

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	De-escalation process on border must move forward: Jaishankar to Wang
Page 06 Syllabus : GS 3 : Indian Economy	Unemployment rate declines to 5.2% in July: govt. survey
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 3 : Science and Technology	What does science say about the govt.'s ethanol blending plan?
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	Alaskan winds, India and the Trump-Putin summit
Page 09 Syllabus : GS 1 : Indian Society	What true empowerment of women entails
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relation	The path to ending global hunger runs through India

External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in New Delhi, marking a significant step in restoring bilateral ties. The talks come ahead of PM Modi's visit to China for the SCO Summit in Tianjin. This is the first ministerial-level engagement since the Kazan 2024 meeting between PM Modi and President Xi Jinping.

De-escalation process on border must move forward: Jaishankar to Wang

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The process of withdrawing troops from the Line of Actual Control needs to "move forward", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as the two sides began discussions to improve bilateral and trade relations in Delhi on Monday.

They also prepared for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit at the end of the month. On Tuesday, Mr. Wang will meet National Security Advisor Ajit Doval for the 24th round of Special Represent-

tative talks that focuses on the resolution of the boundary dispute between India and China.

In a special gesture, Mr. Modi is also expected to meet Mr. Wang on Tuesday, ahead of his meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the SCO summit in Tianjin. "Having seen a difficult period in our relationship... our two nations now seek to move ahead," Mr. Jaishankar said in his opening remarks as the two sides met at the official venue, Hyderabad House. "The basis for any positive momentum in our ties is the ability to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in border areas."

"It is also essential that



Building ties: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar welcomes Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in New Delhi on Monday, as the two sides began discussions to improve bilateral relations. ANI

the de-escalation process move forward," he added, drawing attention to the

fact that demobilisation at the LAC and dismantling of infrastructure, to return to

the status quo before April 2020, have not been completed 10 months after the

leaders met, although other parts of the relationship have been restored.

According to a statement issued by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Wang pointed to global challenges, including "unilateral bullying" in "free trade and the international order", a reference to the U.S. trade tariffs. He said that China was prepared to work with India and other neighbours to establish five aspects of "peace, tranquillity, prosperity, beauty and friendship". "Both sides should carefully draw on the lessons learned over the past 75 years... view each other as partners," Mr. Wang added.

Mr. Modi and the Chinese President last met in October 2024 in Kazan and agreed to normalise ties after a four-year military stand-off at the LAC. Mr. Wang's visit is the first such ministerial visit since the Kazan meeting, and part of a number of exchanges to restore ties between the two countries. In June this year, China and India resumed the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra for pilgrims, and India has resumed issuing tourist visas for Chinese tourists. Both sides are also discussing the resumption of sharing river water data, as well as starting direct flights between India and China, which have been suspended since 2020.

Key Developments

1. Border Issue (LAC De-escalation)

- Jaishankar stressed that the de-escalation process at the LAC must move forward.
- Despite agreements, demobilisation and dismantling of border infrastructure (to restore pre-April 2020 status quo) remain incomplete.
- India links overall relationship progress with peace and tranquillity at the border.

2. China's Position

- Wang Yi highlighted global challenges such as "unilateral bullying" in trade (reference to U.S.).
- Pitched a framework of peace, prosperity, beauty, tranquillity, and friendship in ties with neighbours.
- Called for both sides to learn from "75 years of ties" and act as partners.

3. Bilateral Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

- Resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.
- Tourist visas for Chinese nationals restored.
- Talks on river water data sharing and direct flights (suspended since 2020).

4. Strategic Significance

- Meeting comes ahead of SCO Summit—platform for regional security and connectivity cooperation.
- Seen as part of post-Kazan normalization process after 4 years of border stand-off.

Broader Significance

- India's Stand: Any normalisation of ties is contingent upon resolving border tensions (clear continuity in India's stance since Galwan 2020).
- China's Stand: Keen to delink border tensions from broader cooperation (economic, trade, multilateral issues).
- Geopolitical Context:
 - Both nations face economic slowdowns and pressures from the U.S.-led bloc.
 - Regional forums like SCO and BRICS are crucial for both to project multipolarity.

Implications for India

1. **Security**
 - Border issue remains unfinished business, with risk of flare-ups if de-escalation stalls.
2. **Diplomacy**
 - Need to balance assertiveness on sovereignty with pragmatism in economic and multilateral engagement.
3. **Economy**
 - Despite tensions, China remains a key trading partner. Restoring limited exchanges may ease trade flows.
4. **Regional Balance**
 - India must navigate ties with China and U.S. simultaneously, without appearing aligned against either.

Way Forward

- Firm Linkage: Continue insisting that peace on border = progress in relations.
- Confidence Building: Expand people-to-people ties, tourism, river cooperation, flights to reduce mistrust.
- Strategic Autonomy: Avoid being drawn into U.S.-China rivalry, while safeguarding sovereignty.
- Multilateral Diplomacy: Use platforms like SCO/BRICS to push for rules-based regional order.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Border peace is the foundation of India-China relations. Critically analyze with reference to recent developments. **(150 Words)**



The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reported that India's unemployment rate declined to 5.2% in July 2025 from 5.6% in June 2025. This is accompanied by a rise in female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and improvement in the Worker Population Ratio (WPR). While the numbers indicate a positive trend, deeper analysis reveals persistent structural challenges in India's labour market.

Key Findings of the Survey

1. Unemployment Rate (UR)

- Overall: 5.2% (down from 5.6% in June).
- Rural: 4.4%, Urban: 7.2%.
- Women: Rural 3.9%, Urban 8.7%; Men: Rural 4.6%, Urban 6.6%.

2. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

- Overall: 41.4%.
- Women: 25.5% (up from 24.5%).
- Men: 57.4%.
- Rural Men: 78.1%, Rural Women: 36.9%; Urban Men: 75.1%, Urban Women: 25.8%.

3. Worker Population Ratio (WPR)

- National: 52% (up from 51.2%).
- Rural: 54.4%, Urban: 47%.

Analysis & Implications

• Positive Trends:

- Fall in unemployment rate suggests an improvement in job absorption, especially in rural areas.
- Rising female LFPR indicates a gradual but encouraging shift in women's economic participation.
- Increase in WPR points to more people being engaged in productive activity.

• Persistent Challenges:

- Urban unemployment remains high, especially for women (8.7%), reflecting structural barriers such as limited formal jobs, safety issues, and lack of flexible work options.
- Gender gap remains wide: LFPR of men (57.4%) is more than double that of women (25.5%).
- Quality of employment not captured: Many new jobs may be in low-paying informal sectors or underemployment.
- Rural LFPR and WPR improvements may partly reflect distress-driven employment rather than productive opportunities.

• Policy Relevance:

- Indicates the need for urban job creation, particularly in manufacturing and services.
- Need for women-centric labour policies (skill training, childcare facilities, safety, flexible jobs).
- Importance of tracking underemployment and informality beyond headline unemployment rate.

Unemployment rate declines to 5.2% in July: govt. survey

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The rate of unemployment in the country declined to 5.2% in July from 5.6% in June, shows the Periodic Labour Force Survey released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Monday.

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women showed a marginal increase to 25.5% in July from 24.5% in June. The LFPR for men stood at 57.4%, while for all persons, it was 41.4%.

The LFPR for men aged 15 and above in rural areas was 78.1% and for women, it was 36.9%. "In urban areas, the LFPR among females of age 15 years and above during July was 25.8% compared with 25.1% observed for males of the same age group," the survey noted.



The number of persons covered by the survey was 3,79,222 (2,16,832 in rural areas and 1,62,390 in urban areas). FILE PHOTO

The unemployment rate (UR) for persons aged 15 and above stood at 5.2%. In rural areas, it was 4.4% and 7.2% in urban areas. For women in rural areas, the UR was 3.9%. For men, it was 4.6%. For women in urban areas, the UR was 8.7% compared with 6.6% among men.

The Worker Population Ratio (WPR), which defines the proportion of those who are employed among the total population, in ru-

ral areas for persons aged 15 and above was 54.4%. In June it was 53.3%. The WPR in urban areas was 47% and at the national level, it was 52%, 0.8 percentage points higher than June.

The Labour Bureau surveyed 89,505 (49,355 in rural areas and 40,150 in urban areas) households and the number of persons surveyed was 3,79,222 (2,16,832 in rural areas and 1,62,390 in urban areas).

Conclusion

The decline in India's unemployment rate to 5.2% in July 2025 is an encouraging sign for the economy, reflecting gradual recovery in the labour market. However, the persistent urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and concerns about job quality highlight that India's employment challenge is more structural than cyclical. For sustainable growth, India must focus on creating quality jobs, enhancing female participation, and addressing urban employment vulnerabilities, aligning labour reforms with the broader vision of inclusive development.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: In the context of the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) reported in PLFS July 2025, which of the following is correct?

- (A) WPR is defined as the proportion of labour force among the total population.
- (B) WPR in rural areas was higher than in urban areas.
- (C) WPR declined at the national level compared to June 2025.
- (D) WPR measures unemployment in the working-age population.

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The recent PLFS data shows a decline in unemployment but highlights structural challenges in India's labour market. Discuss.(150 Words)



India's ethanol blending programme, which targets 20% ethanol-petrol blending (E20) by 2025, aims to reduce carbon emissions and curb dependence on imported crude oil. Ethanol, a biofuel derived from sugarcane, food grains, or lignocellulosic biomass, has been positioned as a clean and indigenous alternative. However, its adoption raises questions on scientific, technical, and economic grounds, particularly regarding efficiency, vehicle compatibility, and long-term sustainability.

Scientific and Technical Aspects

1. Production Sources

- Derived from molasses (C-heavy, B-heavy), sugarcane juice, broken rice, maize, or lignocellulosic waste.
- Fermentation converts sugars into ethanol using enzymes like invertase and zymase.

2. Fuel Properties

- Calorific Value: Lower than petrol → potentially reduces mileage.
- Octane Number: Higher → improves anti-knocking properties and combustion efficiency.
- Hygroscopic Nature: Absorbs water → risk of corrosion, clogging, and rusting in fuel systems.

3. Impact on Vehicles

- Modern BS-VI vehicles (with electronic control units) can adjust combustion parameters and adapt better to E20 fuel.
- Older vehicles (pre-2020 carbureted engines) lack recalibration capacity → more prone to mileage loss, corrosion, and higher maintenance.
- Government argues replacement of certain rubber parts is inexpensive, but industry experts highlight costly recalibration for older fleets.

4. Environmental Impact

- Ethanol brings additional oxygen into combustion → reduces particulate matter (PM), NO_x, and CO emissions.
- However, lifecycle emissions depend on feedstock used. Using sugarcane may raise water and land use concerns.

Comparisons and Lessons

- Brazil's Experience:** Transitioned gradually from the 1970s with strong research, subsidies, flex-fuel vehicles, and consumer readiness.
- India's Challenge:** Faster rollout, less preparation, lack of flex-fuel vehicle penetration, and high dependence on food crops for ethanol → raises concerns of pace and practicality.



The government procures ethanol from sugarcane-based materials like C-heavy molasses, B-heavy molasses, sugarcane juice, sugar, or sugar syrup, or damaged food grains like broken rice, maize, or cellulose and lignocellulosic materials, cottonseeds.

What does science say about the govt's ethanol blending plan?

The ethanol push echoes past global experiments. Unlike the most celebrated example, Brazil, which began decades ago in a studied manner, India's more rapid move towards blending has left drivers grappling with practical issues of mileage, corrosion, and higher service costs.

Prithvi Prakash

In 2020, the Government of India said it will move to 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025 with the two-pronged goal of curbing carbon emissions and reducing the country's dependence on foreign oil. While vehicles modified to be compatible with the new composition started rolling out in April 2023, the government's push for 20% ethanol-blended petrol (E20) has left the vehicle owners worried about the impact on their already old and ageing a range of maintenance costs.

Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, is a biofuel it is made from plant waste called biomass. Regular petrol is a hydrocarbon made from the fossilised remains of organic matter buried for millions of years. When mixed with a fossil fuel the petrol, ethanol acts as an oxygenate that helps the petrol burn better.

Making ethanol
Under India's ethanol-blending programme, the government procures ethanol either from sugarcane-based raw materials like C-heavy molasses, B-heavy molasses, sugarcane juice, sugar, or sugar syrup, or damaged food grains like broken rice, maize, or cellulose and lignocellulosic materials.

Molasses is a byproduct of sugarcane production. It is a thick, dark syrup about 40% rich in sugars that can be fermented but which can't be extracted further. C-heavy molasses is the final product of the sugar production process, with molasses content around 28-32%. B-heavy molasses is an intermediate byproduct of the same process and has a higher molasses content, ranging from 48% to 52%.

Ethanol is made from molasses by fermentation – using yeast enzymes to catalyse the breakdown of sugar molecules in the presence of water. An everyday example of fermentation is ginger soda. If you put ginger, sugar, and water in an airtight container for a few days, it becomes fizzy.

This is because the microbes in ginger feed on the sugar, releasing carbon dioxide, which makes carbonic acid with water. In the first step of ethanol production from molasses, glucose molecules in the syrup are diluted with water. They then break down into glucose molecules in the presence of yeast.

These glucose molecules further react in the presence of yeast to form ethanol and release carbon dioxide.

Producing ethanol from food grains and lignocellulosic materials also involves other processes that break them down to fermentable sugar first. Lignocellulosic biomass is plant matter with a high carbohydrate content and is usually composed of parts not used for food or feed. This biomass is rich in cellulose,

hemicellulose, and lignin.

Chemical nature, energy efficiency
Two factors are key to understanding ethanol's energy efficiency: the calorific value and the octane number. The calorific value of a fuel denotes its yield a higher calorific value means more energy. The calorific value of ethanol is significantly lower than that of petrol, so the fuel's overall burning efficiency should theoretically decrease. However, the government has maintained that the drop in fuel performance is not significant and that it is countered by a mix of other factors, including 'driving habits, maintenance practices such as oil changes and air filter cleanliness, tyre pressure and alignment, and even air conditioning load'.

The octane number is a measure of a fuel's resistance to engine knocking or having prematurely. Ethanol has a higher octane number than petrol. Thus, it has the potential to reduce the knock resistance significantly. However, because of its lower energy content, the amount of energy the engine can extract per litre of blended fuel decreases with increasing ethanol content.

This said, the drop in mileage drivers have raised concerns about won't be significant. Sudheer Kumar Koppil, a research fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said, "The compensation for having lower energy would be quite low when you are moving from E10 to E20," Koppil said. "It would be significant only when we shift to 100% ethanol. Most of the upside these days about the reduction in vehicular mileage is fuelled by many factors, which are difficult to assess."

In fact, experts said the thing to focus on here is ethanol's hygroscopic nature. That is, ethanol has a considerable tendency to attract and attach water molecules to itself. This in turn affects the vehicle's components and fuel performance in new ways.

Independent expert Nishu Varghese said the main concern is the increased possibility of corrosion. "Ethanol affects the rubber components of a fuel system, which are usually the piping, the fuel tank, the injectors, the filters, and the carburettor chambers. The combustion chamber and the engine block itself are not as affected by ethanol, but what is affected is the fuel tank, the rubber piping, and the injectors," Varghese said.

"Ethanol tends to attract water, so if the vehicle is not used overnight, water tends to collect in the fuel tank, which is corrosive to steel. This causes another problem too: rust particles mix with fuel and go into the fuel line and clog it," he added.

"That in itself will reduce the mileage. This is not primarily because of ethanol's thermodynamic properties but more because of the components, which are

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When the blending happens, it alters the stoichiometric ratio, i.e., air-to-fuel ratio, which in turn affects the speed of combustion and hence reduces the composition setting. However, one senior industry executive told *The Hindu* that vehicles that don't have electronic control units and injectors can't be made compatible with E20 as fuel. The executive said "about 95% of all vehicles until the rollout of the BS-VI emission standards (in April 2020) were not electronically calibrated, meaning they didn't utilise any electronic units with sensors to regulate the delivery and treatment of fuel."

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Critical Concerns

- Energy Efficiency: Slight mileage drop likely but not drastic (E10→E20).
- Vehicle Safety: Older vehicles face higher risks of corrosion and malfunction.
- Food Security: Use of food grains like maize/rice for ethanol could strain food supply.
- Economic Cost: Recalibration, component replacement, and subsidies increase costs for both government and consumers.

Conclusion

India's ethanol blending plan reflects an ambitious push towards energy security and cleaner fuels. Science suggests that while mileage and efficiency losses are minor, the greater risks lie in corrosion, vehicle incompatibility, and sustainability of feedstock use. Lessons from Brazil show the importance of a phased approach, infrastructure readiness, and vehicle adaptation. To succeed, India must balance climate goals with consumer costs, food security, and industrial readiness, ensuring that the ethanol programme becomes a sustainable pillar of green energy transition rather than a disruptive burden.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to ethanol as a biofuel, consider the following statements:

1. Ethanol has a higher octane number than petrol.
2. Ethanol has a higher calorific value than petrol.
3. Ethanol is hygroscopic in nature.

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 :Ethanol blending is projected as a climate-friendly policy. To what extent does it balance the goals of environmental sustainability, food security, and economic costs?(150 Words)

The Alaska Summit (August 15, 2025) between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin has revived global debate on the Russia–Ukraine conflict, U.S.–Russia rapprochement, and the role of major powers. For India, however, the meeting has created more anxieties than opportunities. Despite India's stakes in stable U.S.–Russia relations, the summit outcomes did little to ease India's diplomatic vulnerability — caught between two of its closest but competing partners.

India's Expectations vs. Outcomes

1. Energy and Sanctions

- India hoped for relief from secondary U.S. sanctions (25%) imposed for buying Russian oil.
- Instead, U.S. statements reinforced sanctions, linking them to India's "funding of Putin's war machine."
- Double tariffs (reciprocal 25%) remain intact, hurting Indian trade competitiveness.

2. Trade & Market Access

- No progress on stalled India–U.S. trade talks, still held hostage to the Russia oil issue.

3. Narrative over Operation Sindoor (May 2025)

- Trump publicly claimed credit for mediating the India–Pakistan ceasefire, contradicting New Delhi's narrative of success.
- This has created friction and dented India's diplomatic position.

4. Geopolitical Signaling

- While U.S.–Russia warmth benefits Moscow, India faced continued pressure and skepticism from Washington.
- China's larger imports of Russian oil were overlooked by the U.S., showing India was selectively targeted.

Alaskan winds, India and the Trump-Putin summit

The "Alaska Moment" between United States President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 15, 2025 will translate to other objectives for Ukraine as Mr. Trump engages with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders, leading up to a possible trilateral summit in a quest for the end of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. For New Delhi, however, the Alaska Summit did not yield the clear-cut outcomes many had hoped for before the meeting between the leaders of two India's closest friends. Nor did it help the peculiar sense of vulnerability that Indian diplomacy faced, of having so much at stake in a meeting while having so little agency in its results.

Broadly, the Narendra Modi government had hoped that a U.S.–Russia rapprochement would take off some of the pressure from the U.S. India has felt over its ties with Russia. However, while there was a visible warmth in the Trump–Putin exchanges, this did not result in a less chilling tone that Mr. Trump has had towards India. He has been taking India to task on a number of issues.

More specifically, hopes rose that the Alaska meeting would result in a rollback of the U.S.'s planned 25% secondary sanctions on India for buying Russian oil, the resumption of India–U.S. trade talks that Mr. Trump has held up over the Russia oil issue, and a subsequent revision of the 25% reciprocal tariffs already in place. In a severely wounded piece in the *Financial Times* ("India's oil lobby is funding Putin's war machine — that has to stop"), Peter Navarro, who is Mr. Trump's Senior Counselor on Trade and Manufacturing, virtually dashed such hopes, making it clear that the double tariffs were a "two-pronged policy" by the U.S. to "hit India, where it hurts", for both the Russian imports and for its curbs on market access.

No change in India policies
Nor was there any indicator that Mr. Trump would set up on the other pain point: his counter-narrative to the Modi government's account of Operation Sindoor (May 7–10) and how the ceasefire was achieved. Not only did Mr. Trump repeat that he has mediated the India–Pakistan ceasefire, using trade as a leverage to corral both sides, but he now adds that a nuclear conflict would have followed as both sides were "shooting down airplanes", a version at considerable odds from that of the Modi government, which has thus far conceded that it had no losses in the conflict.

Thus, the first takeaway from the Summit must be this: while Mr. Trump's re-engagement and bonhomie with Mr. Putin may help Moscow, it does not mean a revision of his policies toward India. In any case, the rationale behind the secondary sanctions on India is dubious, and more about power games than about punishing Russia. The U.S. has itself increased its trade with Russia since Mr. Trump came to power and China imports of Russian oil have been consistently larger than India's. Hitting India with sanctions while letting the Russian President and ignoring China's actions seems to indicate that the reasons



Subhashini Halder

for the U.S. actions lie elsewhere. Many have suggested that Mr. Trump has acted out of pique — upset that Mr. Modi ignored his claims to have mediated with the Pakistanis. Reports suggested that Mr. Modi also rebuffed U.S. moves for him to sit down with the Pakistan leadership in Riyadh or in Washington, and that the Modi–Trump call on June 17 was extremely acrimonious and awkward as a result. Mr. Trump's more obvious focus appears to be recognition for his peace-making efforts, and a possible Nobel Peace Prize, and the Modi government has already missed the bus to give him the credit for the Operation Sindoor ceasefire that Mr. Trump so clearly wants.

New Delhi must decide whether it wishes to jump through hoops for Washington, or whether it would be more sensible to step back and allow the Trump administration to do its worst before assessing a response and turn its energies to other parts of the world. There may be avenues to shore up India's options on trade relationships with Mr. Modi's upcoming visits to Japan and then to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meet, a possible visit to the U.S. for the United Nations General Assembly, and then South Africa for the G20 summit. There is also Mr. Putin's visit to India soon. The belated event for India–U.S. ties will be the upcoming Quad Summit (India, U.S., Japan, Australia) that India is due to host later this year. It is still unclear whether Mr. Trump will visit India, especially if no India–U.S. trade deal is done by then, and whether the Indian government will be in any mood to roll out the red carpet.

Returning to substance
The second takeaway should be a lesson in not allowing "Summitry" to overtake India's broader interests. For more than a decade, the "Modi mantra" of foreign policy has been about personal magic and chemistry, of dealing one-to-one with leaders of other countries, as his imprimatur on bilateral ties. As a result, visits abroad have been judged by the number of joint public appearances, handshakes and embraces as well as special honours and awards that are given to the Prime Minister, rather than the actual agreements and concessions between them. With China, however, the 18 one-on-one meetings between Mr. Modi and China's President Xi Jinping between 2014–19 did not generate the requisite understanding to forestall Chinese People's Liberation Army's transgressions along the Line of Actual Control and the Galwan clashes.

The visible warmth in the Trump–Putin exchanges did not result in a less chilling American tone towards India: the lesson for New Delhi is that it would need to take a firmer stance if it wants to get back its agency

ring around him in the White House, with few appointments being made on the desks that deal with India in the National Security Council or the State Department. In the good times Delhi and Washington have worked well, even without a U.S. Ambassador in place in India. But at present, it is clear that a senior envoy with a keen knowledge of India as well as the U.S. President's care are necessary to navigate the turbulence in ties.

Maintain a political balance

The third lesson of the past few months is that India must reclaim bipartisanship in diplomatic relations, and build and maintain ties on both sides of the political spectrum, regardless of which party is in power. In the U.S., the Democratic party establishment was unhappy about the Trump–Modi rallies because they were held just months before the U.S. presidential election in 2020, and India had to spend some time, subsequently, repairing ties with the Joe Biden administration. Four years later, this annoyed Mr. Trump, the Republican contender, especially as he left the contrast between the close personal bonhomie while he was in power and the fact that the Mr. Modi and his enclaves did not spend time with him when he was out of power, including during the three times Mr. Modi travelled to the U.S. in 2015, 2016 and 2019, to hold talks with Mr. Biden. Closer home, this bipartisanship has been proven to trip up India's ties in the neighbouring countries as well — Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives.

Fourth, Mr. Trump's penalties on India's import of oil, after the U.S. allowed, even actively encouraged the purchases before, show how fickle the global power can be and how futile it is for India to forego its principles in order to please a particular regime. India's time-honoured principle of only acceding to UN-mandated sanctions was broken in 2008 when the government bowed to Mr. Trump's threats of sanctions against Iranian oil, and then Venezuelan oil, possibly emboldening him to demand the same against the use of Russian oil this time. By accepting such unreasonable orders, India does not just risk economic losses in foregoing cheaper oil. It also becomes complicit in the U.S.'s foreign policy objectives that do not necessarily align with India's national interests. Conversely, when India resists such moves, it wins the support of others in the Global South. And while they object, western powers grudgingly accept India's strategic autonomy in these matters.

Finally, New Delhi must consider measures and countermeasures to deal with U.S. actions that hurt India's interests acutely — like the reciprocal and penalty tariffs that will make Indian goods far less competitive than those of its exporting rivals, curbs on U.S. manufacturing in the U.S. Getting back India's agency will require a firmer stance — one that is not buffeted by the winds in Alaska, at a summit meeting thousands of kilometres away from India.

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Key Lessons for India

1. Avoid Over-Reliance on Summit Diplomacy

- Modi's personalized diplomacy ("Summitry" and leader chemistry) has often yielded style over substance.
- Example: Despite 18 Modi–Xi meetings (2014–2019), India was blindsided by Galwan.

2. Reclaim Bipartisanship

- India's participation in the "Howdy Modi" and "Namaste Trump" rallies tied India too closely to U.S. domestic politics.
- Bipartisan ties are essential to sustain long-term diplomatic stability.

3. Stick to Strategic Autonomy

- By bowing to U.S. sanctions on Iran and Venezuela (2018), India compromised its principles and emboldened Washington.
- Strategic autonomy in energy choices enhances credibility in the Global South.

4. Prepare Countermeasures

Daily News Analysis

- India must explore options to offset penalty tariffs, trade restrictions, and remittance taxes.
- Diversifying partnerships with Japan, China (SCO), Russia, and G-20 partners can mitigate U.S. pressure.

Conclusion

The Alaska Summit illustrates how India's agency in global geopolitics remains constrained when great power bargains unfold. For India, the way forward lies in reducing dependence on the whims of one power, strengthening its principled stand on sanctions and energy security, and rebalancing ties across blocs. By shifting focus from personality-driven summitry to substantive, institutional, and multi-aligned diplomacy, India can safeguard its strategic space amidst shifting global winds.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: *The Trump–Putin Alaska Summit of 2025 exposed India's vulnerability of having stakes without agency. In this context, discuss how India can strengthen its strategic autonomy while managing ties with both the U.S. and Russia. (150 Words)*



Women's empowerment is often celebrated in India through symbolic gestures — awards, media representation, and recognition of successful leaders. However, true empowerment lies in enabling ordinary women, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, to stand against entrenched power structures without fear of social ostracisation, financial ruin, or systemic neglect. The case of a domestic help who stood firm in a legal battle against a powerful politician highlights the gap between rhetoric and reality in India's discourse on women's empowerment.

Core Issues Highlighted

- Superficial Narratives of Empowerment**
 - Focus is usually on privileged women in leadership roles.
 - Grassroots struggles of women facing abuse or harassment receive little sustained recognition.
- Systemic Challenges for Survivors**
 - After legal victories, survivors often face job loss, stigma, and economic instability.
 - Legal expenses and social isolation compound trauma, making justice a hollow victory.
- State and Institutional Gaps**
 - Existing legal aid remains inaccessible and underfunded.
 - Survivor rehabilitation frameworks are weak compared to schemes available for other victims (terrorism, industrial accidents).

The Way Forward

- State-funded survivor compensation schemes** – To cover legal expenses and provide financial stability post-trial.
- Dedicated legal aid cells** – Specialised survivor litigation support with professional advocates and forensic experts.
- Guaranteed employment pathways** – Quotas in government/PSUs for survivors of harassment and abuse cases.
- Psychological support & trauma recovery** – Structured access to counselling and therapy, funded by state and CSR initiatives.
- Institutionalising survivor expertise** – Appointing survivors as counsellors, mentors, and committee members under POSH to ensure empathy-driven grievance redressal.

What true empowerment of women entails

The trial of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna, tainted by every trick in the book that power can muster, from legal intimidation to procedural delays, could have been yet another grim entry in India's long and exhausting history of justice denied. However, this case was different because a 47-year-old domestic help, with no wealth, no political connections, and no media machinery at her disposal, refused to be worn down. She braved high-profile legal muscle, relentless attempts at discrediting her, and the quiet but crushing social pressures that compel victims to disappear into silence. She didn't disappear; instead, she stood her ground.

The language of empowerment India loves the language of empowerment. We put women entrepreneurs on magazine covers, we host conferences celebrating women CEOs, and we create awards to honour women leaders in politics, business, and culture. Yet, when a woman without privilege takes on the powerful in a court of law, we often treat her as a passing headline; not as a hero whose actions have fortified the very concept of justice. Our narrative of empowerment too often belongs to those who have the resources to recover from failure, the networks to cushion backlash, and the privilege to choose their battles. We rarely extend the same recognition and support to women whose fight is not for market share or boardroom representation, but for their very survival. Women like this domestic help are not just defending their rights; they are performing a form of public service. Their win strengthens the jurisprudence for every woman who will walk into a police station trembling, unsure if she will be heard. And yet, the moment the verdict is read, the applause dies down and the state, which was happy to bask in the optics of



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justice served, does little to ensure that these women can rebuild their lives. The women return to the same environment where abuse took place, facing retaliatory stigma, finding themselves jobless because it is "too much trouble" to employ someone who has been in court, or sinking under the weight of legal debts incurred during the fight. If governments, corporates, and civil society are serious about "women empowerment", they must provide these women structural support – legal, economic, and psychosocial – to ensure that victory in court does not translate into defeat in life.

The way forward We need state-funded survivor compensation schemes. Frameworks exist to provide financial compensation to families of crime victims in categories such as terrorism or industrial accidents, so why should a woman who has stood up against entrenched power, faced character assassination, and endured court battles not receive similar recognition and financial security? The compensation should be calculated not only to cover legal expenses but to secure a minimum period of stability. We need dedicated legal aid cells with special funding. Most women in such cases are bankrupted by the legal process. While legal aid exists in theory, it is woefully under-resourced and often inaccessible. States must create specialised survivor litigation cells with professional advocates, forensic experts, and victim support officers, funded on par with public prosecutors in high-profile cases. We need guaranteed employment pathways. Governments, public sector undertakings, and corporates should create direct employment quotas for survivors of legal battles against abuse and harassment. We need psychological support and trauma recovery. Survivors require structured access to

long-term counselling, peer support networks, and therapy sessions, funded by the state and supplemented by CSR initiatives. Trauma recovery must be treated as a right, not as a luxury. Most importantly, we must institutionalise survivor expertise. Women who have navigated intimidation, isolation, and legal complexity should be trained and appointed as counsellors for victims in police stations to guide them through the first and often most critical reporting stage; as mentors in community legal education programmes to demystify the justice process for other women; and as members of Internal Complaints Committees under POSH laws, where their lived experience can lend authenticity and empathy to workplace grievance redressal. This will not only provide survivors with income, but ensure that their courage is institutionalised, not forgotten. One might ask, why we should single out women like this? Why not simply improve the justice system for all? The answer is simple: they are fighting battles that, in the absence of systemic reform, remain exceptions. Supporting them visibly and meaningfully sends a signal to both potential victims and potential abusers that the state does not abandon those who resist, and that the cost of silencing them will only rise. Moreover, recognising these women's courage in concrete, life-changing ways reshapes our national idea of empowerment. Applause is easy; it costs nothing. But when a woman risks everything to hold a powerful man accountable, society owes her more than praise; it owes her a future. That future must be secured through a combination of immediate economic support, long-term professional integration, and the legitimisation of survivor voices in policymaking and institutional culture. Only then can we say that empowerment has been delivered, not just declared.

Women who fight for justice deserve more than applause; they deserve a future

Daily News Analysis

Critical Analysis

- The article underscores the **difference between symbolic empowerment and substantive empowerment**.
- Empowerment must move from **optics to outcomes** — legal victories should translate into economic security, social acceptance, and institutional integration.
- Survivor-centred policies will not only strengthen justice but also build public trust in institutions.
- However, such measures should complement **larger systemic reforms** in the justice system to ensure equity for all victims, irrespective of gender or background.

Conclusion

True women empowerment cannot be limited to boardrooms, awards, or token celebrations. It must empower the weakest voices — women without privilege, resources, or networks — who challenge entrenched power structures. By institutionalising survivor support through **legal, financial, psychological, and professional frameworks**, society can ensure that justice is not just delivered in courtrooms but also in everyday life. Real empowerment lies not in applause but in ensuring dignity, livelihood, and security for every woman who dares to resist injustice.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Applause is easy; empowerment requires systemic support." In light of this statement, critically examine the challenges faced by women survivors of abuse in India even after securing legal victories. Suggest structural measures to ensure true empowerment of women. **(150 Words)**



The path to ending global hunger runs through India

With global chronic undernourishment now on a downward trend, the world is beginning to turn a corner in its fight against hunger. The United Nations' newly released The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 reports that 673 million people (8.2% of the world's population) were undernourished in 2024. This is down from 688 million in 2023. Although we have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (7.3% in 2018), this reversal marks a welcome shift from the sharp rise experienced during COVID-19.

India has played a decisive role in this global progress. The gains are the result of policy investments in food security and nutrition, increasingly driven by digital technology, smarter governance, and improved service delivery.

Revised estimates using the latest National Sample Survey data on household consumption show that the prevalence of undernourishment in India declined from 14.3% in 2020-22 to 12% in 2022-24. In absolute terms, this means 30 million fewer people living with hunger – an impressive achievement considering the scale of the population and the depth of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transformation of the PDS

At the centre of this progress is India's Public Distribution System, which has undergone a profound transformation. The system has been revitalised through digitalisation, Aadhaar-enabled targeting, real-time inventory tracking, and biometric authentication. The rollout of electronic point-of-sale systems and the One Nation One Ration Card platform have made entitlements portable across the country, which is particularly crucial for internal migrants and vulnerable households.



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India's decisive role in the world's fight against hunger is a result of its policy investments in food security and nutrition

These innovations allowed India to rapidly scale up food support during the pandemic and to continue to ensure access to subsidised staples for more than 800 million people.

Now, progress on calories must give way to progress on nutrition. The cost of a healthy diet in India remains unaffordable for over 60% of the population, driven by high prices of nutrient-dense foods, inadequate cold chains, and inefficient market linkages. That said, India has begun investing in improving the quality of calories. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) school-feeding scheme, launched in 2021, and the Integrated Child Development Services are now focusing on dietary diversity and nutrition sensitivity, laying the foundation for long-term improvements in child development and public health.

New data in the UN report also shows progress the country has made in making healthy diets more affordable despite food inflation.

What is happening underscores a larger structural challenge: even as hunger falls, malnutrition, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies are rising. This is especially so among poor urban and rural populations.

The agrifood system needs transformation

India can meet this challenge by transforming its agrifood system. This means boosting the production and the affordability of nutrient-rich foods such as pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source products, which are often out of reach for low-income families. It also means investing in post-harvest infrastructure such as cold storage and digital logistics systems, to reduce the estimated 13% of food lost between farm and market. These losses directly affect food

availability and affordability.

In addition, India should further strengthen support for women-led food enterprises and local cooperatives, including Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), especially those cultivating climate-resilient crops, as these can enhance both nutrition and livelihoods.

India must continue to invest in its digital advantage to drive the transformation of its agrifood systems. Platforms such as AgriStack, e-NAM, and geospatial data tools can strengthen market access, improve agricultural planning, and enhance the delivery of nutrition-sensitive interventions.

A symbol of hope

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) notes that the progress of India in agrifood system transformation is not just national imperatives; they are global contributions. As a leader among developing countries, India is well-positioned to share its innovations in digital governance, social protection, and data-driven agriculture with others across the Global South. India's experience shows that reducing hunger is not only possible but that it can be scaled when backed by political will, smart investment, and inclusion.

With just five years left to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) on ending hunger, India's recent performance gives this writer hope. But sustaining this momentum will require a shift from delivering sustenance to delivering nutrition, resilience, and opportunity.

The hunger clock is ticking. India is no longer just feeding itself. The path to ending global hunger runs through India, and its continued leadership is essential to getting us there.

GS. Paper 02 International Relation

UPSC Mains Practice Question: "The path to ending global hunger runs through India." Critically examine India's role in reducing hunger and malnutrition globally, highlighting the challenges that remain in achieving SDG-2 (Zero Hunger). (150 words)

Context :

The latest **UN FAO report (SOFI 2025)** shows global undernourishment declining to **8.2% in 2024** (673 million people), reversing the pandemic-driven rise. A major driver of this progress is **India's improvement in food security**, where undernourishment fell from **14.3% (2020-22)** to **12% (2022-24)** — lifting 30 million people out of hunger. This success is attributed to reforms in the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**, **digital governance**, and **nutrition-focused schemes**.

Key Achievements

1. Revitalisation of the PDS

Daily News Analysis

- Aadhaar-enabled targeting, biometric authentication, e-POS, and real-time inventory tracking.
- *One Nation One Ration Card* ensured portability, benefitting migrants.
- Reached over **800 million beneficiaries** during the pandemic.
- 2. **Nutrition-oriented Schemes**
 - **PM POSHAN (2021)** and **ICDS** focusing on dietary diversity.
 - Increased affordability of healthy diets despite food inflation.
- 3. **Digital and Governance Innovations**
 - Platforms like **AgriStack**, **e-NAM**, and **geospatial tools** for market access, planning, and delivery.
 - Leveraging India's **digital advantage** to scale welfare programs.

Emerging Challenges

1. **Nutrition vs. Calories**
 - While hunger has reduced, **over 60% of Indians cannot afford a healthy diet**.
 - High cost of pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal products.
2. **Triple Burden of Malnutrition**
 - **Undernutrition, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies** co-exist, especially among poor households.
3. **Food System Inefficiencies**
 - **~13% post-harvest food loss** due to weak storage and logistics.
 - Inadequate cold chains and fragmented markets.

The Way Forward

1. **Agrifood System Transformation**
 - Boost production & affordability of nutrient-rich foods.
 - Invest in cold storage, logistics, and digital food supply systems.
2. **Support Women & Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)**
 - Encourage climate-resilient crops, cooperative models, and women-led food enterprises.
3. **From Calories to Nutrition**
 - Expand dietary diversity in schemes.
 - Promote pulses, millets, fortified foods.
4. **Global Leadership**
 - Share India's experience in **digital governance and food security innovations** with the Global South.
 - Contribute to achieving **SDG-2 (Zero Hunger)** by 2030.

Critical Analysis

- India has shifted from being a **food-deficit nation to a global anchor in food security**.
- Success in **digitised PDS** is a model for the developing world.
- However, the **nutritional challenge** (hidden hunger, obesity) requires systemic agrifood reforms.
- India's leadership will be central in shaping the **global fight against hunger**, both by domestic progress and by exporting policy innovations.

Conclusion

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India's progress demonstrates that large-scale hunger reduction is achievable through **political will, digital innovation, and targeted social protection**. Yet, the next step is moving from **"feeding people" to "nourishing people"**. With five years left for the SDGs, the article underscores that the **global pathway to Zero Hunger runs through India**, making its continued leadership vital for both national and global food security.

