The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: International Table of Contents

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Imphal witnessed widespread protests and scuffles as demonstrators attempted a march to the Raj Bhavan in response to an alleged affront to the State's identity and pride. The incident reflects deeper governance challenges in conflict-ridden Manipur.

Imphal erupts as march to Raj Bhavan is foiled

| Protesters were stopped by security personnel, leading to scuffles; 5 injured and hospitalised | They were protesting over an alleged insult to the identity of the State, its pride and respect | Influential organisation had called for civil disobedience campaign and public boycott of Governor Ajay Bhalla |

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Imphal, the capital of Manipur, descended into chaos on Sunday as people protesting against the alleged "undermining" of the State's identity clashed with security personnel during a march to the Raj Bhavan.

The clash followed Saturday's call by the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of Meitei organisations, to participate in a civil disobedience campaign and boycott of Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

Scores of protesters responded to the call and marched towards the Raj Bhavan to stage a protest, but they were stopped along the way by security personnel, leading to scuffles. Five protesters were reportedly injured and hospitalised.

The Governor has been Manipur's administrator since President's Rule was imposed on February 13 after N. Biren Singh resigned as the Chief Minister. The COCOMI has been cross with Mr. Bhalla for not apologising for an incident in which security personnel allegedly made a team of journalists and information officials mask the words "Manipur State Transport" displayed on the bus they were travelling in on May 20.

The incident, which occured at Gwaltabi while the team was travelling to the Shirui Lily Festival in the Naga-dominated Ukhrul

Closed off: Security personnel stop protesters near the Raj Bhavan in Imphal on Sunday. AFP

district, was viewed as "undermining the identity of Manipur, its name, pride and respect", making the COCOMI demand an apology from the Governor and the resignation of the State's Security Adviser Kuldiep Singh, Chief Secretary P.K. Singh, and Director-General of Police Rajiv Singh within 48 hours from Wednesday midnight.

The civil disobedience campaign was launched on Sunday to protest against the "failure" of the Governor to apologise and the government's "reluctance" to remove the three top officials.

'Deeply concerning'
The COCOMI condemned the actions of the security personnel.

"The deployment of such aggressive crowd control measures against unarmed civilians, including women, is deeply concerning," the organisation said, demanding that such "hostile" actions by security forces must immediately cease and be thoroughly reviewed.

The organisation also said a seven-member delegation of its members will leave for New Delhi on Monday to hold a meeting with the officials of the Union Home Ministry the following day. The meeting seeks to initiate follow-up action on the resolutions adopted during the Manipur People's Convention held in Imphal on May 3, on the second anniversary of the ethnic conflict.

The COCOMI said the agenda for the meeting would also include "a public apology from the Governor for the perceived insult to the people of Manipur," resignation or immediate transfer of the Chief Secretary, the Director-General of Police, and the Security Adviser, "all of whom are viewed as incompetent and responsible for making anti-State decision, which has added to the deteriorating situation".

Key Developments:

1. **Triggering Incident:**
   - On May 20, during a state-sponsored travel to Shirui Lily Festival, security personnel allegedly forced a media team to mask the words "Manipur State Transport" on their bus.
   - This act was seen as a symbolic insult to the identity and sovereignty of the State, sparking public outrage.
2. **COCOMI's Response:**
   - The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a powerful Meitei civil society body, launched a civil disobedience campaign and called for a boycott of Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.
   - COCOMI demanded an apology from the Governor and the removal of senior state officials.
3. **Administrative Background:**
   - Manipur is currently under President's Rule since February 13 after CM N. Biren Singh's resignation.

o   Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla has been functioning as the administrative head.

4.   **Security Clash:**
    o   As protesters marched towards the Raj Bhavan on Sunday, they were blocked by security forces, leading to confrontations.
    o   Five people were injured and hospitalised, and concerns have been raised over the aggressive crowd-control measures.

5.   **Demands and Next Steps:**
    o   Immediate resignation or transfer of Chief Secretary P.K. Singh, DGP Rajiv Singh, and Security Adviser Kuldiep Singh.
    o   A public apology from the Governor.
    o   COCOMI's delegation to meet Union Home Ministry officials in Delhi for follow-up on the May 3 Manipur People's Convention resolutions.

Issues for Analysis:

1. Centre-State Relations:

- The imposition of President's Rule and direct governance by the Governor raises questions about democratic representation and federal balance.
- Local distrust towards centrally appointed administrators can exacerbate regional grievances.

2. Civil Liberties vs. Security:

- Use of force against peaceful protestors (including women) highlights the dilemma between law and order enforcement and protection of civil rights.
- Allegations of aggressive crowd control call for accountability mechanisms for security personnel.

3. Identity and Regional Sensitivities:

- In a conflict-sensitive state like Manipur, symbolic acts (such as masking the name of a state institution) can escalate tensions.
- The issue reflects the deep-rooted ethnic and regional pride that must be handled sensitively in administrative decisions.

4. Administrative Accountability:

- COCOMI's demand for removal of top officials citing incompetence signals a trust deficit between the public and the administration.
- There is a need to review the role of bureaucratic leadership in conflict mitigation and public engagement.

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Conclusion:

The events in Imphal underscore the fragility of peace and the challenges of governance in ethnically sensitive areas. The central and state machinery must adopt a people-centric and empathetic approach, ensuring administrative decisions are transparent and respectful of local identity. Rebuilding trust through dialogue, accountability, and sensitive governance is essential for sustainable peace in Manipur.

UPSC MainsPractice Question

Ques : The recent protests in Manipur highlight the fragile balance between national security, federal governance, and civil liberties." In the context of these developments, discuss the challenges of Centre-State relations and the role of civil society in conflict-sensitive regions. **(250 Words)**

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At a recent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) conclave, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the government's commitment to inclusive development by backing caste enumeration as part of the upcoming Census. The statement signifies a strategic shift in policy framing around caste and marginalisation.

Caste count a means to include those left behind: PM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the caste enumeration announced as part of the decennial Census was a step towards his government's model of bringing the marginalised and those left behind in every field into the mainstream of development.

Addressing a conclave of Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers belonging to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Mr. Modi said the success of Operation Sindoor was a reaffirmation of the achievements the country had made in its push towards self-reliance, underscoring the accuracy and precision of indigenous defence technology.

Sources present at the meeting said Mr. Modi

Big meeting: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bihar CM Nitish Kumar during an NDA conclave in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

asked leaders to avoid the tendency to speak out of turn, a likely reference to more than one Bharatiya Janata Party leader making contentious remarks about the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor.

The conclave is a regular event held over the years, where Chief Ministers make presentations of best practices being followed by their governments for replication in other NDA-ruled States.

Two resolutions were passed at the meeting – one praising the Indian armed forces and the leadership of the Prime Minister over Operation Sindoor and another on the decision to undertake a caste census by the Modi government.

The resolution on Operation Sindoor was moved

by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and seconded by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, while the resolution on caste census was moved by Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and seconded by Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Shinde, who is also the leader of BJP ally Shiv Sena, said, "The world needs to hear India's resolve (through Operation Sindoor) loud and clear – whoever dares to provoke India will be wiped out. The strength of our defence forces is the impenetrable shield protecting the nation."

Briefing media after the meeting, BJP president J.P. Nadda said that through the resolution on the caste census, it was being clari-

fied that the NDA "does not believe in caste politics but caste enumeration will help those left behind in different fields to develop".

"Enumerating caste was always part of our political imagination and it was an NDA government, under [Bihar] Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, which had proposed to do this first," Mr. Nadda said.

The third Narendra Modi government will be completing a year on June 4, with the NDA completing 11 years in power with Mr. Modi at the helm, which will be marked on June 9.

"We will on June 25 also be marking the 50th anniversary of the imposition of Emergency in India, and will on this occasion again see who worked to suspend democratic rights in the country and who defended these values," Mr. Nadda said.

Key Highlights:

1. Caste Enumeration as an Instrument of Inclusion:
   - PM Modi framed caste census not as a tool of divisive politics but as a method to identify and uplift communities "left behind in every field".
   - This aligns with a data-driven governance model focused on targeted welfare and social justice.
2. Political Positioning of the NDA:

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- o BJP president J.P. Nadda clarified that while the NDA does not endorse caste-based politics, caste enumeration will enable evidence-based policies.
- o He also traced the idea to Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, reaffirming the alliance's long-standing intent.
3. Operation Sindoor and National Security:
   - o The conclave also celebrated the success of Operation Sindoor, using it to highlight India's defence capability and strategic precision.
   - o It served a dual purpose — reinforcing national security credentials and rallying political unity post-Pahalgam terror attack.
4. Message on Responsible Leadership:
   - o PM Modi subtly warned party leaders to avoid irresponsible statements, a reference to controversial remarks after the recent terror events, indicating the Centre's aim to project discipline and coherence in governance narratives.
5. Broader Political Narrative:
   - o The meeting marks nearly a year of the Modi 3.0 government and NDA's 11-year tenure.
   - o The upcoming commemoration of the Emergency's 50th anniversary (June 25) is being positioned as a reminder of democratic values and BJP's commitment to protecting them.

Issues Analysis:

1. Governance through Caste Enumeration:

- The shift towards accepting caste census signifies a pragmatic move by the government to recognize socio-economic disparities beyond affirmative action categories (SC/ST).
- Caste data could help formulate better welfare targeting, reservation policy review, and human development planning, especially for OBCs and sub-categorised backward groups.

2. Balancing Social Justice and Political Neutrality:

- The NDA's simultaneous disavowal of caste politics while supporting caste data reflects a delicate balancing act — acknowledging the social realities of caste while avoiding the optics of vote-bank politics.

3. Cooperative Federalism in Practice:

- NDA CMs presenting best practices for inter-state learning highlights the value of horizontal federalism — where states collaborate on governance innovations rather than compete.

4. National Security and Internal Stability:

- Operation Sindoor is being used as a political and strategic statement, reinforcing the idea of decisive leadership and indigenous military strength.
- It also helps deflect attention from internal unrest (e.g., Manipur protests) by shifting focus to external threats.

Conclusion:

The endorsement of caste enumeration marks a significant evolution in India's social policy discourse. As the NDA government approaches a major political milestone, it is attempting to integrate governance narratives of inclusivity, security, and democratic values. The caste census, if conducted sensitively and transparently, could become a transformative tool for equitable development.

<table>
<tr><td>UPSC MainsPractice Question</td></tr>
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Ques: The move towards caste enumeration marks a significant shift in India's approach to inclusive governance. Discuss the relevance of caste census in addressing social justice and development gaps in contemporary India. **(250 words)**

Page : 04 :GS 2 : International Relations

Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel's visit to India signals a strategic review of the India-Maldives Vision Document on comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership. The visit is crucial in the backdrop of recent tensions and realignments in bilateral ties.

India, Maldives to review economic and maritime security partnership

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel will on Monday take stock of the implementation of the India-Maldives comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership.

Mr. Khaleel, accompanied by a high-level delegation, arrived in Delhi this evening on a three-day visit. It is his third trip to India this year.

The India-Maldives vision document on comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership was adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu in October last year.

Foreign Minister Khaleel's visit is in continuation of "intensified high-level political exchanges" between India and Maldives, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said announcing his trip.

The Maldivian delegation led by Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel, left, being welcomed upon arrival in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

It said Mr. Khaleel will lead Maldives at the second High Level Core Group (HLCG) meeting to oversee progress in the implementation of the India-Maldives vision document on comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership. Foreign Minister Khaleel will also hold bilateral discussions with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, it said.

"Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour and an important partner in India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and vision MAHASAGAR that is Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions," the MEA said in a statement.

The ties between India and the Maldives came under severe strain after Mr. Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, took charge of the top office in November 2023. Within hours of his oath, he had demanded the withdrawal of Indian military personnel from his country.

There was a thaw in the relations as Mr. Muizzu vowed to boost the bilateral ties with India during his visit to Delhi in October.

Key Developments:

1. Strategic Bilateral Dialogue:
   - Khaleel's third visit to India in 2024 reflects ongoing high-level political engagement between the two nations.

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o The visit includes participation in the Second High-Level Core Group (HLCG) meeting, focusing on implementing the joint vision on economic cooperation and maritime security.

2. India-Maldives Vision Document:
   o Adopted in October 2023 by PM Modi and President Mohamed Muizzu, the document outlines a framework for maritime cooperation, infrastructure development, trade, and security collaboration.
   o It reflects India's effort to institutionalize its partnership with the Maldives under the twin pillars of "Neighbourhood First" and "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

3. Political Background:
   o Bilateral ties were strained after President Muizzu, viewed as pro-China, demanded the withdrawal of Indian troops from Maldives shortly after assuming office in November 2023.
   o However, diplomatic efforts since then, including Muizzu's visit to India, have led to a measured thaw in relations.

4. India's Strategic Interests:
   o Maldives holds a critical geostrategic position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), making it vital for India's maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy operations, and economic sea lanes security.
   o Ensuring a strong partnership prevents China's increasing influence in India's maritime backyard.

Issues Analysis:

1. Maritime Security Cooperation:

- The partnership reflects India's aim to act as a net security provider in the IOR.
- Maritime security initiatives include joint naval exercises, coastal surveillance, hydrographic surveys, and capacity building.

2. Balancing Geopolitical Interests:

- India's engagement with Maldives is part of its counter-China strategy in South Asia.
- The fluctuating nature of Maldives' foreign policy underlines the challenge of small-state diplomacy and India's need to maintain consistent soft power and developmental outreach.

3. Economic Diplomacy:

- Economic partnerships, including grant-in-aid projects, credit lines, infrastructure (like Hanimaadhoo airport), and skill development initiatives, are key tools of India's diplomacy.

- These efforts must be made more visible, sustainable, and locally beneficial to counter anti-India narratives.

4. Importance of Vision MAHASAGAR:

- India's evolving maritime strategy underlines collective security, economic integration, and regional stability.
- Maldives' cooperation is vital to actualizing this vision in the IOR.

Conclusion:

The review of the India–Maldives vision document marks a pivotal opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics in the Indian Ocean. While challenges remain, sustained engagement through institutional mechanisms, developmental diplomacy, and strategic dialogue will ensure Maldives remains a trusted partner in India's maritime and regional strategy.

UPSCMainsPractice Question

Ques: Maritime neighbours like the Maldives are central to India's regional security and foreign policy vision. In the light of recent developments, examine the significance of India–Maldives relations for India's maritime strategy and regional diplomacy. (250 Words)

Page 05 : GS 2 : Internationa Relations

The U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency's Worldwide Threat Assessment 2025 has outlined India's evolving threat perceptions, strategic priorities, and military modernisation efforts. The report positions China as India's primary adversary, while Pakistan is viewed as a manageable secondary threat. It also highlights India's defence diplomacy, domestic arms development, and strategic autonomy in foreign policy.

India views China as 'primary adversary' and Pakistan more as 'ancillary' security problem, says U.S. report

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

India views China as its "primary adversary" and Pakistan more an "ancillary" security problem to be "managed", despite cross-border attacks in mid-May by both India's and Pakistan's militaries, while Pakistan regards India as an "existential" threat, the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) said in its Worldwide Threat Assessment 2025 report.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's defence priorities will probably focus on demonstrating global leadership, countering China, and enhancing New Delhi's military power," the recently released report said.

On Pakistan, the report said it would continue to pursue its military modernisation effort, including the development of battle-

Flash point: The disengagement from Depsang and Demchok did not resolve the longstanding dispute about border demarcation but reduced some tension. PTI

offset India's conventional military advantage. Pakistan was modernising its nuclear arsenal and "almost certainly" procured WMD-applicable goods from foreign suppliers and intermediaries, it stated.

Taking note of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 and India's strikes under Operation Sindoor and the military confrontation over the next three days, the U.S. DIA said that to counter Chinese influence and boost its global leadership role, India was giving priority to advancing its bilateral defence partnerships in the Indian Ocean region through ex-

sales, and information sharing.

"India also has increased trilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and actively participates in multilateral fora such as the Quadrilateral, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Association of South

(ASEAN)," it added.

On India's relations with Russia, the U.S. DIA said that India would maintain its relationship through 2025 because "it views its ties to Russia as important for achieving its economic and defence objectives and sees value in the relationship as a means to offset deepening Russia-China relations."

"Under Mr. Modi, India has reduced its procurement of Russian-origin military equipment but still relies on Russian spare parts to maintain and sustain its large inventory of Russian-origin tanks and fighter aircraft that form the backbone of its military's ability to counter perceived threats from China and Pakistan," the report stated.

India almost certainly would continue promoting its "Made in India" initiative this year to build its domestic defence industry,

cerns, and modernise its military, the report said. It said India continued to modernise its military in 2024 – a test of the nuclear-capable developmental Agni-I Prime Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) and the Agni-V multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle, while also commissioning its second nuclear-powered submarine to strengthen its nuclear triad and "bolster its ability" to deter adversaries.

Referring to the agreement between India and China in October 2024 for disengagement from Depsang and Demchok, the report noted that the disengagement did not resolve the long-standing dispute about border demarcation but reduced some tension still lingering from a 2020 incident when troops on both sides were killed in a clash along the Line of Ac-

Key Highlights:

1. India's Threat Perception:
   o China is regarded as India's main strategic and military adversary, especially post-Galwan clashes and ongoing border issues in Ladakh.
   o Pakistan, though still a source of cross-border terrorism, is increasingly considered an "ancillary" challenge rather than an existential threat.
2. Focus on Military Modernisation:
   o India is prioritising defence self-reliance, enhancing its nuclear triad, and building indigenous platforms like Agni-V MRBM and nuclear submarines.
   o The government continues to reduce overdependence on Russian arms by promoting the 'Make in India' initiative in the defence sector.

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3. Defence and Strategic Diplomacy:
   - India is increasing strategic partnerships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) through joint exercises, arms cooperation, and intelligence-sharing.
   - Enhanced engagement in multilateral forums such as Quad, BRICS, SCO, and ASEAN reflects India's global ambition and balancing strategy.
4. India-China Relations:
   - Disengagement at Depsang and Demchok in 2024 reduced tensions but failed to resolve the underlying border demarcation dispute.
   - India continues to invest in deterrence capabilities to maintain pressure along the LAC and prepare for any escalation.
5. India-Russia Equation:
   - Despite a declining trend in Russian arms imports, India maintains strategic ties with Russia for economic and defence needs.
   - This balancing act is also aimed at neutralising growing Russia-China proximity, safeguarding India's autonomy in global diplomacy.

Issues Analysis:

1. Strategic Realignment in India's Defence Doctrine:

- There is a visible shift from a Pakistan-centric posture to a China-focused long-term threat perception.
- This aligns with India's expanded threat matrix, encompassing cyber, space, maritime, and high-altitude domains.

2. Dual Front Challenge and Deterrence Capability:

- The report validates India's strategic concern of a two-front scenario, with China being the primary and Pakistan a tactical threat.
- Military upgrades, nuclear deterrence, and interoperability with friendly nations are central to India's security response.

3. Indo-Pacific and Multilateral Engagements:

- India's proactive role in the Indo-Pacific through Quad and ASEAN reflects a shift towards coalition-based strategic deterrence.
- Defence diplomacy has become a core tool in India's rise as a regional and global power.

4. Strategic Autonomy and Defence Procurement:

- India's relationship with Russia, despite Western scrutiny, underlines the principle of strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Reducing import dependence while retaining legacy defence infrastructure remains a key policy challenge.

Conclusion:

The U.S. DIA assessment underlines a transformed Indian strategic mindset — one that sees China as a long-term systemic rival, focuses on domestic military strength, and actively pursues multilateral partnerships to assert its regional and global influence. India's evolving defence and foreign policy posture reflects a balanced approach combining realism, resilience, and autonomy.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India's evolving threat perception reflects a strategic shift from a Pakistan-centric focus to a China-oriented defence posture." In this context, discuss the implications of this shift for India's foreign policy, defence preparedness, and regional diplomacy. **(250 words)**

Page 08: GS 2 : Indian Polity

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At the Rising North East Investors Summit 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the significance of the northeastern region in India's growth story. While the region is witnessing infrastructural and economic transformation, deep-rooted socio-political issues, ethnic tensions, and environmental concerns continue to pose formidable challenges.

Key Highlights:

1. Economic and Infrastructure Growth:
   o The northeast is becoming a critical frontier for investment and connectivity, with mega infrastructure projects such as the Sela Tunnel, Bhupen Hazarika bridge, Northeast Gas Grid, and new rail and air connectivity.
   o Flagship investments like Tata Group's ₹27,000 crore semiconductor plant in Assam signal a shift in economic focus toward the region.
2. Strategic Importance:
   o The region serves as India's gateway to Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy, making its stability and integration a national priority.
   o Enhancing tourism, trade, and border infrastructure aligns with India's broader strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific.
3. Conflict Resolution Efforts:
   o Peace initiatives like the Framework Agreement with NSCN (IM), Bodo Peace Accord, and Bru resettlement show the Centre's commitment to resolving long-standing insurgencies.
   o Partial withdrawal of AFSPA from several areas reflects improving security and trust.
4. Persisting Challenges:
   o The ethnic conflict in Manipur, particularly between the Meitei and Kuki communities, remains unresolved and volatile.
   o Perceptions of neglect in the peace process (e.g., in Nagaland), unresolved interstate border disputes, and environmental opposition to hydro projects in Arunachal Pradesh reflect complex fault lines.
5. Socio-political Sensitivities:

Frontier of progress
India must recognise the northeast's diversity to tap its potential

That unity in diversity is India's strength might sound clichéd, but it is as true as ever. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking at the Rising North East Investors Summit 2025 last week, cited the diversity of India's northeastern region to underscore the vast diversity of the country. The northeast is rich in its cultural diversity and natural resources, and its location, topography and complex histories make it a unique space. But its numerous linguistic, tribal and cultural affinities can be a source of conflict within the Indian state. At times, these conflicts can be violent as the one in Manipur, which erupted on May 3, 2023, and is still simmering between the Kuki and Meiti communities. The Modi government and State governments in the region have sought to turn the region into an attractive destination for investors and tourists. The Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, the Bhupen Hazarika bridge in Assam, the construction of 11,000 kilometres of highways, extensive new rail lines, more airports, the development of waterways on the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, the expansion of mobile telephony, and a 1,600-km-long Northeast Gas Grid are examples of the new dynamism of the region. The Modi government has built on the initiatives of its predecessor United Progressive Alliance governments.

Mr. Modi has also sought to settle many a conflict in the region in the last decade. The Framework Agreement with the NSCN (Isak-Muivah) in August 2015, although nebulous now, the Bodo Peace Accord and the Bru refugee settlement (both in January 2020), and the rollback of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from a larger part of the region have been some of the steps signalling the Centre's intent. The change in perception about the northeast and its green cover has led to a surge in tourism and attracted investments, headlined by the Tata Group's ₹27,000-crore semiconductor plant coming up in Assam. But the challenges remain. Apart from Manipur, there is the perception in Nagaland that the Centre has lost interest in the peace process. Inter-State border disputes also continue to haunt the region, although Assam has partially resolved its issues with Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. The investments have increased the demand for power and the focus on hydroelectric projects, most in Arunachal Pradesh, has triggered local protests fearing displacement and environmental damage in a region that is prone to natural disasters. Increased rhetoric by the Bharatiya Janata Party about immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar has heightened social tensions. If India has to meaningfully pursue its Act East policy, by integrating the northeast more closely with the east Asian economies, then its policies within the borders and toward the neighbouring countries should be in alignment.

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- o Rising anti-immigrant rhetoric from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, particularly by political groups, has deepened social fault lines and alienation.
- o Development projects have sparked local protests due to fears of displacement, ecological degradation, and natural disaster vulnerability.

Issues Analysis:

1. Balancing Development and Diversity:

- The region's cultural plurality, while a strength, also demands careful governance and inclusive policy-making to avoid marginalisation and ethnic conflict.
- Development must be sensitive to local aspirations, ecological fragility, and tribal rights.

2. Centre-State Coordination:

- Effective governance in the northeast requires cooperative federalism, especially in resolving border disputes and ensuring the peace accords are meaningfully implemented.
- Decentralised planning and local capacity-building are essential.

3. Environmental Sustainability vs. Infrastructure Push:

- Hydroelectric projects in ecologically sensitive zones must undergo rigorous environmental assessments, with active participation of local communities.
- Balancing energy security and ecological integrity is vital for long-term sustainability.

4. Strategic and Diplomatic Alignment:

- For successful implementation of the Act East Policy, India must ensure internal stability in the northeast and maintain harmonious ties with neighbours like Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- Cross-border connectivity and sub-regional cooperation (e.g., BIMSTEC, BBIN) must be prioritised alongside domestic integration.

Conclusion:

The northeast stands at a transformative juncture, rich in potential yet fraught with challenges. A people-centric, ecologically balanced, and politically inclusive development strategy is critical. India's regional and global aspirations—whether economic or strategic—must begin with building lasting peace, trust, and prosperity in its frontier region.

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Ques: The Northeast region of India, while strategically vital and economically promising, faces challenges rooted in its diversity and historical neglect. Discuss the role of inclusive governance and cooperative federalism in ensuring peace and sustainable development in the Northeast. **(250 words)**

Time for a new India-Africa digital compact

Africa Day (May 25) marks the founding of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963 and symbolises the continent's ongoing journey towards unity, independence, and development. To usher in a new era of growth, the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) positions digital innovation at the heart of its agenda. It recognises the need for governments to adopt digital solutions that can accelerate socio-economic progress.

This evolving paradigm is also reshaping India's approach to development diplomacy in Africa. For decades, India has blended state-led financing with socially embedded solutions, ranging from capacity-building through technical training to infrastructure projects backed by concessional lines of credit. Increasingly, social enterprises delivering low-cost, high-impact innovations have also become part of New Delhi's engagement, reflecting a shift toward more inclusive and adaptable partnerships.

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A digital partnership

India's development approach is now entering a new phase, marked by more integrated, technology-driven partnerships. This builds on early initiatives such as the Pan-African e-Network, launched in 2009, which provided tele-medicine and tele-education through satellite and fibre-optic infrastructure, implemented by TCIL on behalf of the Indian government.

Expanding on this, and building on the success of its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) systems, such as Aadhaar, UPI, CoWIN, and DIKSHA, India is now focusing on sharing and co-creating digital solutions to tackle fundamental governance and service delivery challenges. This shift comes at a crucial moment for Africa, where many governments are advancing national and continental digital agendas, aligned with initiatives such as the Policy and Regulatory Initiative for Digital Africa and the Smart Africa Alliance, aimed at harnessing technology for inclusive and sustainable development.

The contours of a digital partnership between India and Africa are already emerging. In 2021, Togo's National Agency for Identification signed an MoU with the International Institute of Information Technology Bangalore (IIT-B) to implement the Modular Open-Source Identification Platform as the foundation for its national digital ID system. In 2023, Zambia signed an MoU with the Centre for Digital Public Infrastructure at IIIT-B to support the implementation and scaling up of the Smart Zambia Initiative, a national effort to advance digital transformation across government services. In 2024, the Bank of Namibia signed a pact with the National Payments Corporation of India for developing a UPI-like instant payment system. Ghana, too, is linking its payment system with India's UPI to enable faster transactions. These partnerships reflect a growing interest in India's DPI model, which offers affordability, scalability, and a public-oriented design.

However, these advances of India's digital diplomacy in Africa are not occurring in a vacuum. As research by Folashadé Soulé highlights, African governments typically choose digital partners not based on ideological alignment or geopolitical loyalty, but on the partner's capacity to meet national digital priorities. In this context, China has frequently emerged as a preferred collaborator, thanks to state-backed financial mechanisms that lower the cost of adoption, especially in infrastructure-heavy domains. But it is not alone in shaping Africa's digital future: the European Union, the U.S., and India are competing for influence. What sets India apart is not just its technology, but its framing of DPI as a digital public good, open-source, and adaptable.

India's DPI model offers a public-oriented alternative to a more surveillance-driven or proprietary approach. The opportunity lies in adapting these tools to local contexts through genuine state-led collaboration, beyond technology transfer.

In this context, the establishment of the first overseas campus of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras in Zanzibar represents a strategic intervention. By offering advanced academic programmes in Data Science and AI and integrating with Indian private sector partners to fund scholarships, the initiative aligns technical capacity-building with broader socio-economic goals. If scaled effectively, such models could power Africa's digital infrastructure.

Challenges

However, challenges persist. Africa is home to the world's largest digital divide. This exclusion is shaped by the high costs of data and devices, stark rural-urban disparities in connectivity, and a persistent gender gap in digital access and literacy. Moreover, the expansion of digital infrastructure hinges on reliable energy supply, a critical bottleneck in many African countries. Meeting the growing energy demands of digital transformation will require coordinated investments in sustainable power generation and grid expansion.

Regardless, the groundwork for digital governance is advancing. About 85% of African countries now have national ID systems with digital capabilities, and over 70% collect biometric data for authentication purposes. This presents a strong foundation on which to build inclusive and interoperable public digital platforms. A new India-Africa digital compact, anchored in mutual respect, co-development, and long-term institutional partnerships, could serve as a scalable framework for advancing digital inclusion.

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Paper 02: International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model offers a scalable, inclusive, and public-good-based alternative for Africa's digital transformation." In this context, examine the potential and challenges of a new India–Africa digital compact. (250 words)

Context :

As Africa commemorates Africa Day (May 25), the continent stands at the crossroads of digital transformation. India, with its globally recognised Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model, is emerging as a key partner in Africa's digital development, offering affordable, scalable, and open-source technology solutions. The evolving India–Africa digital engagement marks a shift from traditional aid to co-development and digital diplomacy.

Key Highlights:

1. Africa's Digital Ambition:
    o The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030) emphasises the adoption of digital tools for inclusive socio-economic growth.
    o Initiatives like the Smart Africa Alliance and Policy and Regulatory Initiative for Digital Africa demonstrate continent-wide commitment to digital governance.
2. India's Evolving Development Diplomacy:
    o India's engagement is transitioning from technical training and concessional loans to technology-led collaboration.
    o Early initiatives like the Pan-African e-Network laid the groundwork for today's DPI-led partnerships.
3. DPI as a Digital Public Good:
    o India's DPI ecosystem (e.g., Aadhaar, UPI, CoWIN, DIKSHA) is attracting African interest due to its public-centric, open-source, and low-cost architecture.
    o Countries like Togo, Zambia, Namibia, and Ghana have signed MoUs with Indian institutions to replicate DPI components.
4. India vs. Global Competitors:
    o While China remains a strong competitor due to heavy infrastructure investment and financial aid, India's non-surveillance, open-access approach provides a democratic alternative.

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- o India's edge lies in co-development, skill-building, and institutional capacity building, rather than hardware dominance.
5. Institutional and Educational Outreach:
   - o Establishing IIT Madras' campus in Zanzibar, with courses in AI and Data Science, symbolises India's strategic push to integrate education and technology diplomacy.

Challenges Identified:

- Digital Divide: Africa has the world's largest digital divide, marked by high costs of data, rural-urban disparity, and gender-based exclusion in digital access.
- Infrastructure Gaps: Many African countries face energy shortages, impeding digital infrastructure expansion.
- Sustainability Needs: Reliable power grids and green energy investments are essential to support Africa's digital leap.

Opportunities for a New India–Africa Digital Compact:

1. Mutual Gains Through Co-Development:
   - o India can collaborate on context-sensitive digital platforms and provide customised, modular tools for African states.
   - o The emphasis must be on long-term institutional partnerships rather than one-time technology transfer.
2. Strategic Positioning Through DPI:
   - o India can project digital leadership by positioning its DPI as a global public good, distinguishing itself from commercial or surveillance-based models.
3. Regional and Multilateral Leverage:
   - o The India–Africa partnership can be further institutionalised through forums like India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), BRICS+, G20, and Digital Public Goods Alliance.

Conclusion:

A new India–Africa digital compact represents a transformational shift in bilateral development cooperation. Rooted in mutual respect, co-innovation, and public good ethos, this partnership offers a powerful framework for inclusive digital growth. For India, it also strengthens its strategic footprint in the Global South, countering geopolitical competitors while enabling Africa to leapfrog into a digital future.

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