

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Karnataka Launches Door-to-Door Survey to Assess Status of Scheduled Castes.

Karnataka to begin survey today to assess status of Scheduled Castes

Nearly 60,000 enumerators will 'knock on every door' to gather details on a mobile application specifically designed for the 13-day survey; the exercise will be monitored through a central war room that will provide support to the enumerators

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In an exercise that will map the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and their socio-economic and educational levels in Karnataka, nearly 60,000 enumerators will "knock on every door" and gather details on a mobile application from Monday to May 17.

The caste census, conducted in 2015, has pegged the total SC population in the State at 1.09 crore, or about 18.2% of the total population. The survey to identify SC households and their sub-castes is part of the work of the commission headed by retired judge H.N. Nagamohan Das that has been asked by



Sensitive topic: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Justice Nagamohan at a meeting in Bengaluru. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the government to recommend internal reservation among these communities.

Each field-level enumerator will cover about 130 houses during the 13-day survey. They will visit every door in the units mapped and assigned to

them and collect information on a mobile application that has been specifically designed for the survey.

"The survey will be conducted between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. and the mobile application will be automati-

cally locked after that to avoid any foul play," Mr. Das told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

Central war room

"We have instructed the enumerators to knock on every door and click the photograph of the person who shares the information and also take a signature. The data collected will be connected to a central server and will be securely coded. We have deployed 6,000 panchayat development officials (PDOs) as supervisors, who will conduct random inspections of households to verify and confirm the visit," he said.

Mr. Das said the survey will be monitored through

a central war room. The war room will also provide support to enumerators on the field if they encounter any problems while conducting the survey. An exclusive helpline has been set up and email support will also be provided, if required.

Following the door-to-door visit, a camp will be held from May 19 to 21 in panchayat offices, schools or any other public offices in the area where people, who have missed the door-to-door enumeration, can go and declare their caste status.

Besides, an option has also been created to declare caste details online. This window will be open from May 19 to 23.

Key Analysis

1. Significance of the Survey

- **Data-Driven Policy Making:** Provides granular data on intra-caste disparities among SCs for internal reservations.
- **Evidence-Based Reservation:** Fulfills need for empirical data to design **internal sub-quotas** among Scheduled Castes.

Daily News Analysis

- **Inclusive Development:** Targets equitable distribution of welfare benefits within marginalized communities.

2. Governance and Administrative Innovation

- **Tech-Enabled Enumeration:** Use of mobile applications, geotagging, digital signatures, and time-restricted access ensures transparency and efficiency.
- **Central War Room:** Real-time monitoring and support reflect adoption of **modern governance tools**.
- **Random Verification:** Supervisory checks strengthen **accountability and accuracy**.

3. Constitutional and Social Implications

- **Constitutional Backing:** Linked to Articles **15(4)** and **16(4)**—affirmative action for backward classes.
- **Justice and Equity:** Helps address **dominance of certain sub-castes** within SC quota and gives visibility to **neglected castes**.
- **Social Sensitivity:** Careful handling needed to avoid **politicization of caste** and **social tensions**.

4. National Implications

- **Template for Other States:** Could influence other states and central government in debating a **nationwide caste census**.
- **Debate on Social Justice:** Feeds into broader debate on the need to **redefine backwardness** beyond traditional caste-based lists.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Critically examine the role of caste-based surveys in achieving social justice. Do such surveys help in effective targeting of affirmative action policies?

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, at the Arctic Circle India Forum 2025, emphasized that India seeks "partners, not preachers", particularly in relation to the West's attitude towards India's balanced stand on global issues such as the Russia-Ukraine war. His remarks underline India's strategic autonomy, realism in foreign policy, and demand for mutual respect in international partnerships.

India is looking for partners, not preachers: External Affairs Minister

'We have not told one or the other party to do this or do that, and that is important to remember because that is a courtesy that is not always granted to us. We get advice on what we should be doing,' Jaishankar said in a dig at the West while speaking at the Arctic Circle India Forum in Delhi

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India is looking for "partners" and not "preachers", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Sunday, in a veiled message to Europe in the context of the conflict in Ukraine as he explained the nuances of New Delhi's "Russia realism" and why the relationship between the two sides was an "important fit".

In an interactive session, Mr. Jaishankar, delving into broader geopolitical upheavals, said Europe had "entered a certain zone of a reality check" and must display some sensitivity and mutuality of interest for deeper ties with India.

India has always advocated for "Russia realism" and there was an "important fit" and "complementarity" between India and Russia as a resource provider and consumer, the Minister said, in remarks that came amid persistent efforts by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration to strike a ceasefire deal between Moscow and



Clear stand: S. Jaishankar speaks at the Arctic Circle India Forum 2025 in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

Kyiv. Over the course of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, New Delhi has remained engaged with Moscow and enhanced its procurement of Russian crude oil, which triggered criticism from the West. India, however, maintained that its ties with Russia are driven by national interest.

'Russia not involved'

The Minister also criticised earlier attempts by the West to find a solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict without involving Russia, saying it "challenged the basics of realism".

"Just like I am an advocate of Russia realism, I am also an advocate of America realism," he said at the Arctic Circle India Forum.

"I think the best way to engage today's America is also through finding mutuality of interests rather than putting ideological differences upfront and then allowing it to cloud the possibilities of working together," Mr. Jaishankar said.

The Minister was broadly delving into the global consequences of developments in the Arctic and how the changing world

order impacts the region.

On the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Mr. Jaishankar said India has always been "very careful not to prescribe a solution".

"We have not told one or the other party to do this or do that. And that is important to remember because that is a courtesy that is not always granted to us. So, we get advice on what we should be doing," he said, in another dig at the West.

Answering a question on India's expectations from Europe, Mr. Jaishankar said it had to get

beyond preaching, and to start acting based on a framework of mutuality.

"When we look out at the world, we look for partners; we do not look for preachers, particularly preachers who do not practice at home and preach abroad," he said. "I think some of Europe is still struggling with that problem. Some of it has changed," he added.

The Minister said Europe had "entered a certain zone of reality check". "Now, whether they are able to step up to it or not, it is something we will have to see," he added.

"But from our point of view, if we are to develop a partnership, there has to be some understanding, there has to be some sensitivity, there has to be a mutuality of interest, and there has to be a realisation of how the world works," he noted.

"And I think these are all work in progress to different degrees with different parts of Europe. So, some have moved further, some a little bit less," Mr. Jaishankar said.

On India-Russia ties, he

said there was such an "important fit and complementarity" between the two countries as a "resource provider and resource consumer".

"Where Russia is concerned, we have always taken a view that there is a Russia realism that we have advocated," the Minister said.

"When passions were very high [in] 2022, 2023... if one looks back at that period, the kind of predictions and scenarios which were put forward have turned out not to be well-founded," he said.

The Minister criticised the thinking of the West in the past that a solution to the conflict in Ukraine could emerge without involving Russia. "The idea that you will get a solution out of Russia without inviting Russia challenged the basics of realism," he said. "I think for us, to engage Russia, if there is anyway we can be of help, we have always been very open about it," Mr. Jaishankar said, adding, "Having said that we have always been very careful not to prescribe a solution."

Key Highlights & Analysis

1. Strategic Autonomy and 'Russia Realism'

Daily News Analysis

- India has consistently maintained an independent stance in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- Despite Western criticism, India increased crude oil imports from Russia based on national interest.
- The idea of "Russia realism" points to a pragmatic understanding of Russia's global role and its importance to India as a reliable energy and defense partner.
- Jaishankar emphasized the "resource provider-resource consumer" complementarity between India and Russia.

2. Critique of Western Hypocrisy and Moral High Ground

- Jaishankar targeted the Western habit of giving unsolicited advice while ignoring their own inconsistencies.
- His remark, "we get advice on what we should be doing... that courtesy is not always granted to us", reflects India's growing assertiveness.
- The phrase "preachers who do not practice at home" is a direct critique of Western double standards on issues like democracy, climate action, and international peace.

3. Demand for Mutuality in International Relations

- India seeks equal partnerships where both sides benefit through understanding and sensitivity to each other's interests.
- The shift from aid-based or morally hierarchical relationships to interest-based strategic partnerships is central to India's vision.

4. India's Role in Global Diplomacy

- India has maintained that it does not prescribe solutions to others' conflicts – instead offering support when required.
- This non-prescriptive approach enhances India's credibility as a neutral, mature global actor—essential in today's multipolar world.

5. Implication for Europe-India Relations

- Jaishankar's statement that Europe must move beyond its "preaching" mode and enter into reality-based partnerships signals a diplomatic reset.
- He acknowledges that parts of Europe are evolving, but warns that partnerships depend on how sensitively Europe approaches Indian concerns.

Conclusion

Daily News Analysis

India's external affairs approach is increasingly assertive and grounded in realism. It reflects the evolution of Indian diplomacy-from a reactive to a proactive force on the world stage. By rejecting unsolicited moralism and advocating mutual respect, India is shaping a foreign policy suited to a multipolar, interest-driven international order.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : "India is looking for partners, not preachers." In the light of this statement, examine how India's foreign policy is evolving to reflect strategic autonomy and mutuality of interests. **(150 Words)**



During his visit to India, Angolan President Joao Lourenco invited Indian businesses to invest in Angola, especially in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, and critical minerals. This reflects growing momentum in India-Africa economic diplomacy and diversification of South-South partnerships.

Angola invites Indian businesses to explore opportunities in export

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Angola President Joao Manuel Goncalves Lourenco on Sunday invited Indian businesses to explore opportunities that can place the African nation at the centre of their export strategies, highlighting areas for mutual cooperation, including agriculture, pharmaceutical and renewable energy.

Mr. Lourenco, currently on a visit to India, highlighted Angola's strategic location with privileged access to regional markets through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

He was addressing the India-Angola Business Forum here.

"The relationship between Angola and India is built on a solid legal and institutional foundation, developed over decades of



Union Minister J.P. Nadda meets Angola President Joao Manuel Goncalves Lourenco in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

cooperation. The existing bilateral agreements – in areas such as health, energy, financial services, and diplomatic mobility – reflect both countries' commitment to a structured, transparent, and mutually beneficial partnership," Mr. Lourenco said.

"We invite Indian entrepreneurs to explore these logistical opportunities that can place Angola at the centre of their export strategies – both for Africa and the wider world," the

President said.

He went on to talk about the various sectors for cooperation, which includes the pharmaceutical industry, agriculture sector, and renewable energy sector.

"We firmly believe that this transformation will only be truly sustainable if it is supported by strong, fair, and innovative partnerships. Without doubt, India's business dynamism, technological excellence, and capacity for in-

novation are qualities that Angola deeply values and with which we wish to walk side by side," he said.

Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs and Environment, Forest & Climate Change, said, "Looking ahead, there are several priority sectors where we can deepen collaboration. In the energy sector, we can develop oil and gas infrastructure and partner on clean energy. In the field of education and skilling, India can play an important role in education and capacity building." CII president Sanjiv Puri said.

"Angola has a very strong mining sector and the third largest diamond production in Africa. The country also possesses repositories of critical minerals. I truly believe that joint exploration in diamond processing and other critical minerals would develop a critical minerals value chain," he added.

Key Highlights and Analysis

1. Strategic Relevance of Angola in Africa

- Angola is part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and benefits from trade access under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- Its geostrategic location positions it as a potential gateway for Indian exports into Africa and Latin America.
- This aligns with India's larger goal of increasing presence in Africa through trade corridors, infrastructure, and capacity-building partnerships.

2. Expanding Economic Engagement and South-South Cooperation

- Angola has emphasized pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and clean energy as focus areas for Indian investment. India's proven expertise in low-cost medicine production and agro-tech makes it a natural partner.
- Angola's diamond and critical mineral reserves (e.g., cobalt, rare earths) are important in the context of global supply chain diversification- especially for clean energy and digital infrastructure.

3. Complementarity in Developmental Aspirations

- Angola, like many African countries, is seeking sustainable and inclusive development. It values India's technological capacity, democratic ethos, and ability to provide low-cost, scalable development models.
- This includes collaboration in education, skilling, digital health, fintech, and solar technology.

4. India's Diplomatic Approach: Beyond Energy to Development Diplomacy

- Historically, India's relations with Angola focused heavily on oil. Now, the conversation is expanding to clean energy, education, infrastructure, and minerals, indicating a shift toward a multi-dimensional developmental partnership.
- This supports India's global ambitions as a leader of the Global South and contributor to African resilience and self-reliance.

5. Opportunity for Strategic Influence in Africa

- While China has built significant influence in Africa through debt-driven infrastructure, India's model is more sustainable and people-centric — emphasizing capacity-building, small-scale development, and soft power through education, Ayurveda, and cultural diplomacy.
- Angola's outreach is a sign of growing African recognition of this alternative development model.

Conclusion

Angola's invitation to Indian businesses underscores the untapped potential of India-Africa relations beyond traditional areas. With the right diplomatic push, India can play a transformative role in Africa's development journey while securing vital energy, mineral, and market needs. This is a clear win-win avenue that aligns with India's economic diplomacy, strategic autonomy, and role as a development partner in the evolving multipolar world.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : India's partnership with Africa is shifting from energy security to developmental diplomacy. Discuss with reference to recent India-Angola engagements.



The concept of **agrivoltaics (APVs)** – integrating **solar power generation with agriculture** – is gaining traction in India as a dual solution to energy and agricultural income challenges. A recent report highlights its **economic, environmental, and policy potential**, while also identifying the **lack of regulation, financial barriers, and limited adoption** among smallholders.

From ploughs to panels, cultivating a solar-powered future for farmers

With benefits for food and energy production, agrivoltaics promise a dual harvest as well as prosperity for India's smallholder farmers; what would complete the picture is probably official incentivisation through inclusion of APVs in the government's flagship scheme on agricultural solarisation and also in the policy framework

Subhodeep Basu
Laxmi Sharma

In 1981, German scientists Adolf Goetzberger and Armin Zastrow published a foundational paper arguing that dual land use for food and energy could bring significant benefits. They proposed elevating solar modules by about 2 m above the ground to allow crops to grow underneath, giving rise to the concept of agrivoltaics (APVs).

APVs integrate solar energy generation with agricultural production, offering a model that maximises land-use efficiency while augmenting farmers' income. With APVs, farmers will also be able to move energy back to the grid at a predetermined feed-in tariff, forging new streams of income alongside agricultural ones.

To accommodate APVs, the on-site solar infrastructure will have to be designed such that cultivation is possible between rows of solar panels, a.k.a. interspace orientation, and in the area available beneath the elevated panels, or overhead-stilted orientation.

There is a growing interest in APVs in India, but in practice it is mostly limited to demonstrative pilots by research institutes or private developer-owned and -managed APV systems.

A recent report by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (coauthored by the authors of this article) examined an APV system in Najafgarh, Delhi. A farmer had leased his land to solar energy company Sunmaster for 25 years to establish an APV facility.

Before the APV plant was operational, the farmer's net income was typically ₹41,000 per acre a year from traditional crops like wheat and mustard. After the APV was installed, the income included an annual rent of ₹1 lakh per acre. The returns from the crop cultivation and energy sales went to the developer. The farmer said this rent-based income was a stable alternative that kept him from worrying about uncertainties in agricultural yield.

The report also explored a hypothetical scenario in which a farmer, in addition to receiving lease income, had negotiated to receive the agricultural revenue as well. If the farmer cultivated high-value as well as shade-loving crops like potato, tomato, and turmeric, the income could have been up to ₹1.5 lakh per acre a year from crop cultivation in addition to ₹1 lakh per acre in rent – a sixfold increase in income over traditional open farming alone and a testament to APVs' potential to boost farmers' earnings.

Also, in addition to the apparent gains



An experimental agrivoltaic setup at the University of Arizona. KILLAMATOR (CC BY SA)

in land-use efficiency, APVs may also create favourable microclimatic conditions that reduce water loss from and heat stress on plants.

Need for standards

Unlike many other countries, India lacks standardised norms for APVs, creating ambiguity in project design. Countries leading in APV adoption, including Japan and Germany, could offer valuable lessons in this regard.

Japan requires all APV structures to be temporary and removable, a minimum panel height of 2 m, and a maximum crop yield loss of 20%. The Japanese government reviews projects for renewal every three years based on their effects on the agricultural output.

Likewise, Germany has introduced a standardised framework called DIN SPEC 91434, which requires all APV systems to maintain 66% of the original agricultural yield (called the reference yield) and limits the amount of arable land lost to solar infrastructure to up to 15%. The standard ensures agriculture remains the top priority of APV development – even if the energy returns are high.

India can draw on these examples to define its national APV guidelines, including specifications on panel height, permissible yield loss, and land-use criteria. Such guidelines will be key to keep energy management from overshadowing agricultural interest, especially at scale.

Smallholder inclusion

Most Indian farmers are smallholders,

Solar plants within KUSUM could consider implementing models with infrastructure that allows crops to be cultivated simultaneously. This will allow India to take advantage of existing policy platforms to test and accelerate innovation

owning less than 2 ha of land each, and have limited purchasing power. Scaling APV for smallholders will require leveraging farmer institutions such as FPOs and cooperatives. Sahyadri, one of a few FPOs in India to install a 250-kW APV system, is cultivating high-value crops like grapes and citrus lemon under solar panels. It shows how institutions can help farmers pool resources and provide stronger market linkages.

Expanding institutional support – through grants or NABARD's credit guarantee for APV investments – can also lower financial barriers to smallholders.

Indeed, the primary bottleneck for APV adoption in India is the high capital expenditure required for APV systems. While a typical 1-MW ground-mounted solar plant in 5 acres of land would cost around ₹2.7 crore, an APV system will incur an additional 11% due to the specialised infrastructure it requires. So without a remunerative feed-in tariff (FIT), the economic viability of APVs remains uncertain.

For instance, under the current FIT of ₹3.04/unit in Rajasthan's PM-KUSUM scheme, the payback period for a 1-MW

ground-mounted solar plant will be 15 years.

But a higher FIT based on the thermal average power purchasing cost for the State Discoms of ₹4.52/unit, the payback period will drop to four years. Such attractive FITs could incentivise farmers and investors to invest in APVs.

The government can also float capacity-building programmes that train and equip farmers with the expertise to manage APV systems.

Two pillars

India currently doesn't have any designated policy on agrivoltaics.

There is an opportunity, however: a revamp of the Government of India's flagship PM KUSUM scheme on agricultural solarisation to accommodate APVs in its delivery system could help scale the innovation across the country.

Solar power plants as commissioned within the grid-connected components of the scheme could also consider implementing models with infrastructure that allows crops to be cultivated simultaneously.

This will allow India to take advantage of existing policy platforms to test and accelerate innovation.

Success in the long run, however, still depends on two pillars: strong economic incentives for investors and a robust, farmer-centric policy framework.

(Subhodeep Basu is research fellow and Laxmi Sharma is research associate, both at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. shasub@icrier.res.in, lsharma@icrier.res.in)

THE GIST

APVs integrate energy generation with agricultural production, offering a model that maximises land-use efficiency while augmenting income. Farmers can move energy back to the grid, forging new streams of income

India lacks norms for APVs. Japan requires all structures to be temporary and removable and permits a maximum crop yield loss of 20%. Germany requires all APV systems to maintain 66% of original agricultural yield

Scaling APV will require grants and credit. Indeed, the primary bottleneck for APV adoption is capital expenditure. Without a remunerative feed-in tariff, the viability of APVs remains uncertain

Prelims-Focused Pointers

- **Agriphotovoltaics (APV):** A system where solar panels are installed above farmland allowing crops to grow underneath; dual use of land for energy and agriculture.
- **PM-KUSUM Scheme:**
 - Promotes solar pumps and grid-connected renewable energy projects in rural areas.
 - APVs are **not yet included** in the official delivery framework.
- **Key Concepts:**
 - *Feed-in Tariff (FiT):* Rate at which energy producers sell electricity back to the grid.
 - *Interspace & Overhead-stilted orientation:* Panel arrangements allowing space and sunlight for crops.
- **Example of Implementation:**
 - **In Najafgarh, Delhi:** A farmer leased land for 25 years to a solar company earning ₹1 lakh/acre rent—more stable than ₹41,000/acre from traditional farming.

Mains-Focused Analysis

1. APVs: Addressing Land-Use Conflicts and Farmer Incomes

- India faces a critical challenge in balancing land for **agriculture and renewable energy**.
- APVs allow **simultaneous use**: solar panels generate energy while crops (especially shade-tolerant ones) like **tomato, potato, turmeric** grow underneath.
- This improves **land-use efficiency**, stabilises farm incomes, and supports India's **clean energy targets**.

2. Income Diversification for Smallholder Farmers

- Example: With both rent and cultivation income, farmers could earn up to ₹2.5 lakh/acre/year—**six times** more than traditional farming.
- This model protects farmers from **climatic shocks**, yield fluctuations, and market price instability.

3. Challenges Hindering Scaling

- **High upfront capital cost:** APVs cost ~11% more than traditional solar setups.
- **Limited feed-in tariff (FiT):** Current ₹3.04/unit in schemes like PM-KUSUM makes payback periods long (15 years); needs to be aligned with ₹4.52/unit benchmark tariff for viability.
- **Lack of policy standards:** Unlike Japan or Germany, India lacks norms on **panel height, permissible crop yield loss, or land allocation** for solar infrastructure.

4. Inclusion & Institutional Support Needed

- Most Indian farmers are **smallholders (less than 2 ha)**, lacking investment capacity.
- Collective models via **FPOs/cooperatives**, supported by **NABARD credit guarantees** or grants, are essential for equitable access.
- Example: Sahyadri FPO using a 250-kW APV system to grow grapes and citrus lemon under panels.

5. Policy & Governance Imperatives

- India **lacks a dedicated APV policy**. However, **PM-KUSUM** could be revamped to include APVs under its solarisation agenda.
- Government must frame **technical standards**, provide **economic incentives**, and launch **farmer training and capacity-building** programs.

6. Global Best Practices for Inspiration

- **Japan**: Max 20% crop yield loss, 2m panel height, 3-year review cycle.
- **Germany**: Requires 66% of original yield; no more than 15% land loss to solar infrastructure.

Conclusion

Agriphotovoltaics can revolutionise India's agriculture-energy nexus, especially for small and marginal farmers. However, for APVs to become mainstream, the government must:

- Provide **economic incentives** (higher FiT, subsidies),
- Enforce a **farmer-first policy framework**,
- Use existing schemes like **PM-KUSUM** for integration,
- Promote **institutional models** like cooperatives/FPOs, and
- Ensure a balance between **agriculture and solar energy goals**.

India's pursuit of **energy self-reliance** and **climate-resilient farming** hinges on such **innovative, inclusive, and integrated solutions**.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding Agriphotovoltaics (APVs):

1. APVs involve using the same land for both agriculture and solar energy generation.
2. In India, APVs are already covered under the PM-KUSUM scheme.

3. APVs help reduce water loss and heat stress on crops.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only

b) 2 and 3 only

c) 1 and 3 only

d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: What are Agriphotovoltaics (APVs)? Critically examine their role in transforming India's agriculture and energy landscape.



The article by Pushpa Sundar explores the **gradual decline of foreign aid** to India, particularly for **non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**. It highlights the **regulatory tightening by the Indian government**, changing geopolitical trends, and the risk this poses to **social sector development, democratic accountability, and NGO sustainability**.

Demise of foreign aid in India

Indian attitude to official and private foreign aid has always been ambivalent – sometimes welcoming, at other times hostile. With U.S. President Donald Trump's targeting of USAID, the death knell, at least for official aid, seems to have been rung. Other European countries may follow suit, thanks to continuing global conflicts, anti immigration sentiments, and the slowing of economic development in the aid-offering countries. The writing on the wall could not be clearer.

In fact, for India, the writing has been clear for several years now, much before Mr. Trump's action. Western aid-giving nations no longer see India as a country needing aid, given its high growth rate, its oft-vaunted claim of becoming the fifth largest economy by 2047, and the prevailing political and religious ideologies within the country.

India sought international aid soon after Independence to assist in its task of catching up with the developed world. Most of the aid went to the government, as it was believed that the government should be the lead change agent. The peak period was from 1955 to 1965, and most of it came from Western nations. Some official development aid also went to private organisations, especially from bilateral aid organisations, for both humanitarian and development needs.

However, official developmental aid has shown an almost constant decline, especially from 1970 onwards. After 1990, Official Development Assistance (ODA), as a proportion of either Gross National Product or public investment, became insignificant partly due to the success of India's growth story.

What India seeks now is Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and global cooperation in trade, climate change, and technological developments. Thus, declining official aid is not as great a concern as declining private aid to non-government agencies, though



Pushpa Sundar
 author of Foreign Aid
 for Indian NGOs:
 Problem or Solution?
 (2010)

it too will have downsides such as unemployment in aid-giving organisations in both donor and recipient countries, wastage of stockpiled food and medicines, and reduced global collaboration in health and environment.

Private non-governmental organisations engaged in development work – referred to as NGOs – will be more affected by a decline in aid, both official and private. NGOs not only take up the slack in government provision at the bottom but also hold up a mirror to the truth in governance.

While public donations sustained Indian NGOs in the pre-Independence period and for some years afterward, since the 1960s onwards, the two major sources for NGOs in development have come to be government grants and foreign aid. It is only since 2013, when corporate social responsibility contributions became mandatory, that corporate money has become somewhat significant.

External aid to NGOs, both from official and private sources, increased continuously, but slowly the amounts received from both have been coming down. Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, NGOs received ₹88,8820 million, but though correct estimates of Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) aid are difficult to get, approximate figures indicate that the amount has gone down considerably.

Probable reasons

The reason for the decline is less about the reluctance of foreign donors and more about the ambivalent attitude of the Indian government towards the receipt of foreign aid by Indian NGOs. While allowing NGOs to accept aid, government regulations have hedged it in with several restrictions since 1976, when the FCRA was passed. Even before the declaration of Emergency in 1975, the "foreign hand" had become a bogey phrase. The government began to blame it for anti-government sentiments and

activities. The anti-national activities purportedly holding up development included religious conversions to Christianity or Islam, protests against development projects, and various policies of the government.

The FCRA required those receiving or wishing to receive foreign money to register themselves with the Ministry of Home Affairs, and to use the funds strictly according to the rules. This Act and its rules have been amended in 2010, 2011, 2020, 2023, and again in 2024. Each time, the rules have been made more and more stringent, and several NGOs have lost their FCRA registrations.

Certain private foreign donors, such as the Soros Foundation and others, have also been actively discouraged. These factors pushing out aid will slowly but surely toll its death knell.

While foreign aid may have had some drawbacks, such as bringing in ideas not entirely or always suited to India, it has played a valuable role for NGOs. Where government grants are meagre, not easily available, and lacking the flexibility to meet changing conditions on the ground, foreign aid was more generous and allowed more flexibility in use, opened windows to the world outside in terms of new ideas and practices, and built the capacity of Indian NGOs. It also allowed NGOs to play a valuable watchdog role on abuses by the government or market forces by voicing dissent against policies and actions detrimental to poor and vulnerable constituencies.

If foreign aid ceases entirely, not only will there be unemployment in the voluntary sector, but also unfinished projects or shelving of new projects, and a slowing down of social sector development, but more importantly, no correction to government overreach.

While self-reliance is a laudable goal, deliberately killing the golden goose is, in effect, risking harm to India's national interests.

While foreign aid may have had some drawbacks, it has played a valuable role for NGOs

Prelims Pointers

- **FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act):**
 - Enacted in **1976**, regulates the **acceptance and utilization of foreign contributions** by individuals and associations in India.
 - Amended multiple times — notably in **2010, 2020, 2023, and 2024** — to impose stricter regulations on NGOs.
- **India's Changing Foreign Aid Landscape:**
 - Peak official foreign aid period: **1955–1965**.
 - Decline in **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** since 1970, especially after the 1991 liberalisation.
 - India now seeks **FDI and technology cooperation**, not traditional aid.
- **Key Donor Trends:**
 - **USAID** and European aid agencies are scaling back support to India.
 - NGOs previously funded by private foreign donors (e.g., **Soros Foundation**) face active discouragement.

Mains Analysis

1. Evolution of Foreign Aid to India

- **Post-independence era:** India relied heavily on Western official aid for development, routed mainly through the government.
- **1960s–1990s:** NGOs began to receive bilateral and private aid.
- **Post-1991:** With liberalisation and economic growth, India's dependence on foreign aid reduced; aid became **symbolic or supplementary**.
- **Now:** India is a **donor itself** in many South-South cooperation initiatives but still has pockets of poverty that need support.

2. Shrinking Space for Foreign-Funded NGOs

- **Regulatory clampdown:** FCRA amendments have made compliance stringent.
 - Mandatory registration with the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
 - Restrictions on fund transfers, administrative expenses, and re-granting.
- **Ideological suspicion:** Concerns over religious conversions, dissent, and "anti-national" activism have led to growing mistrust of foreign-funded civil society.
- Result: **Loss of FCRA licenses**, drying up of funding channels, and **curbing of dissent**.

3. Impact on Indian NGOs and Civil Society

- **Unemployment** in the voluntary sector.
- **Halting of grassroots development projects** in health, education, environment, and tribal empowerment.
- **Loss of watchdog function:** NGOs help check government and market excesses, advocate for marginalised voices.
- **Reduced innovation:** Foreign funding was often more flexible than government grants, allowing experimentation and global linkages.

4. Government's Dilemma: Between Self-Reliance and Civic Space

- While India promotes **Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance)**, excessive regulation risks **strangling constructive civil society engagement**.
- A balance must be struck between **national security concerns** and the **need for global partnerships** in social development.

5. Way Forward

- Rationalise FCRA regulations to ensure **transparency without overreach**.
- Create a **clear distinction** between ideological threat and developmental dissent.
- Encourage **domestic philanthropy** and **corporate CSR** to fill the vacuum, while allowing **ethical foreign contributions**.
- Treat NGOs as **development partners**, not adversaries.

Conclusion

The decline of foreign aid to Indian NGOs reflects **changing global aid dynamics** and **domestic political priorities**. While India's aspiration for self-reliance is valid, **shutting out valuable foreign partnerships risks weakening the social sector**, silencing civil society, and undermining democratic checks. A **pragmatic, balanced policy approach** is necessary to protect national interest **without isolating progressive voices**.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA):

1. It was enacted to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations in India.

Daily News Analysis

2. NGOs receiving foreign aid under FCRA must register with the Ministry of External Affairs.
3. FCRA has been amended multiple times to impose stricter compliance norms.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The decline of foreign aid in India reflects both global and domestic shifts. Critically analyze the reasons behind this decline and suggest a way forward.



Page : 10 Editorial Analysis

Shaping the port of the future

The Vizhinjam port is of immense significance to India's global maritime trade. Amongst all existing Indian ports, Vizhinjam is the closest to international shipping routes. Many global shipping stakeholders have already appreciated the role the port is going to play in transshipment

FULL CONTEXT

Arun P.S.

The town of Vizhinjam in Kerala has played a crucial role in the history of global maritime trade. Inscriptions from the Pandya-Chola era (1129 AD) records Vizhinjam as Rajendra Chola Pattinam, a port of Kerala. Historians claim that Balita, a port with considerable commercial importance which finds mention in the first century AD historical travelogue *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, is Vizhinjam's old name. However, this historical significance faded away after colonisers of India prioritised ports in other places like Cochin and Madras.

In the 1940s, the princely state of Travancore commissioned a study to explore Vizhinjam's potential to set up a world-class port. And now, after almost eight decades of delays and uncertainties, India's first deep water and container transshipment port at Vizhinjam has been officially inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The port, located in Thiruvananthapuram district, started limited-scale operations from July last year and began commercial operations in December. The first phase of this public private partnership (PPP) project cost ₹8,867 crore and was developed by the State Government of Kerala (₹5,595 crore), with the support of concessionaire Adani Ports (₹2,454 crore) and the Union Government (which provided a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) of ₹817.8 crore with repayment conditions).

An important landmark

This port is of immense significance to India's global maritime trade. Currently, around 75% of India's transshipment cargo is handled at ports like Colombo, Singapore and Klang. The need to have a transshipment hub in India is being felt both economically and geopolitically. Amongst all existing Indian ports, Vizhinjam is the closest to international shipping routes, strategically located just 10 nautical miles from the global maritime trading route. Many global shipping stakeholders have already appreciated the role of Vizhinjam on the transshipment map, and as a result, the port has already handled 6 lakh TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) berthing more than 280 ships, much higher than the projection of one lakh TEUs for 12 months within launch of operations, including 1.08 lakh TEUs from 51 vessels in March this year. Many large ships prefer ports with 18-metre draft depth and Vizhinjam with a 20-metre natural draft can easily accommodate Ultra Large Container Vessels. The Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), one of the largest shipping companies globally, has included the port in two of their shipping services – the Jade service (connecting Europe and Asia) and the dragon service (connecting Asia and the Mediterranean) after initial trial runs. This inclusion would direct more ships towards Vizhinjam.

The port has already made its presence felt through a number of milestones. This all-weather port is India's first greenfield port project. As India's first semi-automated port, it also flaunts a skilled women workforce operating automated cranes, another first in India. They were all trained at the Community Skill Park Vizhinjam, an industry-led PPP initiative launched by the Kerala government and operated by the Adani Skill Development Centre. In September



Trade boost: A view of the Vizhinjam International Seaport in Thiruvananthapuram on May 2. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

last year, MSC Claude Girardet (24,116 TEUs) docked in Vizhinjam Port making it the largest cargo ship ever to dock in South Asia. Earlier, large ships would use Colombo as a transshipment hub. In October, MSC Anna's docking witnessed the Vizhinjam Port handling 10,330 containers from a single ship, a record for any Indian port. MSC Irina, the world's largest container ship, is expected to dock in Vizhinjam in May this year.

Need for a global push

While it is definitely a great start, there is a need to capitalise and surge ahead to reap maximum economic benefits. This triple engine (State, Union and concessionaire) project has the potential to make it big amongst the global players.

The Kerala government is aggressively pushing this prestige project to stakeholders across the globe. It has showcased the port at the World Economic Forum 2025, the Invest Kerala Global Summit 2025 and through a dedicated Vizhinjam Conclave 2025. The cover page of Kerala's State budget also featured an image of the Vizhinjam Port highlighting the significance of this project for the State's economic future. The State has signed an agreement with Adani Ports to fast-track the remaining phases, and it is set to be completed by 2028 instead of 2045. In March 2025, the Union Government granted the environmental clearance for the second and third phases. The ₹20,000 crore investment for the remaining phases will upgrade the port's handling capacity to 4.87 million TEUs from the existing one million TEUs and extend the length of the container berth from 1,200 metres to 2,000 metres.

Challenges and opportunities

However, there persist some challenges which need to be addressed urgently. Firstly, a push to develop the associated infrastructure in a fast-paced model. For instance, the arrival of 40 ships in February, resulted in delays which should be avoided in the long run. Industry stakeholders like the Container Shipping Lines Association (CSLA) have flagged the absence of an Integrated Check Post (ICP). The application for the check post is currently pending with the Union Home Ministry; the check post is crucial for generating revenue beyond

transshipment through cargo operations and crew change facilities. A much-awaited Customs Office at the port was opened last month. The Kerala Steamer Agents Association had flagged the challenges owing to a delay in ICP approval in addition to the absence of a permanent Port Health Office, an important stakeholder for cargo operations.

The start of import-export operations at Vizhinjam could significantly help boost the local economy. The Kerala government had announced a Vizhinjam Development Zone with a focus on developing an industrial corridor covering the nearby regions. An IAS officer from the State could be allocated exclusively for overlooking the projects associated with the Vizhinjam Economic Growth corridor. In this year's budget, the Kerala government announced a dedicated space for other States to establish their official business centres near the port. The pace of completion of multiple projects including the National Highway 66 which connects to the port, the railway line connecting Balarampuram to the port and the 63 km Thiruvananthapuram Outer Ring Road (ORR), would decide the fate of the future of the port.

There should also be efforts to promote allied businesses including ship building, ship repair, crew change facilities, logistics, warehousing and bunkering facilities. There is significant momentum for building a shipyard and ship repair centre in Poovar (10 kms from the Vizhinjam port). Adani Ports has announced that Vizhinjam Port will also be a global bunkering hub, supplying clean and green fuel like hydrogen and ammonia. The Kerala government's energy agency ANERT is exploring energy projects including wave power and green hydrogen projects near the port.

There is also a concerted campaign to change the name of the port to Trivandrum International Sea Port Limited, which offers a stronger value proposition from a global branding perspective and consistent with the 'IN TRV 01' location code allocated by the Directorate General of Systems and Data Management.

Special economic zone
Mahindra Group Chairman Anand

Mahindra recently advocated for a Shenzhen equivalent city in India. Shenzhen used to be a quiet fishing village, like Vizhinjam, in the 1970s and became China's first Special Economic Zone in 1980. The Port of Shenzhen, established in 1980 has emerged as a top player in global maritime trade and contributed significantly in the transition of the city as the Silicon Valley of China. There is great potential for the deep sea port in Thiruvananthapuram to trigger a similar economic boom in the region, depending exclusively on how various actors including governments, the concessionaire, businesses, and local communities perceive these changes and rise to the occasion. The Kerala government should ideally fast-track the Vizhinjam Special Investment Region (SIR) Bill to create an economic zone, ensuring fair compensation and rehabilitation to the landowners and dwellers in cases of land pooling/acquisition.

Maybe when the Bill is introduced in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, it should be referred to a select committee to study various best practices across the globe in port-led economies including Shenzhen. On the other hand, the Union government should reconsider the decision to have another transshipment hub 40 km away from Vizhinjam in Colachel. Probably, in the interests of the economic viability of large-scale transshipment port projects, we need a policy similar to the greenfield airport policy that prevents new transshipment ports within 750-1,000 kms. Additionally, the Kerala government and legislators across the Left and Congress parties have expressed concerns regarding the repayment terms associated with the Union government's ₹817.8 crore VGF which could potentially escalate to approximately ₹10,000 crore over time, imposing a significant burden on the State's finances. In light of the project's critical economic and strategic value, the Union government could reconsider the repayment clause.

While we have a game-changing port ready, its global success will depend on strategic interventions by policymakers, swift adoption by businesses, and the pace of informed decision-making.

Arun P.S. is Founder and Research Director, Atyeti Research. The views expressed are personal

THE GIST

After almost eight decades of delays and uncertainties, India's first deep water and container transshipment port at Vizhinjam has been officially inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Kerala government is aggressively pushing this prestige project to stakeholders across the globe. It has showcased the port at the World Economic Forum 2025, the Invest Kerala Global Summit 2025 and through a dedicated Vizhinjam Conclave.

The Kerala government should fast-track the Vizhinjam Special Investment Region (SIR) Bill to create an economic zone, ensuring fair compensation and rehabilitation to the landowners and dwellers in cases of land pooling/acquisition.

Paper 02& 03 :Governance & Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Vizhinjam Port has the potential to transform India's maritime trade and regional economy. Critically examine the strategic and economic significance of the port and highlight the challenges in realising its full potential.(250 words)

Context :

The **Vizhinjam International Seaport**, recently inaugurated in Kerala, is India's first deep-water, semi-automated container transshipment port with global strategic potential. With proximity to international shipping lanes, it promises to transform India's maritime trade and regional economy. However, its long-term success depends on resolving policy, infrastructure, and coordination challenges.

Key Issues and Analytical Dimensions*1. Historical and Strategic Legacy*

- Vizhinjam was a renowned trading port even in ancient times (mentioned in *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*).
- The modern project, nearly 80 years in planning, is now emerging as **India's first greenfield transshipment hub**, a key alternative to Colombo and Singapore.

2. Strategic Maritime Advantage

- Located just **10 nautical miles** from international shipping routes.
- Natural depth of **20 meters**, accommodating **Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs)**.
- Preferred by major players like the **Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC)**, which has included Vizhinjam in key shipping services (jade and dragon routes).
- Capable of reducing India's dependency on foreign ports—currently, **75% of India's transshipment cargo** is handled overseas.

3. Economic and Infrastructure Potential

- Expected to handle **4.87 million TEUs** upon completion of next phases.
- Can catalyse **local industrial growth**, port-led development, and boost to allied sectors—**shipbuilding, logistics, bunkering, warehousing**.

- Clean energy and green hydrogen prospects under exploration.

Kerala Government Initiatives:

- Vizhinjam Development Zone and **Special Investment Region (SIR) Bill** planned.
- Dedicated space for other States' official business centres.
- Showcased at WEF, Invest Kerala Summit, and global platforms.

4. Governance & PPP Model

- **Triple engine model:** Kerala Govt (₹5,595 crore), Adani Ports (₹2,454 crore), Centre's VGF (₹817.8 crore).
- Potential tension over **repayment clause of VGF**, which may inflate State's liabilities (possibly up to ₹10,000 crore).
- Project must balance **fiscal prudence with strategic investment**.

5. Infrastructure and Operational Challenges

- Absence of **Integrated Check Post (ICP)** causing delays in cargo clearance.
- Missing **Port Health Office**, inadequate road and rail connectivity (NH-66, Outer Ring Road, Balaramapuram railway line still incomplete).
- Success depends on fast-tracked execution of support infrastructure.

6. Lessons from Global Port Economies

- Advocated vision of a **Shenzhen-like transformation**: port-centric industrial growth, SEZ-led employment boom.
- Suggestion to **prevent parallel transshipment hubs** nearby (e.g., Colachel), as in greenfield airport policy (no new hubs within 750–1000 km).
- Proposal to rename it **Trivandrum International Seaport** for global branding consistency.

Conclusion

Vizhinjam Port holds the promise of reshaping India's maritime and economic landscape. But its success hinges on:

- **Efficient multi-level governance,**
- **Integrated infrastructure roll-out,**
- **Global positioning and branding,**

- **Balanced fiscal planning.**

By addressing operational bottlenecks and learning from global best practices, Vizhinjam can emerge as **India's first truly world-class maritime transshipment hub**-a model of cooperative federalism, sustainable growth, and strategic economic vision.

