poverty", widens access to work, education and health, aids safety and public-transport use. **Against:** strain on State transport finances, crowding, fewer services if fleets are not expanded. Free travel works best with more buses, safer last-mile links and reliable schedules.

Free bus travel has given women more mobility

The Time Use Survey data from 2019 and 2024 show that women's travel went up in four States that offer free bus rides to women



DATA POINT

Sravani Venkatraju

Between 2021 and 2024, four States made travel in ordinary government buses free for women. Punjab and Tamil Nadu introduced the scheme in 2021, Karnataka followed in June 2023 and Telangana in December 2023. Such schemes are expected to help women reach jobs, colleges and hospitals more easily.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) has conducted two all-India Time Use Surveys, one through 2019 and another through 2024, in which about 4.5 lakh persons in each round reported how they spent every half hour of a day. The two can be compared to see whether women are now moving out of their homes more often.

Analysing movement

In the four States, the share of women aged 15-59 who made at least one trip on the survey day went up from 38.7% in 2019 to 45.3% in 2024, an increase of 6.6 percentage points, while for men the increase was 3.7 points **(Table 1)**. In the 12 other large States that were studied, it was the other way round, as women's travel went up by 4.4 points and men's by 7.6 points.

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which were one State till 2014, offer a useful comparison. Telangana's Mahalakshmi scheme started in December 2023, but Andhra Pradesh's Stree Shakti scheme came only in August 2025, after the 2024 survey was over. In 2019, 43.7% of women in Telangana and 40.8% in Andhra Pradesh had made a trip on the survey day. By 2024, this had gone up to 54.6% in Telangana, while in Andhra Pradesh it stayed almost the same at 41.6%.

Since travel went up in almost every State after the pandemic years, it is more useful to check whether women's travel grew faster than men's within the same State. This was the case in all four free-bus States **(Chart 1)**.

In most States without free buses, including Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, women's travel grew slower than men's, and Bihar was the only clear exception.

Women's travel in the four States grew about six percentage points more than in the other States, which is well beyond the survey's margin of error.

More reason to step out

The survey also records the purpose of each trip. The share of women who travelled for paid work went up by 2.3 points in the free-bus States and by 1.2 points in the others. The biggest change was in trips made for care, such as dropping children at school or taking a family member to the hospital, which nearly tripled in the free-bus States **(Table 2)**. Trips for social, religious and leisure purposes also increased in the free-bus States, but remained the same in the others.

In the free-bus States, the share of women who were travelling went up the most around 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., but there was also an increase in the late morning and afternoon travels, which are not usual office hours and are more likely to be the time for care and household work **(Chart 2)**.

The time of these trips tells a similar story. However, the data do not show a similar rise in paid work so far. The share of women aged 15-59 who did any paid work on the survey day rose from 30.5% to 34.4% in the free-bus States, which is about four points, but in the other States it rose slightly more, from 18.4% to 22.9%. This suggests that free buses have made it easier for women to step out of their homes, but getting a job depends on other things as well, such as whether there is work nearby, whether childcare is available and whether the journey is safe.

Going the distance

The data were sourced from the National Statistics Office's Time Use Survey for the years 2019 and 2024. The author is a II Year student of the MA in Cities and Governance programme at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad

Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Karnataka made travel free for women in select bus services between the two surveys

All aboard: Working women in the State travel free of cost in government-owned buses in Chennai.

CHART 1: Difference in the changes between 2019 and 2024 in the respective shares of women and men who made at least one trip on the survey day

In Telangana, the share of women increased by 10.9 percentage points (pp), while that of men went up by 7.1 pp. The difference is 3.8 pp

TABLE 1: Share of women aged 15-59 who made at least one trip on the survey day, and the changes for women and men

State	Free bus since	Women 2019 (%)	Women 2024 (%)	Change, women (pp)	Change, men (pp)
Telangana	Dec 2023	43.7	54.6	10.9	7.1
Tamil Nadu	2021	43.8	50.6	6.7	3.8
Karnataka	Jun 2023	36.6	41.5	5	3.2
Punjab	Apr 2021	22.5	26.6	4.1	0.1
All free-bus States	–	**38.7**	**45.3**	**6.6**	**3.7**
Andhra Pradesh	Aug 2025*	40.8	41.6	0.8	1.9
Other States**	None	23.9	28.3	4.4	7.6

**The 12 States listed in Chart 1 that were taken for comparison including Andhra Pradesh
*Andhra Pradesh's scheme began after the 2024 survey ended

CHART 2: The rise in the share of women travelling in free-bus States in each hour of the day

The share of women who were travelling went up the most around 9 a.m. and 6 p.m

There was also an increase in the share of women during noon, which are not usual work hours

Change in share of women travelling (pp)

TABLE 2: Share of women aged 15-59 who made a trip for different purposes on the survey day (in %)

Purpose of trip	Free-bus States 2019	Free-bus States 2024	Other States 2019	Other States 2024
Paid work	22.4	24.7	11.7	12.9
Household errands	3.9	5.2	2.9	4.3
Care (school, hospital)	0.9	2.6	0.6	1.2
Study	7.8	8	6.3	6.8
Social, religious, leisure	6.4	7.6	4.5	4.5

▲ Source: The Hindu

VALUE ADDITION

Time Use Survey

Conducted by the **NSO (MoSPI)**; first round 2019, second 2024. Measures paid and unpaid work.

Unpaid care gap

TUS 2024: women spent about **289 minutes** a day on unpaid domestic services vs about 88 for men.

Female LFPR

PLFS 2023-24 (usual status, 15+) — about **41.7%**, up sharply from 23.3% in 2017-18.

Scheme names

Shakti (Karnataka), Mahalakshmi (Telangana), Vidiyal Payanam (Tamil Nadu), Stree Shakti (Andhra Pradesh).

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ Time Use Survey — NSO, MoSPI (rounds: 2019, 2024) ◆ Mahalakshmi — Telangana; Stree Shakti — Andhra Pradesh ◆ Women 15–59 making a trip, free-bus States: 38.7% → 45.3%

SYLLABUS LINK GS 2 — Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections and their performance; GS 1 — Role of women; GS 3 — Inclusive growth.

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GS 2 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Hindu · Page 6

05 U.S. Immigration Curbs May Outlast Trump

WHY IN NEWS

The second **Donald Trump** administration has steadily restricted legal immigration — measures that hit **Indian professionals and firms** hardest and reflect bipartisan political interests likely to survive beyond Trump.

- **The measures:** A **$100,000 payment requirement** on certain new H-1B petitions; changes to visa-renewal procedures; a **wage-weighted selection system** replacing the pure lottery; and suspensions of the **PERM** (Program Electronic Review Management) process — the labour-certification step for employment-based Green Cards.
- **India's exposure:** Indian nationals account for **about 70% of H-1B approvals**, with one-fifth of visas going to employees of Indian-origin companies. As the bipartisan focus on immigration reform continues, the issue will stay a friction point in India–U.S. relations.

U.S. immigration restrictions may outlast Trump

In its second term, the Donald Trump administration has been active in restricting legal immigration to the United States. The administration's attempt to impose a $100,000 payment requirement on certain new H-1B petitions, changes to visa renewal procedures, the introduction of a wage-weighted selection system, and the latest suspensions of the Program Electronic Review Management (PERM) process are cases in point, disproportionately impacting Indian immigrants and firms.

It is tempting to read these developments as a product of the Trump administration alone, but they reflect deeper political interests that are likely to survive post-Trump. Indian nationals account for 70% of H-1B visa approvals, with one-fifth of the visas going to employees of Indian-origin companies. This means that, as the bipartisan focus on immigration reform continues, the issue is likely to sustain as a friction point in India-U.S. relations.

The views of the Democrats and Republicans

Democrats are expected to dominate the upcoming midterm elections in November. They view immigration through a rights-based lens, and their voters remain supportive of both legal immigration and increased legalisation of undocumented immigrants. Some 75% of Democrats see skilled immigration as good for the U.S., compared with 54% of Republicans. Even under the current administration, Democrats have pushed for easing F-1 student visa requirements and have traditionally enjoyed the support of diaspora communities in the U.S., including the Indian diaspora.

However, prominent Democratic Senators such as Dick Durbin and Richard Blumenthal, as well as progressive Independents such as Bernie Sanders, have also pushed for bills seeking H-1B reforms. Democrats view alleged fraud in the H-1B visa system as a serious challenge that needs to be addressed. Similarly, the labour wing of the Democratic Party views the H-1B visa programme as a potential threat to domestic labour protections and workers' rights. The Democrats' immigrant voter base, their open opposition to the H-1B visa fee hikes, and resistance to these restrictions from businesses and unions suggest that a Democratic-controlled Congress may soften the harshest executive measures and tone down the rhetoric. However, concerns about visa fraud and worker protections mean that Democrats are likely to keep up the pressure on the outsourcing model and continue pushing for H-1B reforms.

Abhishek Kadiyala

Research Analyst, Geostrategy Programme, Takshashila Institution

With both the Republicans and Democrats committed to immigration reform, India faces continued uncertainty

While a plurality of Republicans support restrictions on legal immigration, this number has declined considerably since 2025. Among the Republican leadership, there is a visible split between anti-immigration nationalists and pro-immigration business interests. The Trump administration's hikes in the H-1B visa fee is an example of this conflict. While the administration was openly critical of the programme and aggressively pushed for the fee increase, it subsequently diluted the measure by including exemptions for graduates of U.S. universities and existing visa holders, following pressure from businesses and universities.

The business divide

The debate over wage-weighted entries versus the lottery system for H-1B visas has dominated discussions on immigration within the U.S. business community. There are three broad categories in this debate. The first is the random lottery system that was in place until 2026, which benefited outsourcing firms and start-ups. The second is the wage-weighted lottery system (February 2026), which infers wage levels based on experience, job role and location, dividing visa quotas into four categories. On the surface, this system might benefit big-tech firms, but it could also benefit outsourcing firms that hire highly experienced workers for lower wages. The third is the actual wage weighted lottery model, which is supported by U.S.-based industries. This approach could dilute the advantages enjoyed by outsourcing firms while benefiting American hires and also F1 student hires.

For the artificial intelligence (AI) and big-tech business community, this reform could be beneficial in two ways. First, AI graduate programmes and advanced research roles in the U.S. rely heavily on international talent, with demand for AI skills growing faster than the supply of domestic graduates. The reform could therefore help AI firms secure top international talent for higher wages.

Second, the AI sector is expanding into market segments traditionally occupied by start-ups and outsourcing companies, which often perform low technology maintenance and communication roles. The AI sector could therefore benefit if these start-ups and outsourcing firms were compelled to hire fewer workers. With the AI sector playing a prominent role in campaign contributions for the 2026 midterm elections, these policies to counter outsourcing firms are likely to continue. With over 54% of India's software services exports going to the U.S., which remains the top market for Indian information technology (IT) outsourcing, this represents a major challenge for India. However, these developments could also be viewed as positive news for Indian students at U.S. universities.

Looking ahead

The U.S. Department of Labor's suspension of eight firms, including not only Indian outsourcing companies such as Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro but also major technology firms such as Microsoft and Adobe, from green card sponsorship reinforces this trend. It raises the cost of hiring foreign workers for businesses as a whole, creating pressure that remains largely beyond partisan control.

With Mr. Trump's political power potentially diminished after November, anti-immigration rhetoric could decline. However, with both parties committed to immigration reform, India should continue to expect an unfavourable and unpredictable immigration landscape.

The views expressed are personal

▲ Source: The Hindu

VALUE ADDITION

USCIS
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services runs the H-1B lottery.

PERM
Labour certification by the U.S. Department of Labor — first step to an employment Green Card.

Remittances
India is the world's largest remittance recipient (World Bank), with the U.S. the top source.

Other visas
L-1 (intra-company transfer), O-1 (extraordinary ability), F-1/OPT (students).

- **H-1B basics:** A **non-immigrant**, employer-sponsored work visa created under the **Immigration Act, 1990**, letting U.S. employers hire foreign professionals for specialised roles in IT, engineering, finance and healthcare. Requires a bachelor's degree or higher (or equivalent experience).
- **Cap & lottery:** Annual cap of **65,000** new visas plus **20,000** for holders of advanced U.S. degrees, allotted by lottery through USCIS. Universities, non-profits and government research bodies are exempt from the cap.
- **Validity & intent:** Initially **3 years, extendable to 6**; no lifetime limit on the number of H-1B visas. It is a **dual-intent** visa — holders may apply for a Green Card for themselves and family.
- **India's response options:** Diversify talent destinations (EU, UK, Australia, Japan mobility pacts); push the long-pending India–U.S. **Totalisation Agreement**; expand Global Capability Centres in India so work moves to talent; and use iCET/TRUST tech partnerships to frame skilled mobility as a shared innovation interest.

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ H-1B created under Immigration Act, 1990 ◆ Cap: 65,000 + 20,000 (U.S. advanced degree) ◆ Indians: ~70% of H-1B petitions since 2015; China second

SYLLABUS LINK GS 2 — Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests; Indian diaspora.

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GS 2 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS — The Hindu · Page 6 (Editorial)

06 New Avenues: India and Poland Have No Conflict, But Are Pulled Apart by Others

WHY IN NEWS

Polish Prime Minister **Donald Tusk** visited India, his first since 2017, just as the **India–EU Free Trade Agreement** is finalised after years of delay. The two sides agreed to a **Defence Industry Dialogue** and to explore a dialogue on counter-terrorism.

- **Economic pull:** Poland, the EU's sixth-largest economy, has crossed the **$1 trillion GDP** (nominal) mark, and its **$120-billion tech economy** is drawing global interest. Much Polish machinery goes to Germany, which in turn sources more from India — room for trilateral manufacturing and mining-technology projects.
- **New sectors:** Technology, AI and defence hardware, critical minerals, and renewable and nuclear energy — pairing Poland's expertise with India's capacity for scale.
- **Geopolitics:** Modi–Tusk talks focused on the war in Ukraine. Poland is a frontline NATO state and among Kyiv's strongest backers, while India maintains strategic autonomy.
- **The trust deficit:** Distance aside, India's defence ties with **Russia** and Poland's with **Pakistan** breed caution. Poland helped train Pakistan's Air Force in its early years and signed a **defence cooperation agreement with Pakistan in 2018**. New Delhi is unlikely to accept Warsaw's strictures on its exercises with Russia, which caused controversy during the Polish Foreign Minister's visit earlier this year.

New avenues

India and Poland have no conflict, but are pulled apart by other nations

Sixteen years after his visit as Poland's Prime Minister, Donald Tusk's travel to Delhi and Bengaluru last week was to signal a renewed desire to work closely with India. Mr. Tusk's visit, two months ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Brussels to sign the India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement, indicated one part of his agenda. Both sides agreed that it was time to develop trade, currently worth just $6 billion, to double its size by 2030. Mr. Tusk's last visit to India was in 2017, as President of the European Council for the EU-India summit, and it is fitting that his trip was just as the FTA is finalised and ratified after years of delays. Another area of increased India-Poland collaboration is in technology, AI and defence hardware, critical minerals, renewable and nuclear energy given Poland's expertise in the last few decades and India's capacity for scale. As the EU's sixth largest economy, Poland has officially crossed the $1 trillion GDP (nominal terms) milestone. Its $120-billion-dollar tech economy is also gaining global interest. A large part of Polish machinery and parts is exported to Germany, which in turn has a growing share of Indian imports, and India could consider more trilateral collaborations for manufacturing and mining technology. The two sides agreed to establish a "Defence Industry Dialogue" and explore a dialogue on counter-terrorism cooperation. Finally, the Modi-Tusk talks focused on geopolitics, particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine. The war's impact, especially on the Global South, has been a concern for India, and the Modi government's initiative to work on an agreement agreed to establish a "Defence Industry Dialogue" and explore a dialogue on counter-terrorism cooperation. Finally, the Modi-Tusk talks focused on geopolitics, particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine. The war's impact, especially on the Global South, has been a concern for India, and the Modi government's initiative to work on an agreement acceptable to Kyiv and Moscow on grain exports and seafarers' safety was discussed. The four-pronged plan, announced by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during his September visit to Warsaw, won Mr. Tusk's support.

At the India-Poland Business Forum in Bengaluru, Mr. Tusk, who was accompanied by a Polish business delegation, said the challenge now was in "translating" the talks and MoUs signed into actual joint ventures between businesses. Apart from the distance and geographies, there is the matter of trust, given India's defence engagement with Russia and Poland's defence ties with Pakistan. Poland is credited with training Pakistan's Air Force in its early years; a mutual defence cooperation agreement was signed in 2018. India has a unique and enduring partnership with Russia, and New Delhi is unlikely to accept Warsaw's strictures over its military engagement and exercises with Russia that caused a controversy earlier this year during the Polish Foreign Minister's visit. It is essential for Delhi and Warsaw to complete the confidentiality of classified information that is still being negotiated and draw up the parameters of future cooperation based on realities. Mr. Tusk's statement that India and Poland today have no "conflicts of interest" is a significant aspiration, for two countries that share old values, and new avenues of partnership.

▲ Source: The Hindu

◆ **Assessment:** With no bilateral dispute, the relationship can be built on economics and technology — provided both sides compartmentalise third-country ties and use the EU FTA as the springboard.

VALUE ADDITION

Strategic Partnership
Ties upgraded in **August 2024** during PM Modi's Warsaw visit — the first by an Indian PM in 45 years.

Groupings
EU (2004), NATO (1999), **Visegrad Group** (with Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary), **Weimar Triangle** (with France, Germany).

WWII bond
Jam Saheb of Nawanagar sheltered Polish children at **Balachadi**; Valivade (Kolhapur) hosted Polish refugees. Warsaw has a "Good Maharaja Square".

Operation Ganga
Poland helped India evacuate students from Ukraine in 2022.

MAP CHECK

Poland and its neighbours — Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia (Kaliningrad).

PRELIMS POINTERS ◆ Capital: Warsaw, on the Vistula river; coast on the Baltic Sea ◆ Poland does NOT border Hungary ◆ Poland–Pakistan defence cooperation agreement: 2018

SYLLABUS LINK GS 2 — Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; India–EU relations.

TEST YOURSELF · UPSC & HPAS

Practice Zone

MAINS PRACTICE · 2 Questions

Q1 · GS 3 15 marks · 250 words

Hawala networks act as the financial backbone of the narco-terror nexus in India's Northeast. Examine the challenges in curbing them and suggest a multi-pronged strategy.

हवाला नेटवर्क पूर्वोत्तर भारत में नार्को-आतंक गठजोड़ की वित्तीय रीढ़ की तरह कार्य करते हैं। इन पर अंकुश लगाने में आने वाली चुनौतियों का परीक्षण कीजिए तथा एक बहुआयामी रणनीति सुझाइए।

APPROACH

Intro: Cite Operation Trident — 38 raids, 18 arrests, ₹100 crore traced to a Myanmar-linked cartel.

Body 1: Define hawala and how it moves value without moving money; link to Golden Triangle geography.

Body 2: Challenges — porous border & FMR legacy, cash economy, ethnic kinship, Myanmar instability, crypto and trade-based laundering, weak inter-agency data sharing.

Body 3: Strategy — PMLA/FEMA/NDPS enforcement, FIU-IND analytics, NCORD, smart fencing, demand reduction via Nasha Mukt Bharat, FATF compliance, BIMSTEC cooperation.

Conclusion: "Follow the money" is as important as seizing drugs — link to the 2029 drug-free goal.

Q2 · GS 2 15 marks · 250 words

Fare-free bus travel for women is often dismissed as a populist freebie. In the light of Time Use Survey evidence, critically evaluate its role in improving women's mobility and economic participation.

महिलाओं के लिए निःशुल्क बस यात्रा को प्रायः लोकलुभावन 'मुफ़्त सुविधा' कहकर खारिज कर दिया जाता है। समय उपयोग सर्वेक्षण के साक्ष्यों के आलोक में महिलाओं की गतिशीलता और आर्थिक भागीदारी बढ़ाने में इसकी भूमिका का आलोचनात्मक मूल्यांकन कीजिए।

APPROACH

Intro: Four States (Punjab, TN, Karnataka, Telangana) introduced free travel between 2021 and 2024; NSO Time Use Surveys 2019 vs 2024.

Evidence: Women's trips 38.7% → 45.3% in free-bus States; Telangana vs Andhra Pradesh natural experiment (54.6% vs 41.6%).

Merits: Mobility poverty, access to jobs/education/health, safety, public-transport and climate co-benefits.

Limits: SRTC finances, crowding, fleet shortfall, mobility ≠ employment by itself, unpaid care burden.

Conclusion: A merit good, not a freebie, if paired with more buses, last-mile safety and childcare support.

PRELIMS MCQs · 10 Questions

1. Consider the following statements about hawala:
1. It transfers value without physical movement of money across locations.
2. Hawala dealings are unauthorised under FEMA, 1999 and illegal in India.
3. It originated in Europe in the 18th century.
Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

2. The "Golden Triangle", recently termed the "Death Triangle" by the MHA, comprises:

(a) Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan
(b) Myanmar, Laos, Thailand
(c) Myanmar, Bangladesh, India
(d) Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam

3. With reference to the Oskar Klein Medal, consider the following:
1. It is awarded by Stockholm University and the Nobel Committee for Physics.
2. It has been awarded every year since 1988.
3. Ashoke Sen is the first Indian to receive it.
Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

4. Who is the only Indian to have won both the Dirac Medal and the Boltzmann Medal?

(a) Ashoke Sen
(b) Deepak Dhar
(c) Jayant Narlikar
(d) C.N.R. Rao

5. Consider the following statements about the snow leopard:
1. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
2. China holds about 60% of its global habitat.
3. As per SPAI, Ladakh has the largest population in India.
Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

6. Which one of the following is NOT a snow leopard range country?

(a) Bhutan
(b) Kyrgyz Republic
(c) Myanmar
(d) Uzbekistan

7. The all-India Time Use Survey is conducted by:

(a) NITI Aayog
(b) National Statistics Office, MoSPI
(c) Office of the Registrar General
(d) Ministry of Labour and Employment

8. Consider the following pairs (Scheme — State):
1. Mahalakshmi — Telangana
2. Shakti — Karnataka
3. Stree Shakti — Andhra Pradesh
4. Vidiyal Payanam — Punjab
How many pairs are correctly matched?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

9. Consider the following about the H-1B visa:
1. It is a non-immigrant visa created under the Immigration Act, 1990.
2. It has an annual cap of 65,000 plus 20,000 for U.S. advanced-degree holders.
3. Its holders cannot apply for a Green Card.
Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

10. Which one of the following countries does NOT share a land border with Poland?

(a) Lithuania
(b) Belarus
(c) Hungary
(d) Slovakia

ANSWER KEY & RATIONALE

Q	Ans	Rationale
1	(b)	Hawala originated in South Asia around the 8th century, not in Europe.
2	(b)	The Golden Crescent (now “Death Crescent”) is Afghanistan–Iran–Pakistan.
3	(d)	All three facts are as reported on Sen’s award.
4	(b)	Deepak Dhar won the Boltzmann Medal and later the Dirac Medal — second Indian after Sen for the latter.
5	(d)	SPAI recorded 718 snow leopards, 477 of them in Ladakh.

6	(c)	The 12 range states are Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
7	(b)	The NSO conducted the rounds of 2019 and 2024.
8	(c)	Vidiyal Payanam is Tamil Nadu's free bus scheme for women.
9	(a)	H-1B is a dual-intent visa; holders can seek a Green Card.
10	(c)	Poland borders Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia (Kaliningrad).

QUICK REVISION RECAP

- ✓ **Operation Trident** — 38 raids in Assam, Mizoram, Manipur (Oct 23); 18 held; ₹100 crore hawala traced; drug-free target 31 Dec 2029.
- ✓ **Hawala** — South Asian origin (8th century); value moves via two hawaladars, not cash; illegal under FEMA.
- ✓ **Ashoke Sen** (ICTS Bengaluru) — first Indian to win the Oskar Klein Medal (Stockholm University + Nobel Committee for Physics, since 1988).
- ✓ **Snow leopard** — 718 in India (SPAI), 477 in Ladakh; IUCN Vulnerable; 12 range states; Project Snow Leopard 2009; Day: Oct 23.
- ✓ **Free bus travel** — women's trips in free-bus States 38.7% → 45.3% (TUS 2019 vs 2024); Telangana 54.6% vs Andhra Pradesh 41.6%.
- ✓ **H-1B** — Immigration Act 1990; cap 65,000 + 20,000; 3 + 3 years; dual-intent; Indians ~70% of approvals.
- ✓ **India–Poland** — Tusk visit; Defence Industry Dialogue; Poland's GDP > $1 trillion; Poland–Pakistan defence pact 2018.

PLACES & PERSONS IN NEWS

PLACES

Champhai — Mizoram border district facing Myanmar; drug money traced here.

Zokhawthar — Mizoram border-trade point on the Tiau river.

Churachandpur — Manipur district under the Operation Trident searches.

Ladakh — Home to 477 of India's 718 snow leopards.

Warsaw — Capital of Poland, on the Vistula river.

Stockholm — Seat of Stockholm University, co-awarder of the Oskar Klein Medal.

PERSONS

Ashoke Sen — String theorist, ICTS Bengaluru — Oskar Klein Medal.

Deepak Dhar — Only Indian with both Dirac and Boltzmann Medals.

Donald Tusk — Prime Minister of Poland; visited India.

Amit Shah — Union Home Minister; announced Operation Trident results.

Oskar Klein — Swedish physicist (1894–1977); Kaluza–Klein theory.

PRELIMS TRAP-SETTERS

⚠ **Golden Triangle ≠ Golden Crescent**	Triangle = Myanmar–Laos–Thailand; Crescent = Afghanistan–Iran–Pakistan.
⚠ **Oskar Klein Medal is not a Nobel**	It is given jointly by Stockholm University and the Nobel Committee for Physics.
⚠ **Snow leopard is Vulnerable**	Not Endangered — it was down-listed in 2017.
⚠ **H-1B is dual-intent**	Unlike most non-immigrant visas, it allows a Green Card application.
⚠ **Time Use Survey ≠ PLFS**	Both are NSO surveys, but TUS records time spent per half hour; PLFS measures labour force.
⚠ **Poland–Hungary**	Both are in the Visegrad Group, yet they share no border (Slovakia lies between).

STATIC LINKAGE

Today's story	Static anchor	Revise this
Operation Trident	GS 3 — *Internal security*	NDPS Act 1985, PMLA 2002, FEMA 1999; Golden Triangle vs Golden Crescent; Free Movement Regime
Oskar Klein Medal	GS 3 — *Science*	String theory, quantum gravity, extra dimensions; Indian Nobel laureates in physics
Snow leopard	GS 3 — *Environment*	Schedule I, WPA 1972; IUCN categories; cold-desert biosphere reserve; Project Snow Leopard 2009
Free bus travel	GS 2 — *Welfare*	DPSP Art. 38 & 39; MoSPI surveys (PLFS, TUS); gender budgeting
H-1B curbs	GS 2 — *Diaspora*	Remittances, services exports, India–U.S. iCET/ TRUST
India–Poland	GS 2 — *Europe*	India–EU FTA, Visegrad Group, Weimar Triangle, Central Europe outreach

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

— ROBERT COLLIER · KEEP GOING