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Daily News Analysis

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: InternationalTable of Contents

RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has cut the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6%.

- This is the second consecutive cut, and the policy stance has been changed from neutral to accommodative.
- GDP growth forecast revised down from 6.7% to 6.5% due to global trade tensions.

Prelims Key Facts:

Term/Concept	Explanation
Repo Rate	The rate at which RBI lends money to commercial banks. Current: 6%
Basis Point (bps)	1 bps = 0.01%. So, 25 bps = 0.25%
MPC	6-member Monetary Policy Committee, chaired by RBI Governor
Accommodative Stance	RBI is open to further rate cuts to support economic growth
Impact of Rate Cut	Loans (home, auto, etc.) become cheaper, savings returns may reduce
Growth Forecast	Revised down to 6.5% for the current fiscal

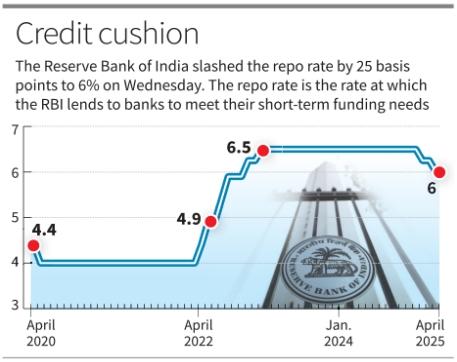
Implications for India:

- Boosts liquidity and lowers borrowing costs.
- May stimulate demand, especially in sectors like real estate, auto, MSMEs.
- But may also reduce returns on fixed deposits and small savings.
- Reflects RBI's concern about growth slowdown over inflation.

Some Fact

- The MPC was constituted under the RBI Act, 1934 (amended in 2016).
- It meets bi-monthly to decide interest rates.

RBI cuts repo rate by 0.25%, trims GDP growth forecast



Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India slashed the repo rate by 25 basis points to 6% on Wednesday, with its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voting unanimously to reduce the policy rate in a bid to support growth and bring down the interest burden on home, auto, and other loan borrowers. However, this will also reduce the interest earned on savings by depositors.

The move comes against the backdrop of an escalating global trade war, triggered by U.S. President Donald Trump's wide-ranging tariffs. The MPC has also lowered its forecast for India's GDP growth this year, from 6.7% to 6.5%.

This is the second time in a row that the MPC has cut the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) or 0.25%. The committee, headed by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, also unanimously shifted its policy stance from neutral to accommodative, indicating that it is more worried that economic growth could be a casualty of the trade war, than about inflation.

This is a policy stance "geared towards stimulating the economy through softer interest rates," Mr. Malhotra said, signalling the likelihood of further rate cuts.

"Uncertainty in itself dampens growth by affecting investment and spending decisions," he said, in a monetary statement explaining the situation. "Second, the dent on global growth due to trade friction will impede domestic growth. Third, higher tariffs shall have a negative impact on our exports," he said.

'Known unknowns'

"There are, however, several known unknowns – the impact of relative tariffs, the elasticities of our export and import demand; and the policy measures adopted by the Government, including the proposed Foreign Trade Agreement with the USA, to name a few. These make the quantification of the adverse impact difficult," Mr. Malhotra emphasised.

The risks to inflation are two-sided, he pointed out. "On the upside, uncertainties may lead to possible currency pressures and imported inflation. On the downside, slowdown in global growth could entail further softening in commodity and crude oil prices, putting downward pressure on inflation," he said.

"Overall, while global uncertainties shall impede growth, its impact on domestic inflation, while requiring us to be vigilant, is not expected to be of high concern," he added.

- Inflation targeting framework: 4% ± 2% CPI inflation as the goal.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques :With reference to the Monetary Policy in India, consider the following statements:

1. A change in repo rate directly influences the lending rates of commercial banks.

2. An accommodative policy stance indicates the RBI may raise interest rates in the future.

3. The Monetary Policy Committee consists of members solely from the RBI.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 1 and 3 only

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans : A

Page 03 : Prelims fact

Kerala and Tamil Nadu to jointly conduct a synchronized Nilgiri tahr census from April 24–27, 2025.

- Part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Eravikulam National Park.

Kerala and T.N. to conduct joint Nilgiri tahr census from April 24

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala and Tamil Nadu will jointly carry out a Nilgiri tahr census from April 24 to 27. The survey will span 89 census blocks in Kerala and 176 blocks in Tamil Nadu over the four-day period.

Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran, who announced the initiative recently, said the synchronised survey of the mountain ungulate is being conducted to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Eravikulam National Park. The Kerala and Tamil Nadu's Forest departments have begun preparations to conduct the census across the contiguous Nilgiri tahr habitats, covering areas both inside and outside protected forest zones.

The survey will cover 89 census blocks in Kerala and 176 in T.N.

According to Chief Wildlife Warden Pramod G. Krishnan, camera traps would be deployed and pellet samples would be collected from selected blocks for scientific analysis, including studies on genetic variation.

In Kerala, the 89 census blocks are located across 20 forest divisions, stretching from Thiruvananthapuram to Wayanad, regions known for their tahr populations.

Around 1,300 census team members will participate in the survey.

The data collected will be analysed using the 'bounded count' method to estimate the population in each block.

Key Facts for Prelims:

Feature	Details
Species	Nilgiri Tahr (Nilgiritragus hylocrius)
IUCN Status	Endangered
Endemic to	Western Ghats (India only)
Habitat	Montane grasslands (altitude 1,200–2,600 m)

State Animal of	Tamil Nadu
Census Method	Bounded Count Method
Techniques Used	Camera traps, pellet analysis, genetic sampling
Kerala Census Blocks	89 blocks across 20 forest divisions
Tamil Nadu Census Blocks	176 blocks
Total Personnel	~1,300 census team members
Notable Park	Eravikulam National Park – largest population of Nilgiri tahr

Significance of the Census:

- First synchronised effort across states to ensure accurate estimation.
- Helps monitor population trends, habitat condition, and genetic diversity.
- Useful for conservation planning and interstate coordination in biodiversity protection.

About Nilgiri Tahr :

Aspect	Detail
Taxonomic Family	Bovidae
Appearance	Stocky body, curved horns, males darker
Threats	Habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, fragmentation
Population Estimate	~3,100 individuals (past estimates)
Conservation Projects	Project Nilgiri Tahr (TN, 2022)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques :Consider the following statements regarding Nilgiri Tahr:

1. It is endemic to the Eastern Ghats.

2. It is classified as 'Endangered' under the IUCN Red List.

3. It is the state animal of Kerala.

4. It inhabits montane grasslands of the Western Ghats.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 2 and 4 only

B. 1, 2, and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 2, 3, and 4 only

Ans: A

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has approved a ₹63,000 crore government-to-government deal with France for the procurement of 26 Rafale-M (Marine) fighter jets for the Indian Navy.

- The formal signing is expected during the French Defence Minister's visit to India.

Govt. approves ₹63,000-cr. deal for procuring Rafale-M jets

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved a nearly ₹63,000-crore deal for the procurement of 26 Rafale-M fighter jets from France for the Indian Navy, official sources confirmed.

The contract is expected to be concluded later this month. It includes 22 single-seater jets that can operate from aircraft carriers and four twin-seater trainer jets, which are not carrier-compatible.

The CCS approval for the government-to-government deal is the final step, and the agreement now awaits formal conclusion. It is expected to be signed during the French Defence Minister's visit to India, likely later this month.

Flight might: Rafale-M jets lined up on French carrier *Charles de Gaulle* during the Varuna exercise last month. DINAKAR PERI

This leaves another mega deal with France for three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines awaiting CCS approval, before it can be finalised.

The delivery of the jets will begin three-and-a-half years after the contract is signed and is expected to be completed in about six-and-a-half years, official sources said.

The Indian Air Force operates 36 Rafale jets, acquired under a ₹60,000-crore deal signed in September 2016.

The Indian Navy got the opportunity to witness the performance of the Rafale-M jets aboard the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* during the bilateral Varuna exercise last month.

Unlike the Rafale deal, which is an inter-governmental agreement, the deal for the Scorpene submarines is a follow-on to the earlier deal for six submarines procured under Project-75, between Naval Group of France and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL).

On July 13, 2023, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, had accorded initial approval for the procurement of 26 Rafale-M fighters and three additional Scorpene-class diesel-electric submarines.

The Rafale-M jets are meant to fill the gap in the number of fighter jets till the under-development, indigenous Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF) is inducted into service. The Navy currently operates two aircraft carriers – *INS Vikramaditya*, which was procured from Russia, and the indigenously built *INS Vikrant*, which was commissioned in September 2022.

The Indian aircraft carriers use a ski-jump to launch aircraft, unlike the French carrier. Both carriers use arrestor cables to recover aircraft which use a tail hook.

The lifts aboard the Indian carriers were built to accommodate the Russian MIG-29K jets, and the Rafale-M jets would need slight modifications to fit in. The lifts are used to move the aircraft between the hangar and the flight deck.

Key Facts:

Feature	Details
Number of Aircraft	26 (22 single-seater carrier-capable + 4 twin-seater trainer jets)
Deal Type	Government-to-Government (G2G)
Total Cost	₹63,000 crore
Delivery Timeline	Starts 3.5 years after signing; completed in 6.5 years
Carrier Compatibility	Single-seaters are carrier-compatible; trainers are not
Aircraft Carriers in Use	INS Vikramaditya (Russia), INS Vikrant (India)
Current Carrier Fighters	MIG-29K
Indigenous Jet Under Development	Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF)
Related Exercise	Varuna Exercise – Rafale-M demonstrated on French carrier Charles de Gaulle
Lift Compatibility	Rafale-M jets need minor modifications to fit Indian carrier lifts
Previous IAF Deal	36 Rafales for IAF (₹60,000 crore in 2016)

Scorpene Submarine Deal	Awaiting CCS nod for 3 more under Project-75

Terms & Concepts for Prelims:

Term	Meaning
Rafale-M	Marine variant of French Dassault Rafale fighter; suitable for carrier operations
CCS	Cabinet Committee on Security, headed by PM; clears all major defence acquisitions
TEDBF	Indigenous Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter being developed by DRDO-HAL for the Navy
Project-75	Submarine project under which 6 Scorpene-class subs were built at MDL, Mumbai
Ski-jump	Technique used by Indian carriers to launch aircraft (not used by French carrier)
Arrestor cables	Equipment used to recover landing aircraft on aircraft carriers via tail hook

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques :*Consider the following statements about the Rafale-M fighter jets:*

1. They are twin-engine carrier-based fighter jets.

2. The Rafale-M jets are already in service with the Indian Air Force.

3. They can operate from ski-jump type aircraft carriers used by India.

4. Rafale-M is being indigenously developed by HAL under Project-75.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 1 and 2 only

C. 1, 3, and 4 only

D. 1 only

Ans: A

Wildfires have become more frequent and intense globally — from the Eaton Fire in California (Jan 2025) to fires in Ofunato, Japan (Feb 2025).

- New research in Nature Climate Change reveals that the Arctic Boreal Zone (ABZ), once a carbon sink, is now a net carbon source.

As wildfires scorch the earth, the Arctic biome rejects more carbon

A new study has found the Arctic Boreal Zone began to turn into a carbon source before 1990, and it was helped by the Eastern Siberia fires in 2003 and the Timmins wildfire in Canada in 2012. The CO2 released in those two years far exceeded the amount the zone alone was able to absorb

Arkatapa Basu

Multiple states in the U.S. were recently in the grip of tornadoes, wildfires, and dust storms. The fires that scorched parts of Texas and Oklahoma burnt through almost 300 homes, reliving the horrors a similar blaze inflicted on Los Angeles in January this year. The fires that raged across Eaton and Palisades in particular claimed at least 28 lives, destroyed more than 14,000 structures, and forced people to evacuate *en masse*.

The inferno engulfed at least 16,000 hectares of land, destroying various natural ecosystems, per state agency Cal Fire. In fact, Cal Fire said it was among the most destructive fires in California history.

Almost a month later, across the Pacific Ocean, another wildfire swept through the forests near Ofunato City in Japan. According to media reports, the fire had started burning in the mountainous region surrounding the city on February 26. It claimed the life of at least one person, damaged close to 210 buildings, and forced more than 4,200 residents in the area to evacuate. In all, the fire covered nearly 2,900 hectares of land, rendering it one of the largest fires Japan has suffered in the last five decades.

All these fires also released large quantities of carbon into the atmosphere. According to the Copernicus Air Monitoring Service (CAMS) of the European Union, wildfires released 800,000 tonnes of carbon in January 2025 alone, and this was nearly four times the amount wildfires released in the same period a decade ago. CAMS also examined the fires' radiative power – i.e., the amount of heat they radiated, measured in watts – as recorded by NASA's Terra and Aqua satellites (which also track farm fires in India in winter). It found that this power exceeded the long-term average power between 2003 and 2024 by one order of magnitude.

A home is engulfed during the Eaton Fire on January 8, 2025, in Altadena, California. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Highest land temperatures

According to the latest India State of Forest Report published on December 21, 2024, Uttarakhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh recorded the most fires in that year. Uttarakhand alone recorded 5,315 forest fires between November 2022 and June 2023. However, the report also said the number of fire 'hotspots' in the country seems to be dropping: from 2.23 lakh in 2021-2022 and 2.12 lakh in 2022-2023 to 2.03 lakh in 2023-2024.

At the same time, India has been experiencing some of its highest land temperatures in recent years. In 2023, researchers at IIT-Kharagpur and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, reported that in India's northwest, northeast, and central regions, land temperature is rising 0.1°-0.3° C per decade in the pre-monsoon season and 0.2°-0.4° C per decade in the post-monsoon season.

Heat waves have also been found to be occurring earlier in the year, moving slower, and lasting longer. Together with prolonged dry spells, they create conditions ripe for wildfires. Suryaprabha Sadasivan, senior vice-president of consulting firm Chase India, wrote in *The Hindu* on February 12 that forest fires in India emit around 69 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year.

The intensity and frequency of wildfires raise the question: are the earth's natural carbon sinks able to absorb all the carbon being emitted?

The Arctic carbon sink

The planet's oceans, forests, and soil are well-known carbon sinks. The Arctic Boreal Zone (ABZ) is a particularly important one: for many centuries now, its tundra, coniferous forests, and wetlands around the Arctic Circle have absorbed carbon and sequestered it in the zone's permafrost. Its coniferous forest is the world's largest land-based biome.

But according to a new study published in *Nature Climate Change*, the increasing ferocity of wildfires means that more than 30% of the ABZ has now stopped capturing carbon and is instead releasing it.

In the study, an international team of researchers analysed data from 200 monitoring sites worldwide between 1990 and 2020 and tracked year-round changes in the atmospheric concentration of carbon. Their analysis found that while the ABZ was actively absorbing carbon from the atmosphere from 2001-2020, fully one-third of the region has been releasing carbon dioxide since.

"While we found many northern ecosystems are still acting as carbon dioxide sinks, source regions and fires are now cancelling out much of that net uptake and reversing long-standing trends," Anna Virkkala, a research scientist at Woodwell Climate Research Center in the US and an author of the study, said in a statement.

Wildfires released large quantities of carbon into the atmosphere. According to the EU, wildfires released 800,000 tonnes of carbon in January 2025 alone, four times the amount such fires released a decade ago

The researchers were also able to specify the areas in the ABZ that had become carbon sources: while Alaska accounted for 44% of the 'new' emissions, northern Europe and Siberia accounted for 25% and 13%, respectively. The study paper also stated that the carbon emissions from the longer, non-summer months in the ABZ had surpassed the amount of carbon dioxide absorbed during the summer months (June to August).

Carbon sink to source

Finally, the team was able to estimate that the ABZ first began to transform from a carbon sink to a carbon source before 1990 and it was helped along by the Eastern Siberia fires in Russia in 2003 and the Timmins wildfire in Canada in 2012. According to the paper, the carbon dioxide released in these two years far exceeded the amount the ABZ alone was able to absorb.

One important reason for the ABZ releasing more carbon dioxide than what it can absorb is the thawing of tundra permafrost. As global warming – whose effects have been more pronounced in cooler regions – dries out the soil and changes the type of plants that grow, the average temperature of the top soil rises and organic materials in the soil decompose, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The consequences of these changes creates a dangerous feedback loop. According to the study, as wildfires become more common and more intense, they burn through the natural carbon reservoirs that have historically helped regulate the earth's climate. The carbon released from these fires further fuels global warming, which in turn creates conditions for more frequent and more intense wildfires. And so on.

The study also corroborated the findings of the 2024 Arctic Report Card issued by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This document stated that frequent wildfires are turning the Arctic tundra into a source of carbon by forcing it to absorb record levels of pollution due to burning fossil fuels.

Alaska Biological Research senior scientist Gerald Frost, who also co-authored the Arctic Report Card, told the NOAA, "Many of the Arctic's vital signs that we track are either setting or flirting with record-high or record-low values nearly every year. This is an indication that recent extreme years are the result of long-term, persistent changes, and not the result of variability in the climate system."

arkatapa.basu@thehindu.co.in

Key Global Events Cited:

- Eastern Siberia Fire (2003) and Timmins Fire, Canada (2012): Massive CO_2 emissions.

- Eaton & Palisades Fire, California (2025): 28+ lives lost, 14,000+ structures destroyed, 16,000 ha burned.
- Ofunato City Fire, Japan (2025): Largest in 50 years; 2,900 ha affected.
- CAMS Report (Jan 2025): 800,000 tonnes carbon released from wildfires — 4x more than Jan 2015.
- India State of Forest Report (2024): Hotspots decreasing, but fires in Uttarakhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh still high.

The Arctic Boreal Zone (ABZ):

- Covers parts of Alaska, Siberia, Northern Europe.
- World's largest land-based biome, previously a major carbon sink.
- Permafrost + coniferous forests + tundra + wetlands stored centuries' worth of carbon.

Key Findings of the Study (Nature Climate Change):

- ABZ has become a carbon source.
- Before 1990, the transformation began.
- Wildfires + non-summer emissions have overtaken carbon absorbed in summer.
- Thawing permafrost, plant changes, and microbial decomposition driving emissions.
- Alaska (44%), Northern Europe (25%), and Siberia (13%) are top new emission zones.

Feedback Loop Identified:

- Wildfires → CO_2 Emissions → Global Warming → Drier soil → More fires.
- Natural carbon sinks become net emitters, worsening climate change.

Indian Context:

- Heatwaves are more intense, occur earlier, and last longer.
- Northwest, Northeast, Central India warming by 0.1°–0.4°C per decade.
- Forest fires in India emit 69 million tonnes of CO_2 annually (Chase India).
- Reducing fire hotspots but Uttarakhand still vulnerable.

Linked Reports:

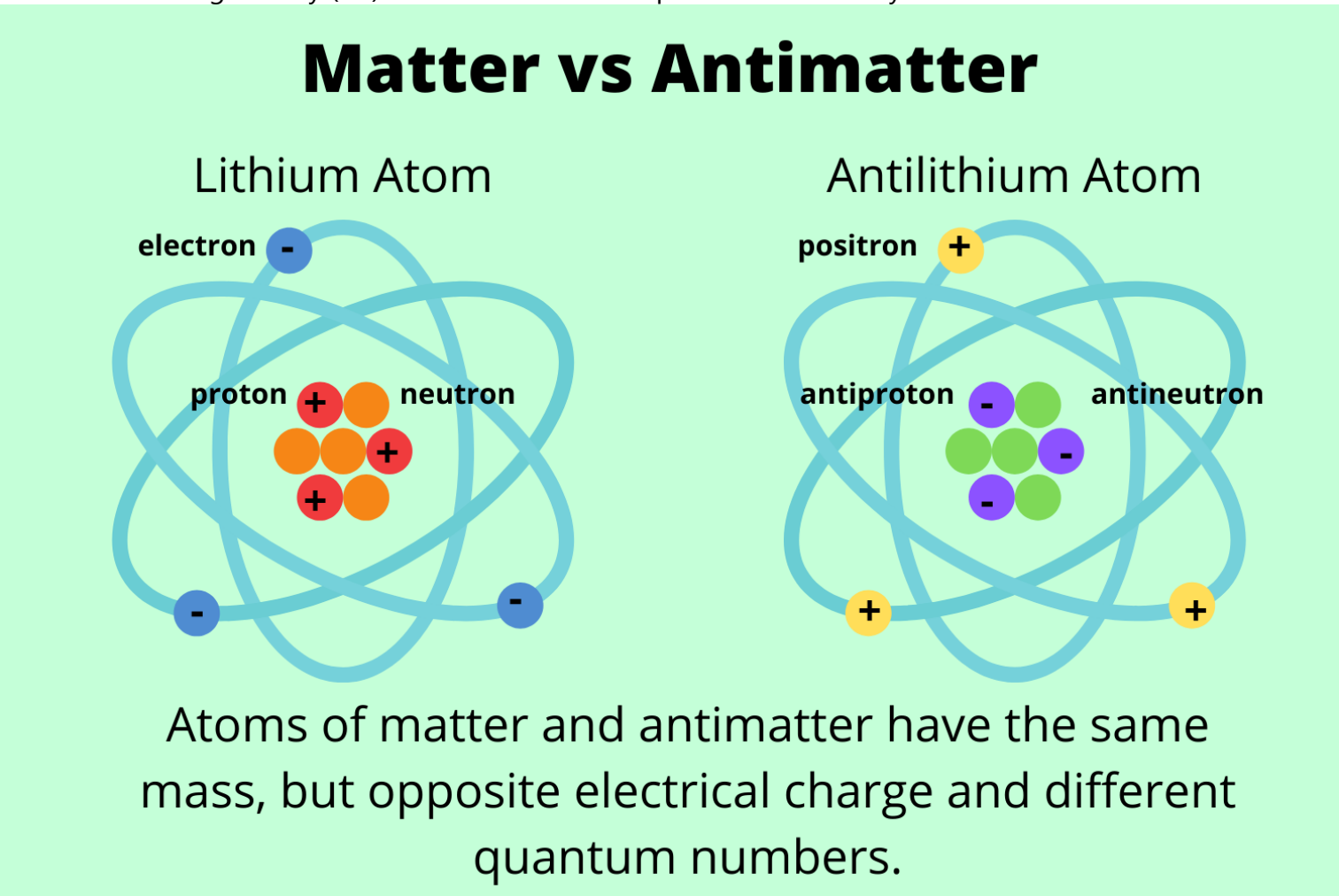
- India State of Forest Report 2024
- CAMS (Copernicus Air Monitoring Service)
- 2024 Arctic Report Card (NOAA)
- NASA's Terra & Aqua Satellite Data

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Recent studies suggest that natural carbon sinks such as the Arctic are turning into carbon sources. Discuss the causes, implications, and potential strategies to address this reversal.**(250 words)**

In News : Matter and Anti-Matter

Recently, physicists at CERN's Large Hadron Collider beauty (LHCb) experiment reported confirmed evidence of Charge-Parity (CP) violation in a class of particles called baryons.



Matter

- Matter is anything that has mass and occupies space, composed of atoms and molecules.
- Primary States:
  - Solid: Fixed shape and volume.
  - Liquid: Fixed volume, no fixed shape.
  - Gas: No fixed shape or volume.
- Fourth State – Plasma:
  - Consists of ionized particles.
  - Found in stars and high-energy environments.
- State Changes: Driven by temperature and pressure, e.g., melting, evaporation, condensation.

Antimatter

- Antimatter consists of particles that are mirror counterparts of matter, with opposite electric charge.

  - Electron → Positron, Proton → Antiproton, Neutron → Antineutron
- Creation: Both matter and antimatter were created during the Big Bang in equal amounts.
- Interaction: When matter and antimatter collide, they annihilate each other, producing gamma rays.
- Sources:
  - Natural: Cosmic rays and radioactive decay.
  - Artificial: Particle accelerators like the LHC simulate conditions similar to the Big Bang, producing antiparticles.

Key Concepts and Definitions

- CP Violation (Charge-Parity Violation): CP violation refers to a discrepancy in the behavior of matter and antimatter counterparts under a combination of charge conjugation (C) and parity transformation (P).
  - Charge conjugation (C) changes a particle into its antiparticle, while parity (P) flips the spatial coordinates (like a mirror reflection).
  - Ideally, CP symmetry implies that matter and antimatter should behave identically in physical processes. Violation of this principle hints at an inherent asymmetry.
- Baryons and Antibaryons: Baryons are subatomic particles made of three quarks. The most common examples are protons and neutrons.
  - Their antimatter counterparts, called antibaryons, are composed of three antiquarks.

Latest Discovery: What Did the LHCb Find?

- Physicists studied a baryon called the lambda-b (Λb) particle, composed of up (u), down (d), and bottom (b) quarks.
- The lambda-b baryon was observed decaying into a proton, a kaon, and two pions.
- A small but statistically significant difference was found in the decay rate between the lambda-b baryon and its antimatter counterpart, indicating CP violation.
- This is the first discovery of CP violation in baryons to surpass the five-sigma statistical threshold, a standard benchmark for declaring a scientific discovery.

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Understanding India's China conundrum

Today's China is evidently not the China of Deng Xiaoping. With the advent of Xi Jinping in 2013, China has changed even more and there is little indication that it has since retracted from this path. On the other hand, it is harking more and more to its past, wallowing in self-pity as a 'wronged' civilisation. As this becomes more pronounced, the need for caution becomes self-evident, at least as far as countries on its borders are concerned. China's border provocations, in the Himalayas for instance, can be traced to its determination to restore the Qing Dynasty frontiers, notwithstanding the evident weakness of these claims.

From skirmishes to some de-escalation

The border skirmishes with India in Depsang (2013), Demchok (2016), Doklam (2017), and Galwan (2020) serve to confirm this hypothesis. The warm sentiments exchanged between leaders of India and China recently, therefore, need to be taken with a great deal of circumspection. Much of the rest of the world, apart from India, has been surprised by the recent outburst of sentiments. Caution is, thus, well merited, and it would be highly optimistic to treat the present as denoting a return to the Hu Jintao period – in the first decade of the century – which was a brief interregnum when relations appeared to veer towards normalcy.

A thaw in relations could be discerned towards the latter part of 2024, involving a de-escalation of operations at friction points on the border. Official references to this were, however, made only just prior to the BRICS Summit in Kazan (Russia) in October 2024. Outlines of the India-China Border Patrolling Agreement, nevertheless, remained sketchy, though they did appear to signal a breakthrough. The Agreement, focusing primarily on patrolling arrangements between the two sides in the Himalayas, has since been invested with far greater significance than a mere Border Patrolling Agreement. A 'degree of stand-off', however, still prevails along the Line of Actual Control.

It was China that was first off the mark. In November 2024, the Chinese Defence Ministry observed that India and China were implementing a settlement reached between the two countries for disengagement and resumption of patrolling. Even before the process had been completed, a Chinese Defence Ministry Spokesman (during a media briefing), observed "we look forward to a harmonious dance between the Chinese Dragon and the Indian Elephant with concerted steps".

In an interview with an American podcaster, Prime Minister Narendra Modi – who visited the United States in February 2025 – declared that normalcy had returned to the India-China border after his talks with President Xi Jinping in Kazan in October (2024), adding that "our cooperation is not only (mutually) beneficial, but also essential for global peace and prosperity". Subsequent to this, there has been mention of the revival of the SR (Special Representatives) talks in the near future.

M.K. Narayanan

is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

In its shadow play with Beijing, New Delhi must also be prepared for all eventualities

De-escalation of tensions on the border and putting in place new 'patrolling arrangements' are important, but fall well short of robust negotiating stages. Specifics are, however, important in dealing with such issues, all the more so in the case of a nation such as China. In a world that is no longer considered multipolar, and where pluralism is at a severe disadvantage, most experts veer to the view that 'Might is again Right'. Also, that references to the 'rules based international order' have little meaning. Hence, the need for caution.

A reality check

Meanwhile, China, in March, announced that it is increasing its Defence Budget by 7.2% over that of the previous year. This is approximately three times higher than that of India, and should serve as a warning to India. India's defence spending is currently believed to be less than 2% of its GDP, and the difference between a burgeoning Chinese Defence Budget and that of India's is a matter of concern. India and China are not about, or expected, to go to war in the near future, but India should not also be inveigled into accepting China's assertions and promises. The grim reality is that the People's Liberation Army today maintains over a lakh of soldiers (along with tanks, howitzers, surface-to-air missiles and heavy weaponry), in the icy Himalayan heights of Ladakh. This apart, there are reports that China is stocking-up on its nuclear weaponry (and while all reports about nuclear warheads are at best speculative), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and other reliable agencies suggest that in the recent past, Beijing has added another hundred nuclear warheads to its existing stockpile.

India should not be oblivious to the fact that while talking peace, China is strengthening its war-fighting capabilities (even though this may also be intended to withstand a U.S.-led attack). China's lead in Artificial Intelligence (AI) today also gives it a decided advantage in the realm of 'new age' warfare. Simultaneously, China has taken the lead as far as military applications of cyber, apart from AI, are concerned, becoming adept at AI-enabled cyber-security operations.

China already maintains a lead over India in aspects such as anti-satellite capabilities and has made rapid advancements in battlefield digital technologies, real-time data processing, predictive analytics and automated decision support systems. China is also understood to have a decisive advantage in aspects such as quantum technology. Hence, much more than pious words will be needed to convince the world (India included) about China's real intentions before the Elephant and the Dragon can dance together. India must, hence, exercise utmost vigil.

In the neighbourhood

Meanwhile, as a part of its current foreign policy initiatives, China has embarked on a quest for new friends in India's 'backyard'. India needs to be vigilant about this development. The latest is Bangladesh. After the eclipse of the Sheikh Hasina regime in Bangladesh, and a successful visit by Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Mohammed Yunus, to China in March, Bangladesh has now come directly on China's radar, and is being viewed as a 'good friend'.

This development, apart from being an aspect of deep concern, creates a new void on India's eastern flank. What is also becoming evident is that even as India has been assiduously courting the U.S., it seems to be losing focus on strengthening and improving relations with countries in its immediate neighbourhood. This situation extends to West Asia and North Africa as well.

Again, if energy security remains the 'Holy Grail' for nations the world over, China appears to have stolen a march over India and many others, in the nuclear energy domain. It has been active in the African continent and has reportedly gained a beachhead there, in terms of nuclear energy resources, while other countries such as India (which are similarly hoping to increase their reliance on nuclear power) remain far behind. Irrespective of relations between India and China, nuclear energy will soon be an important component in the tussle for energy independence and influence. For now, China appears to have stolen a march over India with its successful foray into the African continent, even as their market is beginning to open up. Given the mounting intensity of great power competition, including between India and China, the scale and pace of China's military modernisation, and China's penchant for expanding its boundaries, India could well confront a difficult future, if it does not act in time and with necessary foresight.

Finally, in its shadow play with China, India must also be prepared for any and all eventualities. U.S. President Donald Trump, given his mercurial temperament, could well strike a deal with China – an eventuality that could upset and alter power equations across the globe. It might, hence, be prudent for India's leaders and strategists to take note of such an eventuality, if not for now in the not too distant future, and prepare for this eventuality. India and China are old civilisations and have overcome many problems in the past. This may be one more eventuality that India's leaders might have to anticipate and contend with even if it appears highly improbable at this point in time.

Paper 02:International Relation

UPSC Mains Practice Question:Discuss how the evolving military and geopolitical posture of China under Xi Jinping has influenced India–China relations in recent years. What should be India's strategic response to ensure regional stability and sovereignty? (250 words)

Context :

- The trajectory of China's geopolitical and military posture has undergone a significant transformation under President Xi Jinping, marking a sharp departure from the era of Deng Xiaoping and the more measured diplomacy of Hu Jintao.
- Contemporary China is increasingly drawing from its imperial past, nurturing a narrative of historical victimhood, and projecting an assertive vision for its future.
- This evolution has direct implications for its neighbours, particularly India, as both nations continue to navigate a complex relationship characterised by intermittent cooperation and recurring confrontation.

Historical Legacy and Modern Ambitions

- Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has increasingly invoked its historical legacy, especially that of the Qing Dynasty, to justify contemporary territorial claims.
- The border provocations in the Himalayas, from Depsang (2013) and Demchok (2016) to Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020), reflect a broader strategic calculus aimed at reclaiming perceived historical frontiers.
- While China's actions are framed as defensive or restorative, they reveal a more ambitious agenda: to reshape regional dynamics and secure a hegemonic position in Asia.
- These skirmishes underscore the caution with which India must approach bilateral relations.
- Despite recent diplomatic gestures and exchanges of warmth between the two countries' leaders, these efforts should not be misinterpreted as a return to the relatively stable era of Hu Jintao.
- Rather, they appear to be temporary pauses in a broader pattern of assertiveness and recalibration.

Signs of De-escalation: Substance or Symbolism?

- By late 2024, signs of a thaw in India-China relations began to emerge. Official announcements before the BRICS Summit in Kazan suggested an agreement on border patrolling mechanisms.

- Although the specifics remained vague, the initiative was welcomed as a potential step toward reducing tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- However, the existence of a continued stand-off and the lack of transparent implementation mechanisms cast doubt on the durability of this détente.
- Statements from both Chinese and Indian leaders presented a facade of optimism.
- China's invocation of a 'harmonious dance' between the Dragon and the Elephant and Prime Minister Modi's public endorsement of restored normalcy painted a picture of progress.
- Nonetheless, these symbolic affirmations fell short of addressing the underlying issues, particularly China's military build-up and strategic posturing in the region.

India's Challenges Dealing with China

- The Strategic Imbalance: Military and Technological Gaps
  - India faces a formidable challenge in matching China's accelerating defence modernisation.
  - China's 7.2% increase in its defence budget in 2025, which significantly outpaces India's own spending (under 2% of GDP), highlights this imbalance.
  - The People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to maintain a robust presence in contested regions like Ladakh, equipped with tanks, artillery, and missile systems.
  - Meanwhile, China is also reportedly expanding its nuclear arsenal, a development that cannot be overlooked despite the lack of precise figures.
- China's Lead in AI and Technological Advancements
  - Equally concerning is China's lead in the domains of Artificial Intelligence, cyber warfare, and quantum technology.
  - These advancements provide it with critical advantages in the emerging landscape of 'new age' warfare, potentially undermining India's strategic autonomy and preparedness.
  - In contrast, India's slower pace of digital military transformation could widen this technological divide and limit its ability to effectively respond in a future crisis.
- China's Expanding Influence in India's Neighbourhood
  - Beyond military considerations, China's diplomatic manoeuvres in South Asia further complicate India's strategic calculus.
  - The shift in Bangladesh's foreign policy orientation, particularly after the decline of the pro-India Sheikh Hasina government, illustrates China's growing influence in what has traditionally been considered India's sphere of influence.
  - China's outreach to Bangladesh, exemplified by high-level visits and deepening bilateral ties, introduces a new dimension of competition in the region.
- China's Growing Influence in Africa
  - This diplomatic encroachment is not limited to South Asia.
  - China's proactive engagement in Africa, particularly in securing nuclear energy resources, contrasts sharply with India's relatively muted presence.

- As the global race for energy independence intensifies, China's early investments and strategic partnerships may yield long-term dividends that enhance its leverage in both economic and geopolitical terms.

The Way Forward

- Preparing for the Unexpected
  - Amidst this evolving landscape, India must prepare for scenarios that appear improbable but are within the realm of possibility.
  - The potential for sudden shifts in global alliances, such as a surprise rapprochement between the United States and China, could upend existing power equations.
  - India must, therefore, adopt a flexible and forward-looking strategy, one that balances immediate needs with long-term preparedness.
- Need for a Realpolitik Approach
  - While both India and China are ancient civilizations capable of resilience and reinvention, their contemporary relations are shaped by modern power politics rather than shared heritage.
  - The current environment, marked by a decline in pluralism and a weakening of the so-called 'rules-based international order', necessitates a realpolitik approach.
  - For India, this means strengthening its military capabilities, safeguarding its neighbourhood from external encroachment, and diversifying its strategic partnerships beyond traditional allies.

Conclusion

- India and China's relationship is one of paradox, rooted in ancient ties yet shaped by modern rivalry.
- While diplomacy and dialogue remain essential, they must be backed by vigilance, capability, and strategic clarity.
- The metaphor of the Elephant and the Dragon dancing together may hold symbolic appeal, but for the dance to be sustained, both partners must respect boundaries, share rhythms, and prepare for sudden turns.
- Until then, cautious engagement, not blind optimism, should guide India's China policy.