

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Saturday, 03 May, 2025

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned the **Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport** in Kerala -**India's first dedicated container transshipment port**- developed through a **PPP model** between the **Adani Group** and **Kerala Government**.

Port economy will drive India's growth: PM

Modi commissions the Vizhinjam international seaport in Kerala

The facility is India's first dedicated container transshipment port

The deepwater multipurpose port is being developed by Adani Group

Private sector participation has enhanced efficiency, says PM

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Coastal States and port cities will become key growth centres for a developed India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday, speaking after commissioning the ₹8,800 crore Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport in Kerala's capital. The Centre is committed to strengthening this channel of economic power to take the maritime sector to new heights, he said.

The port economy reaches its full potential when infrastructure and the ease of doing business are promoted together, Mr. Modi said, noting that this has been the blueprint of the Centre's port and waterways policy over the last decade. Underscoring the critical role of the private sector, he said that thousands of crores have been

invested through public-private partnerships (PPP) over the past 10 years, to upgrade India's ports to global standards and make them future-ready.

With a natural deep draft of nearly 20 metres and located near one of the world's busiest sea trade routes, the new Vizhinjam port is expected to strengthen India's position in global trade, enhancing logistics efficiency, and reducing reliance on foreign ports for cargo transshipment. The Vizhinjam facility is the country's first dedicated container transshipment port, and was developed by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd, through a public-private partnership with the Kerala government.

Noting that private sector participation has driven innovation and enhanced efficiency, he said that even a State government headed by a Commu-



Maritime power: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Gautam Adani after the inauguration of the Vizhinjam seaport. PMO

nist regime in Kerala could find a private sector giant to be a trusted partner in a flagship infrastructure development project. The PM also wondered whether two prominent INDIA bloc leaders sharing the dais with him – Kerala Chief Mi-

nister Pinarayi Vijayan and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor – would cause discomfort in some quarters.

Reduce revenue loss

Terming the Vizhinjam port as a symbol of new age development, the

Prime Minister said that the capacity of this transshipment hub would triple in the coming years, enabling the smooth arrival of some of the world's largest cargo ships. He also pointed out that 75% of India's transshipment operations

PM launches new projects, backs Amaravati plans

AMARAVATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated about ₹58,000 crore-worth of works in Andhra Pradesh on Friday. He virtually re-started the unfinished works at Amaravati, and said the Centre would extend full support to the State to realise its vision. All obstacles for Amaravati are gone now, he said. The projects include capital city institutions, national highways, and railway upgrades. » PAGE 4

the country would generate new economic opportunities within the country.

The Union Budget for the current financial year introduced a new policy to promote the construction of large ships in India, which will significantly boost the manufacturing sector. Noting the growth of the shipping and port infrastructure in the last 10 years, Mr. Modi said that two Indian ports are now ranked among the world's top 30, while India has improved its position on the Logistics Performance Index and stands among the top 20 countries in global shipbuilding.

India is also setting up a shipbuilding and repair cluster in Kochi, the Prime Minister said. Once completed, this cluster will create numerous new employment opportunities, providing Kerala's local talent and youth with a platform for growth, he said.

Prelims Pointers

Feature	Details
Location	Vizhinjam, near Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
Developer	Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd (under PPP with Kerala Govt.)
Cost	₹8,800 crore
Unique Feature	India's first dedicated container transshipment port

Daily News Analysis

Feature	Details
Natural Depth	Nearly 20 metres , ideal for mega container ships
Strategic Advantage	Located close to major East-West shipping route
Key Benefit	Reduce India's reliance on foreign ports for transshipment (e.g., Colombo, Singapore, Dubai)
Associated Scheme	Sagarmala Project (Port-led development)
Logistics Performance Index	India among top 20 globally in shipbuilding
Related Infrastructure	Shipbuilding and repair cluster being developed at Kochi , Kerala

Mains Analysis :

1. Significance of Vizhinjam Port

- **Strategic Location:** Near international sea route; crucial for India's **maritime trade autonomy**.
- **Container Transshipment Hub:** 75% of India's transshipment (till now done at foreign ports) will now be handled domestically.
- **Revenue Retention:** Prevents outflow of Indian funds to foreign ports; enhances national income and logistics efficiency.

2. Economic & Strategic Impact

- **Boost to Blue Economy:** Helps realize the potential of India's 7,500 km coastline.
- **Reduced Logistic Cost:** Enhances India's export competitiveness and ease of doing business.
- **Foreign Trade Efficiency:** Strengthens India's status as a **logistics hub** in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Private Sector Role:** Public-private partnerships (PPP) showcasing **innovation & efficiency** even under a Communist-led State.

3. Employment and Regional Development

- **Shipbuilding Cluster at Kochi:** Will generate jobs and skill-based opportunities, especially for Kerala's youth.
- **Multiplier Effect:** Spinoffs in ancillary services — transport, warehousing, repair, tourism, etc.

4. Alignment with National Programs

- **Sagarmala Project:** Enhancing port connectivity and port-led industrialization.
- **Make in India:** Encouraging domestic shipbuilding under new policy in Budget 2024–25.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Retaining transshipment revenue within India.

5. Challenges Ahead

- Environmental concerns in ecologically fragile zones.
- Efficient integration with **rail-road connectivity** inland.
- Navigating political friction in centre-state-private partnerships.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :“India’s maritime infrastructure is key to its economic self-reliance.” Discuss in the context of the Vizhinjam International Port project.

As AI technologies evolve rapidly and permeate every aspect of life—from hiring and surveillance to writing books—*ethical dilemmas* are intensifying. The article raises pressing questions on whether ethics, a traditionally slower-moving domain, can adapt to the speed and scope of AI innovation.

Can ethics keep pace with the rapid evolution of AI?



The Hindu Bureau

In theory, it is already possible for an individual to create facial recognition software using Artificial Intelligence – software that could scrape billions of images from the Internet without permission, recognise faces, and identify individuals. Some of the large AI tools today are capable of doing this, but they refrain for ethical reasons. In that sense, ethics is currently woven into AI, but that may not remain the case as smaller, decentralised AI platforms emerge to meet market demand.

AI can be used for surveillance, for generating deepfakes, and for spreading disinformation – all areas already rife with ethical concerns. It can also embed and automate bias, especially in hiring. The

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unspoken truth is that hiring is often biased. AI can enable this subtly, simply by tweaking a few parameters.

There is also an innate human need to always know whether one is interacting with a human or a machine. Yet it is often in a company's interest to conceal that the engagement is with AI. For instance, people may be fine living in homes designed by AI, but

they need to know that. They may be far less comfortable reading novels entirely written by AI, even if they are works of pulp fiction. In the near future, publishers may release AI-generated books created in a single day, while actively hiding that fact.

This raises the need for an industry standard to govern such practices. But is that even possible? Can ethics keep pace with the

rapid evolution of AI? Ethics, after all, is a broad, ambiguous set of rules based on what we know. The future will present wholly unfamiliar scenarios. Who, then, will set the ethical rules for what is yet to come?

We like to talk about ethics because it represents a part of morality that remains outside the purview of the State. We want to be seen as good people – while keeping the law and the government out of our businesses. But that is also why ethics lacks teeth. Morality, outside religion and the law, is just statement of intent.

Legality, by contrast, is a formalised version of ethics – those ideas a society has agreed upon and encoded into law. But legality implies regulation, and regulation implies govern-

ment. So, how willing will businesses be to articulate ethical standards, knowing that doing so may invite legal oversight? These are some of the questions that will be discussed during *The Hindu Huddle* session titled "AI for all? The dream of a democratised and ethical technology".

The participants are Ashta Kapoor, co-founder, Aapti Institute; Kalika Bali, senior principal researcher, Microsoft Research, India; and Tanvi Lall, Strategy, People+AI, and the conversation will be moderated by Manu Joseph, author, columnist, and screenwriter.

The Hindu Huddle will be held on May 9 and 10 in Bengaluru. If you have any questions that you would like our moderator to ask the panellists, write to us at huddle@thehindu.co.in.

Key Ethical Issues Raised

1. Surveillance vs Privacy

- AI enables mass facial recognition and tracking without consent.
- Ethical dilemma: Security vs personal liberty.

2. Deepfakes & Disinformation

- AI-generated fake videos or texts can mislead society.
- Challenge: Identifying truth in the age of synthetic media.

3. Bias and Discrimination

- AI in hiring can perpetuate biases (gender, caste, race) subtly via algorithmic tweaks.
- Invisible injustice: decisions appear neutral but are not.

4. Transparency vs Deception

- Users often unaware whether they're interacting with humans or AI.
- E.g., AI-written novels, customer support chatbots.
- Raises question of *informed consent and trust*.

5. Ethics vs Profit

- Corporate reluctance to enforce ethics may stem from fear of legal regulation.
- "Will businesses adopt ethical standards that might trigger government oversight?"

Core Ethical Conflict

Ethics	Legality
Moral compass; subjective; soft regulation	Codified norms; enforceable; hard regulation
Driven by intent, values	Driven by consequences, compliance
May lack enforcement	Carries penalties, accountability

Can Ethics Keep Pace with AI?

Challenges

- AI evolves faster than regulatory or ethical frameworks.
- Unpredictable future use-cases.
- Diffused responsibility in decentralized AI models.

Needs

- **Global ethical standards** (like Asilomar AI Principles).
- **Algorithmic transparency & audit.**
- **Ethics-by-design:** Embedding ethics at the design stage of AI tools.
- **Legal frameworks with ethical foundations**, e.g., EU AI Act.

Conclusion:

Ethics must not trail behind innovation. A *proactive ethical framework*, embedded in design and backed by minimal regulation, is essential for responsible AI development.

Key Takeaways for Essay/Ethics Paper

- "Morality without enforcement is intention; law without morality is tyranny."
- AI is not inherently ethical or unethical—it **reflects human intent and design choices**.
- Balance required between *innovation*, *liberty*, and *social justice*.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Can ethics keep pace with the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence? Critically examine. **(150 Words)**

The article reflects on the breakdown of the post-World War II global order, the decline of Western-led multilateralism, and the emergence of a more equal, multipolar world. It argues that India must reorient its strategic vision, embracing technological leadership and regional cooperation to navigate this global shift.

A profound shift in the global order

India is at another inflexion point, reminiscent of Vasco De Gama sailing into Kozhikode in 1498 and of a complacent Zamorin lacking strategic intention. Instead of trade routes, global value chains are being reshaped by force. The stakes are high for India which is in line to be the third largest economy.

The 75-year-old post-colonial order, labelled as globalisation, characterised multilateralism imposing rule-based restrictions on all for the common good. Its conceptual foundation of a world divided between 'donors' and 'recipients' became obsolete with China 'overtaking' the United States as the largest donor, and in the share of manufacturing and global trade. The World Trade Organization and the United Nations and Treaties lost their utility to the proponents, leading to U.S. withdrawals. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the G-7 scrambling to corner medicines, oblivious of the plight of others. Now, the G-7 is splitting leaving a vacuum and global institutions such as BRICS will soon have more requests for membership.

U.S. President Donald Trump is not whimsical. He is responding to a more equal world moving out of the colonial frame that is attempting to hold on to fading benefits. Bilateral deals are forcing countries to subordinate their interests and the way tariffs have been described and defined arbitrarily based on trade imbalance intrudes into how national laws should be changed. Least Developed Countries no longer have privileges. The U.S. is restructuring its approach to prosperity and power and so should the others.

A post-WTO frame

The 'breakup' of the G-7 and G-20 now leaves global agenda-setting open. Since 2020, the U.S., China, the European Union and India have together contributed nearly three-quarters of all growth, with the U.S. and China accounting for almost half. There is also a decline in the relative power of the U.S. Russia has become an Asian power, increasing energy links with China and India.

Asia will soon again have two-thirds of global wealth and power (as had been the case throughout civilisation except for the age of colonialism). Geopolitics has returned to its



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natural state of co-existence sharing prosperity.

India has to be strategic to grasp new opportunities with the 'dismantling' of the WTO just as China used its entry into the WTO for its rise. The U.S. and China are pretty much evenly balanced in terms of influence, trade, technology, defensive military capacity and playing tit-for-tat on tariff levels. The challenge is to manage trade relations with the U.S. pushing its agricultural and energy surplus and to build on the rapprochement with China.

The future direction has been set in the recent statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that this is the Asian Century. The turmoil within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an opportunity to jointly work towards an Asian common market, with bilateral concessions to share prosperity. As the WTO's 'most-favoured nation' clause of non-discrimination withers away, it is in India's longer term interest to propose a new cooperative architecture to ASEAN and the African Union, as their potential consumption will exceed current consumption in the U.S. and Europe.

India's world-class diplomats should be given the task of coming up with a new type of principles of global governance for a more equal world. Gaining from global value chains that are dependent more on technology than on tariffs requires laying out a new type of rules that reduce non-tariff barriers and treat linkages between goods, services, investment and infrastructure as part of composite agreements, with a review of national impacts annually.

Trade and innovation neglected

Emerging from colonialism, India framed foreign policy in terms of a balancing between the great powers, relying on tactics than on strategy. The first challenge to the post-colonial world was the Bandung Conference of newly independent Asian and African countries in 1955. Jawaharlal Nehru moved to the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, shifting from economic development to peace in a divided world, becoming a darling of the West while India remained poor. The best diplomats are still sent to negotiate resolutions in the United Nations, ignoring rights and opportunities through trade. India also ignored what other leading powers were doing – technological innovation in partnership with academia and

industry, which is the other side of the coin of trade.

Now is the time for hard decisions to be taken to develop a national consensus between political parties and States on how to nurture talent and focus on skills and employment in order to regain our technological edge, wealth and global status. The West developed on the foundation of colonialism unlike the East. New policy groups need to engage and seek complementarity with China, ASEAN and Africa as value chains get restructured. There will no longer be global goods and treaties to which others can subscribe; the smaller countries that have been hit hardest by the new order are looking for an alternative to choosing sides.

India has the endogenous capacity to aim for global technological leadership by developing open source software that will shape future multilateralism and international cooperation. Huawei, which was sanctioned by the U.S. for spreading telecommunication networks worldwide, is manufacturing 7-nanometer (7nm) chips just behind global technology leaders. The DeepSeek open source AI model is cheaper than and as good as the best in the U.S.. Fifteen years ago, a World Bank study noted that China has reached global scale in the hardware industry but not in software. India had achieved the reverse, then faltered.

Lesson from China

The most important lesson in China's re-emergence is national consensus on endogenous pathways to achieve prosperity, and not looking at socio-economic growth through the modelling prism of the West. Patents are a better indicator of future prosperity than GDP. Reducing the price of assured electricity is the most effective incentive for a restructuring of the economy, and prosperity is the optimum adaptation to adverse effects of climate change.

India needs to formulate grand challenges with academia and industry to leverage its world-class human talent, vast data and proven digital stack to build the best large language models in the world, which would make India a formidable cyber power. In the digital world, the foundation of wealth and influence is AI, which is reminiscent of India clothing the world for millennia relying on skill and not monopoly.

History should
remind India to
focus on its
own destiny

Key Themes & Issues

1. Collapse of the Post-Colonial Global Order

- The traditional donor-recipient model, central to the Western-led globalisation narrative, has become obsolete.
- Institutions like the WTO, UN, and G7 are losing relevance as their founding assumptions no longer align with current power realities.
- China's rise as the world's largest donor and trading power challenges Western hegemony.

2. Shift Towards Bilateralism & Fragmentation

- Countries are increasingly resorting to bilateral trade agreements over multilateral frameworks.
- The U.S. uses tariffs and trade terms strategically to serve domestic interests, undermining universal trade principles.
- G7 and G20 consensus is weakening, opening a power vacuum in global agenda-setting.

3. Asia's Re-emergence as the Power Centre

- Asia is regaining its historical share of global wealth and influence, disrupted only during colonialism.
- India, China, and ASEAN nations are becoming central players in global trade, energy, and digital networks.
- The 'Asian Century', as highlighted by PM Modi, signifies this shift towards an Eastern-led global structure.

4. India's Strategic Opportunity

- India must act like China did two decades ago—use the current institutional collapse as a platform for rise, not retreat.
- Rethinking trade policy, India should push for regional value chains with ASEAN and Africa, moving beyond WTO's non-discrimination framework.
- India should propose a new cooperative architecture focused on shared prosperity, investment, and innovation.

5. Rethinking Foreign Policy and Governance

- India's post-colonial diplomacy has often been moralistic (NAM, UN resolutions) but lacked strategic economic thinking.
- The Bandung Conference (1955) and NAM (1961) promoted peace, but India missed the industrial and innovation revolutions.

- The emphasis now must shift to economic diplomacy, trade-linked foreign policy, and technology-first partnerships.

6. Innovation and Technology as Foundations of Power

- Global power now rests more on AI, patents, and digital infrastructure than on traditional military or trade dominance.
- China has built a hardware empire (e.g., Huawei, semiconductor tech), while India's strength lies in software and digital stack.
- India should build large language AI models, invest in open-source technologies, and aim to become a global cyber power.

7. Domestic Consensus and Talent Utilisation

- A national consensus is crucial to sustain a long-term vision for global leadership.
- Coordination between States, political parties, academia, and industry is essential to cultivate skills and research ecosystems.
- India must re-invest in foundational needs like affordable electricity, digital infrastructure, and research-oriented education.

Ethical & Governance Implications

- The global order must reflect equality, fairness, and co-prosperity, not just power equations.
- India has the moral and demographic potential to offer a non-exploitative model of global leadership—based on open source, collaboration, and sustainability.
- Ethics in diplomacy should evolve beyond abstract morality to encompass fair innovation, data sharing, and inclusive trade.

Way Forward for India

- Lead in creating Asian and Global South alliances for economic and technological cooperation.
- Advocate for new global principles of governance rooted in mutual respect and shared prosperity.
- Build strong domestic capability in AI, semiconductor design, green energy, and sustainable infrastructure.
- Emphasise patents, digital exports, and educational investment as markers of prosperity over mere GDP growth.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : India's opportunity lies not in restoring the old global order, but in shaping the new one." Discuss in light of recent global shifts.



Page 08 : GS 1,2, 3& 4 : Post-Independence India , International Relations, Internal Security & Ethics in Governance

The recent terror attack in Pahalgalam, Jammu & Kashmir, has reignited tensions between India and Pakistan, leading to diplomatic fallout, visa suspensions, trade halts, and disruption of cross-border civilian life. The article captures the emotional, social, economic, and geopolitical consequences of this strain, especially at the Attari-Wagah border, and highlights the human cost of geopolitical rivalry.



Turbulent times: (Clockwise from top) An Indian couple returning to India from Pakistan at the Attari-Wagah border in Punjab's Amritsar district, vehicles with Pakistani nationals crossing the border, and travellers producing their passports at the Integrated Check Post. (net photo)

The people who bear the weight of a divided history

Amid a relatively quiet Beating Retreat ceremony that takes place every evening at the Attari-Wagah border are Indians and Pakistanis, who share similar emotions. Some cry and others pray for resilience as nationals from both countries cross borders, leaving family members grieving and in disquiet. Vikas Vasudeva reports from the border villages and Amritsar, just 50 km down the road from Lahore, once its twin city

Ripples of rising hostility between India and Pakistan after the recent terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgalam are strikingly noticeable at Attari-Wagah, the international border between the two countries. Anguish, dismay, uncertainty, and resilience are all palpable in Punjab's Amritsar and its border villages, even as tensions between the nuclear-armed nations and temperatures of the scorching summer continue to soar.

At Bahawalpur, near Pahalgalam in Amritsar district of Jammu and Kashmir, 26 people, all but one of whom were tourists, were killed by terrorists on April 22. A day later, India, in protest against the attack, which it attributes to Pakistan, announced a series of diplomatic measures, including the closure of the Attari border. It asked almost all Pakistani nationals to leave India. In response, Pakistan suspended trade with India and shut down its Indian nationals. This forced several nationals from both countries to cut short their trips and return to their home country.

The deadline for Pakistani citizens on visas — excluding those on medical, diplomatic, and long-term visas — to leave India was April 22. Several people, including women and children, lined up at Attari to cross over to Pakistan. Tensions ran high with many taking unexpected and painful leave from relatives and friends. From the Pakistani side, several Indians made their way to India. Many families with mixed nationalities are starting at separation with no end date.

"My wife Susha has a Pakistani passport, but my two kids are Indian. They had gone to Pakistan to meet her family a few days ago. We have been married for 10 years and she has visited Pakistan on different occasions and returned. This time she is being held here. The authorities in Pakistan are allowing only our children to return," says Rishi Kumar from Maharashtra's Kolhapur. He reached Attari on April 24 and stood waiting outside the Integrated Check Post (ICP).

"Why are we being separated? I don't know what to do now. What happened in Pahalgalam is condemnable beyond words, but I hope and pray the situation doesn't deteriorate between the two countries. Peace should prevail," says Kumar, who spent three days trying to find a way to reunite with his family. After five days of turmoil, on April 26, he heard a sigh of relief when Pakistani authorities allowed his wife and children to cross over to India.

Families fret

As many as 527 Pakistani citizens left India between April 24 and 27, when the first deadline came to an end, while 850 Indians arrived from Pakistan. On April 28 and 29, as many as 249 Pakistanis left India via the ICP, while 327 Indians returned to the country.

Over the years, families and communities that were split at the time of Partition have attempted to stay in touch via the trans-boundary connect.

But whenever bilateral relations are strained, people suffer. Despite the creation of India and Pakistan as separate countries in 1947 — a time that was marred by violence and bloodshed — a sense of shared cultural identity across the border has remained intact for years.

Attari-Wagah has stood witness to both turbulent times and kinship. Being the only land route for trade and travel between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, its economic significance has been critical over the years, especially for locals. It is situated on the historic Grand Trunk Road, one of South Asia's oldest, which dates back to the Mauryan period, though it was redone by Sher Shah, one of the rulers of Delhi.

Organised since 1959, the Beating Retreat ceremony at the ICP every evening is a key attraction for tourists from across India. Both countries raise their flags, with the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Pakistan Rangers playing key roles. The tone of the ceremony, whether amplified or moderated, indicates the depth of strained ties and the level of animosity. Now, it is low key, with half the attendance compared with the usual turnout of 20,000 on weekdays and 10,000-20,000 on weekends, a BSF officer says.

With a short window to exit India, people jostled at the ICP to cross over to Pakistan, even as they made their way in vehicles and motorbikes loaded with luggage to the passenger terminal guarded by the BSF. While those holding a Pakistani passport were allowed to leave, the others, even family members, were stopped.

An upset Waqeda Khan, 24, an Indian national who married a Pakistani and came to India in February to meet her parents, is uncertain about reuniting with her husband, who is waiting on the other side of the border. "I am an Indian and got married a decade ago in Karachi. My two children were born in Pakistan and they are Pakistani nationals. How can I stay here and send my children across the border?" she says, tearfully.

Elham Iqbal, an Indian national and solo



traveller, is worried about reaching her country. "I travel across the globe in my camper van to spread the message of peace. Attari-Wagah is the only road route for me to reach my home in Iran. I have a 'tourist visa on road' and I have been in India for the past 75 days. I just want to go back home," she says, dejected as she parks her van on the roadside close to the ICP.

The Attari-Wagah border is both a physical and symbolic gateway. In 1959, then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru visited the border and travelled on the inaugural bus to meet then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Blood and country

Many Indian nationals arriving from Pakistan expressed anguish over the Pahalgalam terror attack, jostling India's firm stance.

Ali Khan, 58, says, "I am an Indian first. We have blood ties across the border, but that is secondary to us. What happened in Pahalgalam was inhuman and I read with my country."

His uncle's family went to Pakistan at the time of Partition and chose to settle in Lahore, about 50 km from Amritsar, once both cities. "My cousin was unwell, so my wife and I went on April 8 on a month-long visa to meet him," says Hasan, who is a farm worker in Haryana's Sonapat.

After the terror attack, the BSF scaled down the Beating Retreat ceremony at three locations — Attari, Hussainiwala, and Sadki — along the Pakistan border in Punjab. Among the three points, Attari witnesses the maximum crowd.

On April 26, as the sun went down, the border gates remained closed during the ceremony at Attari and the symbolic handshake between the Indian and Pakistani commanders and the Pakistani commander didn't take place. These steps, according to the BSF, reflect "India's serious concern over cross-border hostilities and reaffirms that peace and provocation cannot coexist".

Usually, patriotic songs are played during the soldiers' perfectly rehearsed drill. People from the spectator gallery join the chorus in nationalistic fervour, waving the flag, with the Tricolour pointed on their faces. The festivity, including dancing by women, is a daily thing.

"We are the immediate successors whenever tensions escalate between India and Pakistan. There are hardly any customers in *dhabas* now and daily business has taken a hit. Once the check post is completely shut down, our future will be bleak. We stand with the country but request the government to ensure that some steps are taken for our survival as well," says Ashish Singh, who runs a *dhaba* opposite the ICP. The trade local businesses have already taken a hit since the halting of bilateral trade following the Pahalgalam terror attack in 2019. Since then,

there has been only sparse cargo movement from Afghanistan at Attari's land port at the ICP. However, this too has been stopped for now, impacting traders, customs house agents, truckers, and porters, among others.

Tarun Singh, a 38-year-old porter, says, "Once the ICP completely shuts down, life will be difficult for me and many others like me. Already the trucks that were coming from Afghanistan have stopped, so there has been no work at the cargo terminal since April 24. The passenger terminal will be closed in a few days. Where will I go? How will I sustain my family?" he says, dropping his head in despair.

Away from Attari, at Dera Baba Nanak town in Gurdaspur district, the Kartarpur Corridor, which connects Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara in Pakistan with Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India, is still open and pilgrims continue to access the historic gurdwara in Pakistan without the need for visas. Notably, amid the ongoing tensions, Pakistan has suspended visas of all Indians except Sikh pilgrims. Pilgrims from India continue to travel to Kartarpur to pay obeisance at the gurdwara and return the same evening.

A matter of safety

Punjab villages adjacent to the international border have often been at the receiving end of diplomatic fallout and economic disruptions. About 80 km from Attari, in Gurdaspur district's Rose village, situated on the international border, the sentiments are somewhat different.

"There's no sense of fear among the villagers. It's not the first time that there has been tension with Pakistan; we are used to it and not afraid. In 2016, when India conducted surgical strikes, villagers were asked to move to a safer place, but hardly anyone left the village. We don't run. In fact, if the situation demands it, we will help the Army in whatever way we can," says 50-year-old Hardev Singh, who is harvesting wheat on his 15-acre farm situated close to the fence constructed by India near the "zero line", the actual boundary line between the two countries.

He says it is difficult to cultivate here at their limited time given for farm operations. "Each time I go to my farm, I have to take permission and complete paperwork. It's time-consuming. On the Pakistani side, there's no fencing, so the cattle damage the crop. Problems are there and we want the government to solve our issues. But now, our nation's priority is our priority."

Even as tensions continue to escalate between the two neighbours, the scars of a violent past and the pain of families torn apart rearheads. "I hope the situation normalises soon. Whenever tension arises between India and Pakistan, residents of the border villages have to bear the brunt," says Balraj Singh, 60, who is a hurry to harvest the wheat crop on his 1.5-acre farm land close to the international border.

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Key Themes & Issues

1. People-to-People Ties and Cross-Border Families

- Partition created divided families across India and Pakistan, many of whom have maintained ties through limited legal channels.
- The fallout from the terror attack led to the closure of borders and deportation orders, resulting in forced separations and emotional distress for many families.
- Cases such as Rishi Kumar's and Wajeeda Khan's illustrate the personal suffering and legal complications involved when families hold different nationalities.

2. Impact on Civilians and Local Economies

- Border closures and trade suspensions directly affect the livelihoods of locals — dhaba owners, porters, traders, and customs officials at Attari suffer immediate income loss.
- Business had already been hit since 2019 after the Pulwama attack, with minimal cargo movement since then, further compounded now.

3. Emotional Symbolism of the Border

- The Beating Retreat ceremony, a symbol of both nationalism and hostility, becomes a barometer for bilateral ties — now scaled down in tone and attendance.
- Absence of the ceremonial handshake and muted patriotic displays underscore the fragility of peace and the emotional toll of strained diplomacy.

4. Security vs Humanity Dilemma

- India's national security imperatives demand firm responses to cross-border terror.
- However, collateral damage is evident in how ordinary citizens, especially those in border areas or with familial links across the border, bear the brunt of such decisions.

5. Kartarpur Corridor: A Contrasting Exception

- Despite the broader tension, the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor remains open, reflecting a targeted approach to uphold religious sentiments while restricting broader engagement.
- This selective openness reflects the complex balancing act between diplomacy, faith, and strategy.

Broader Context and Analysis

Historical Legacies

Daily News Analysis

- The Attari-Wagah route, part of the historic Grand Trunk Road, is more than a checkpoint; it is a living symbol of Partition's unresolved legacy.
- Despite repeated efforts (e.g., Vajpayee's 1999 Lahore visit), peace-building efforts have remained fragile, often reversed after terror incidents.

Humanitarian Perspective

- Nationalism and security are important, but ethical governance also demands empathy towards vulnerable civilians affected by diplomatic decisions.
- The principle of proportionality in state response must account for humanitarian fallout, especially for children, women, and aged citizens separated across borders.

Strategic and Diplomatic Implications

- The pattern of reactive diplomacy—shutting down communication and trade channels—hurts regional integration and soft power diplomacy.
- A measured, people-sensitive diplomacy, with human corridors, long-term visas for families, and non-political trade channels, may mitigate humanitarian harm without diluting strategic firmness.

Ethical Dilemmas

- Moral conflict arises when the pursuit of justice and sovereignty clashes with innocent people's right to life and family.
- The state's ethical duty includes safeguarding national interests while not allowing hatred to erode shared humanity.

Way Forward

- Institutionalise family reunification mechanisms, even during heightened tensions.
- Develop humanitarian protocols at border crossings for exceptional cases.
- Promote track-two diplomacy involving civil society, cultural exchange groups, and religious pilgrimages to keep people-to-people ties alive.
- Strengthen internal resilience in border economies to cushion against periodic shocks from external relations.
- Evolve a national strategy that distinguishes state-level hostilities from civilian ties, preserving avenues for peace even during geopolitical crises.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques

Discuss the humanitarian challenges that arise when bilateral tensions between nations impact civilian populations. Suggest diplomatic and administrative mechanisms to address such challenges with reference to the India-Pakistan context.

Ques

"Borders divide nations, but not emotions." Critically examine the role of people-to-people contacts in reducing hostility between India and Pakistan.

Ques

In the light of cross-border terrorism, evaluate the effectiveness of India's response mechanisms, keeping in view the ethical responsibilities towards civilians caught in diplomatic crossfire.

Ques : Case Study :

You are a District Magistrate. A terror attack has resulted in the closure of the local border crossing, affecting hundreds of families divided between two countries. While national security concerns are valid, emotional and humanitarian appeals from affected civilians are rising.

- 1. What are the ethical issues involved?*
- 2. How will you balance national interest with humanitarian concerns?*
- 3. What immediate and long-term steps will you take?*

 Quality education

In news : Teak (*Tectona grandis*)

Tissue-cultured teak is being promoted in India as a high-yield, fast-return solution for boosting timber cultivation and trade. However, concerns are being raised about its long-term productivity, economic viability, and ecological impact.

About Teak (*Tectona grandis*)

- Known as the “King of Timbers” for its durability, pest resistance, and water resistance.
- One of the world’s most valuable tropical hardwoods.
- Widely used in shipbuilding, construction, furniture, flooring, and musical instruments.

Global and National Significance

- India accounts for 35% of the world’s planted teak forests.
- Asia holds over 95% of the global teak resources.
- As per FAO’s 2022 report, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have the largest areas of natural teak forests in India.

Geographic Distribution

- Native to South and Southeast Asia — especially India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Indonesia.
- In India, found in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and parts of the Northeast.
- Grows mainly in moist and mixed deciduous forests, preferring well-drained soils and full sunlight.

Biological and Ecological Characteristics

- A large deciduous tree reaching 30–40 meters in height and capable of living for centuries.
- Trunk: Straight, cylindrical, 1–1.5 meters in diameter.
- Leaves: Oblong, dark green, arranged in opposite pairs.
- Flowers: Small, white or cream-colored, fragrant.
- Wood color: Golden brown to dark brown.
- Plays a vital ecological role by supporting biodiversity and wildlife in native forests.

Regulatory Framework

- Green felling (commercial harvesting of trees) is banned in government forests under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and National Forest Policy, 1988.

- Therefore, private teak plantations are essential to meet domestic and export timber demands.

Conclusion

Tissue-cultured teak offers new opportunities for India's forestry and timber sector. However, its adoption must be guided by scientific validation, policy oversight, and ecological caution to ensure long-term sustainability.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding Teak (*Tectona grandis*):

1. It is a deciduous tropical hardwood valued for its water and pest resistance.
2. India holds more than 50% of the world's teak plantations.
3. It is commonly found in moist and mixed deciduous forests.
4. Teak is native only to India.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Ans: a)

Page : 06 Editorial Analysis

Strengthening parliamentary oversight in India

A historical fact is that over nearly three years, the Constituent Assembly met for 167 days to frame the Constitution of India. Among the many crucial debates that occurred was the question of what form of government India should adopt. Defending the choice of a parliamentary system, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued that it offered more responsibility and less stability which is a necessary trade-off for a functioning democracy. He emphasised the point that such a system allows for the daily accountability of the executive through questions, motions and debates in Parliament, and periodic accountability through elections.

A diminishing of oversight

While the Constitution enshrines checks and balances, legislative oversight has often been diminished. Efficiency in governance is important, but not at the cost of transparency. Strengthening the role of Parliament in scrutinising executive action is essential in not just making laws but also ensuring their effective implementation and accountability. If India seeks 'Maximum Governance', it must also commit to 'Maximum Accountability', starting with an empowered and effective Parliament.

Over decades, Parliament has developed an array of mechanisms to fulfil this mandate – some formal, some by convention. From the daily scrutiny of Question Hour and the spontaneity of Zero Hour, to the behind-the-scenes workings of Standing Committees, these tools form the framework of accountability. In theory, they empower Members of Parliament (MP) to ask probing questions, seek detailed information, and even move a no-confidence motion if necessary.

Despite its strong framework, parliamentary oversight often falls short. Question Hour, intended as a daily spotlight on government accountability, is frequently disrupted by noisy protests, leading to adjournments where important issues remain unaddressed. During the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-24), Question Hour functioned for 60% of its scheduled time in the Lok Sabha and 52% in Rajya Sabha, significantly reducing its effectiveness. Even when it operates, individual MPs tend to focus on isolated queries



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Along with 'maximum governance, there needs to be 'maximum accountability', which must start with an empowered and effective Parliament

rather than a systematic scrutiny of complex, cross-ministerial problems.

Parliamentary committees, including the Department-related Standing Committees (DRSC), meet regularly and generate detailed reports, though these are often not taken up for discussion on the floor. Consequently, despite their detailed evaluations of policies and schemes, committee findings have had limited influence on legislation or executive action. Despite their mandate for detailed scrutiny, committee consultations tend to engage a relatively small group of stakeholders, raising concerns about diversity and the breadth of input. Moreover, their inherently temporary structure limits the ability of members to develop both expertise and institutional standing.

Some successes

Even with its inconsistencies, Indian legislative oversight has had notable successes. The Standing Committee on Railways recommended waiving dividend payments by Indian Railways in 2015 to improve its financial health, which was implemented in 2016. The Standing Committee on Transport influenced the Motor Vehicles Bill amendments in 2017, removing caps on third-party insurance and establishing a National Road Safety Board.

Other significant interventions include the Committee on Public Undertakings addressing delays in National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)-managed highway projects, recommending that projects commence only after acquiring 80% of land and necessary clearances. Similarly, the Estimates Committee advised increasing domestic uranium production by opening new mines, reducing dependency on imports. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) exposed critical delays, opaque appointments, and corrupt practices during the Commonwealth Games in 2010. On average, the PAC has made 180 recommendations every year in the past eight years, out of which 80% were accepted by the government.

To make oversight truly effective, Parliament must adopt targeted reforms, beginning with robust post-legislative scrutiny. Laws do not end with their passage; they begin there. Yet, India lacks a formal process to track whether laws are

achieving their intended impact. This gap can be addressed by creating subcommittees under each Standing Committee or a specialised body to review implementation. The United Kingdom offers a useful model: government departments submit reviews of major laws within three to five years, which are then examined by parliamentary committees – enabling timely course correction and ensuring that laws deliver on their promises.

Strengthening and institutionalising committee work must also be a priority. One way to do this is by making oversight findings more accessible; through translations in local languages, visual explainers, or short videos. At the same time, select DRSC reports should be brought to the floor for debate, followed by a mandatory response from the Minister concerned. This would ensure that committee work informs parliamentary discourse and enhances executive accountability. Committees must also be strengthened with dedicated research and technical support, thus moving beyond mere administrative assistance.

Adopt technology

Technology offers a powerful opportunity to modernise and strengthen parliamentary oversight. MPs in India often operate without specialised staff or professional research support, making it harder to scrutinise complex policies or spending data. Faced with massive volumes of budget documents, audit reports, and policy reviews, they are at a disadvantage. By leveraging Artificial Intelligence and data analytics, Parliament can help members swiftly flag irregularities, track policy trends, and frame sharper, evidence-based questions.

While delivering the inaugural address held to formally inaugurate the new Standing Committees in 1993, the then Vice-President K.R. Narayanan said that the main purpose of the system was not to weaken or criticise the administration but to strengthen it by investing it with more meaningful parliamentary support. Strengthening legislative oversight means honouring the mandate citizens have given their representatives; to make sure the machinery of government stays transparent, accountable, and truly "of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Paper 02: Indian Polity & Governance

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Despite having institutional mechanisms, parliamentary oversight in India remains weak and inconsistent. Discuss the factors behind this weakness and suggest measures to make parliamentary scrutiny more effective. (250 words)

Context :

A detailed editorial highlighted the current challenges and potential reforms needed to strengthen the Indian Parliament's role in holding the executive accountable, especially amid concerns about declining legislative scrutiny.

Background:

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar justified the adoption of the parliamentary system in India by emphasizing its daily accountability mechanism via debates, questions, motions, and elections.
- Oversight by the legislature is vital for transparency, policy correction, and executive accountability.

Current Concerns Regarding Parliamentary Oversight:

1. Disruptions in Functioning:
 - Question Hour operated only 60% in Lok Sabha and 52% in Rajya Sabha during the 17th Lok Sabha.
 - Disruptions due to protests result in adjournments, undermining accountability.
2. Underutilised Parliamentary Committees:
 - Reports often lack impact as they are not debated on the floor.
 - Limited stakeholder consultations reduce representativeness.
 - Temporary nature of committees limits long-term expertise.
3. Lack of Post-Legislative Scrutiny:
 - No formal mechanism to evaluate whether passed laws achieve intended objectives.
4. Weak Research Support to MPs:
 - MPs operate without professional aides or data support to scrutinize complex issues.

Successes So Far:

Daily News Analysis

- Railway Standing Committee led to the waiver of dividends improving Indian Railways' finances (2016).
- Transport Committee shaped the Motor Vehicles Act amendments in 2017.
- Public Undertakings Committee improved NHAI project procedures.
- Estimates Committee helped reduce uranium import dependency.
- PAC (Public Accounts Committee) uncovered corruption during 2010 Commonwealth Games and gives -180 recommendations/year, 80% of which are accepted.

Proposed Reforms:

1. Institutionalise Post-Legislative Scrutiny:
 - Create subcommittees or a specialised agency for reviewing law implementation.
 - Adopt the UK model: mandatory review by government departments after 3–5 years.
2. Enhance Committee Effectiveness:
 - Bring key reports to the floor for debate.
 - Mandatory response from the concerned minister.
 - Improve stakeholder diversity.
 - Provide technical/research support to MPs.
3. Use of Technology:
 - Employ AI and data analytics to:
 - Scan budget reports.
 - Identify anomalies.
 - Frame evidence-based questions.
 - Create visual and local language summaries to improve public engagement.

Conclusion:

Parliamentary oversight is not about weakening the government but strengthening democratic accountability. In the spirit of "maximum governance, maximum accountability," reforming and empowering Parliament is essential to ensure laws serve the people effectively and transparently.

