

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Tuesday, 20 Jan, 2026

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The recent upward revision of India's GDP growth forecast by the International Monetary Fund to 7.3% for FY 2025–26 reflects the resilience of the Indian economy amid global uncertainties. This revision, outlined in the January 2026 update of the World Economic Outlook, places India among the fastest-growing major economies and broadly aligns with the Union government's own projection of 7.4%.

IMF upgrades India's growth projection to 7.3%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised upwards its estimate of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the current financial year 2025-26 to 7.3% from its earlier prediction of 6.6%.

Slower figure

This upward revision, the IMF said in its January 2026 World Economic Outlook update released on Monday, was primarily a reflection of stronger-than-expected growth in the third quarter, and "strong momentum" in the fourth quarter of the financial

Growth forecast

IMF says the revision reflected stronger-than-expected growth in the third quarter and strong momentum in the fourth quarter

- The Centre has predicted **7.4%** GDP growth for 2025-26
- IMF projects growth to moderate to **6.4%** in 2026 and 2027 as cyclical and temporary factors wane
- Inflation expected to go back to near-target levels of **4%** set by RBI, says IMF

■ Global economic growth projected to remain 'resilient' at **3.3%** in calendar year 2026 and at **3.2%** in 2027



year. "In India, growth is revised upward by 0.7 percentage point to 7.3% for 2025 [FY 2025-26], reflecting the better-than-expected outturn in the third quarter of the year and

strong momentum in the fourth quarter," the report said. "Growth is projected to moderate to 6.4% in 2026 and 2027 as cyclical and temporary factors wane," it added.

The IMF's prediction of 7.3% growth for 2025-26 is just marginally slower than the 7.4% the Union government predicted for the same period.

For the global economy, the report projects growth to remain "resilient" at 3.3% in calendar year 2026 and at 3.2% in 2027, largely the same as the 3.3% estimated for 2025.

These forecasts entail a small upward revision for 2026 and no change for 2027 as compared with the predictions made in the October 2025 World Economic Outlook. "This steady performance on the surface results from the balancing of divergent forces," the report said.

es," the report said.

"Headwinds from shifting trade policies are offset by tailwinds from surging investment related to technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), more so in North America and Asia than in other regions, as well as fiscal and monetary support, broadly accommodative financial conditions, and adaptability of the private sector."

On the inflation front, the report predicted that inflation in India is expected to go back to near-target levels after a decline in 2025 driven by subdued food prices. The Reserve Bank of India's target for inflation is 4%.

Key Highlights and Analysis

Reasons for Upward Revision

The IMF attributes the higher growth estimate to stronger-than-expected performance in Q3 and robust momentum in Q4 of the current financial year.

This suggests that domestic demand, investment activity, and services-led growth have remained buoyant despite global headwinds.

Medium-term Moderation

Growth is projected to moderate to 6.4% in 2026–27, indicating that some drivers of current expansion are cyclical or temporary.

For UPSC analysis, this highlights the importance of structural reforms—such as manufacturing competitiveness, labour reforms, and productivity enhancement—to sustain high growth.

India in the Global Context

Daily News Analysis

Global growth is expected to remain stable at around 3.2–3.3%, with divergent forces at play.

While trade policy uncertainties pose risks, investments in technology and artificial intelligence (AI)—especially in North America and Asia—act as growth drivers. India stands to benefit if it leverages digital public infrastructure and innovation ecosystems.

Inflation Outlook and Monetary Policy

The IMF expects India's inflation to return close to the target after easing in 2025, aided by subdued food prices.

This aligns with the 4% inflation target of the Reserve Bank of India, offering policy space to balance growth and price stability.

Policy Implications for India

The convergence between IMF and government projections strengthens macroeconomic credibility.

However, sustaining growth will require managing fiscal consolidation, external sector vulnerabilities, and employment generation, particularly for a young workforce.

Conclusion

The IMF's revised growth forecast underscores India's strong short-term economic momentum and relative insulation from global slowdowns. For long-term sustainability, the focus must shift from cyclical tailwinds to deep structural reforms, human capital development, and technology-driven productivity gains.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the World Economic Outlook (WEO) published by the IMF, consider the following statements:

1. It provides forecasts for global and country-wise economic growth.
2. It is released annually and cannot be updated mid-year.
3. It also discusses inflation and financial conditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (A) 1 only
- (B) 1 and 3 only
- (C) 2 and 3 only
- (D) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the factors behind the IMF revising India's GDP growth projection upward for FY 2025–26. What are the implications of the projected moderation in growth for India's economic policy? (150 Words)



Page 01 : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam

The Reserve Bank of India has proposed that the idea of linking central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS countries be placed on the agenda of the 2026 BRICS Summit. This move reflects India's growing interest in shaping global financial architecture amid rising geopolitical tensions and technological changes in cross-border payment systems.

Key Issues and Analysis

Background and Rationale

The proposal builds upon the 2025 BRICS Summit declaration in Brazil, which emphasised interoperability of payment systems among member states.

Linking CBDCs could reduce transaction costs, improve speed, and enhance transparency in cross-border payments, especially among emerging economies.

While the initiative may reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar, the RBI has clarified that it is not explicitly aimed at de-dollarisation, but at improving payment efficiency.

India's Strategic and Economic Interests

India has been actively piloting its digital rupee (e-rupee) since December 2022, with about 7 million retail users, indicating readiness to experiment at scale.

By promoting CBDC linkages, India seeks to internationalise the rupee, strengthen its fintech ecosystem, and play a leadership role within BRICS, especially as it hosts the next summit.

Global and Geopolitical Implications

The initiative could face resistance from the United States, which views BRICS-led alternatives as potentially undermining the dollar-centric global financial system.

Statements by U.S. President Donald Trump warning against bypassing the dollar underline the geopolitical sensitivity of the proposal.

Challenges to Implementation

Technological interoperability, common governance frameworks, and regulatory harmonisation among BRICS members remain major hurdles.

Include proposal to link digital currencies on the BRICS agenda, says RBI

Reuters
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended to the Centre that a proposal connecting the central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS countries be included on the agenda for the 2026 summit of the grouping, two sources have said. They requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly.

The proposal seeks to make cross-border payments easier, in a move that could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise. The RBI's recommendation builds on a 2025 declaration at the BRICS summit in Brazil which pushed for interoperability between members' payment systems to make cross-border transactions more efficient.

The RBI has publicly expressed interest in linking India's digital rupee with other nations' CBDCs to expedite cross-border transactions and bolster its currency's global usage. It has, however, said its efforts to promote the rupee's global use are not aimed at promoting de-dollarisation.

India will host the next BRICS summit later this year. If the RBI's recommendation is accepted, a proposal to link the digital currencies of BRICS members would be put forward for the first time. The initiative could irritate the U.S., which has warned against any moves to bypass the dollar. U.S. President Do-

Ease of payment

If the proposal is accepted, a plan to link digital currencies will be put forward at the 2026 BRICS summit in India

- The move could reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as geopolitical tensions rise
- While none of the BRICS members have fully launched their digital currencies, all five main members have been running pilot projects
- India's digital currency - e-rupee - has attracted a total of 7 million retail users since its launch in December 2022



nald Trump has previously said the BRICS alliance is "anti-American" and he threatened to impose tariffs on its members.

While none of the BRICS members have fully launched their digital currencies, all five main members have been running pilot projects.

India's digital currency has attracted a total of 7 million retail users since its launch in December 2022, while China has pledged to boost the international use of the digital yuan.

The RBI has encouraged the adoption of the e-rupee by enabling offline payments, providing programmability for government subsidy transfers and allowing fintech firms to offer digital currency wallets.

The RBI and the central bank of Brazil did not respond to emails seeking comment. The People's Bank of China said it had no information; the South African and Russian central banks declined to comment.

For the BRICS digital currency linkages to be successful, elements like

interoperable technology, governance rules and ways to settle imbalanced trade volumes would be among the discussion topics, one of the sources said.

The source cautioned that hesitation among members to adopt technological platforms from other countries could delay work on the proposal and concrete progress would require consensus on tech and regulation.

One idea that is being explored to manage potential trade imbalances is the use of bilateral foreign exchange swap arrangements between central banks, both sources said.

Previous attempts by Russia and Indian governments to conduct more trade in their local currencies hit roadblocks.

Russia accumulated large balances of the Indian rupee for which it found limited use, prompting India's central bank to permit the investment of such balances in local bonds. Weekly or monthly settlements for transactions are being proposed to be made via the swaps, the second source said.

Daily News Analysis

Past experiences, such as Russia accumulating large rupee balances due to limited convertibility, highlight risks in local-currency trade mechanisms.

Proposals like bilateral foreign exchange swap arrangements and frequent settlement cycles are being explored to manage trade imbalances.

Comparative BRICS Position

Although none of the BRICS members have fully launched a CBDC, all are running pilots.

China's push to expand the global use of the digital yuan adds another dimension, raising concerns among members about technological dependence and data governance.

Conclusion

The RBI's proposal to link BRICS CBDCs signals a gradual shift towards multipolar financial arrangements driven by technology rather than overt political alignment. For India, it offers an opportunity to enhance cross-border payment efficiency and elevate the global role of the rupee. However, success will depend on consensus among BRICS members on technology, regulation, and settlement mechanisms, making this initiative a long-term strategic endeavour rather than an immediate alternative to the dollar-based system.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : The proposal to link BRICS CBDCs is primarily intended to:

- (a) Replace SWIFT completely
- (b) Promote cryptocurrency trading
- (c) Improve efficiency of cross-border payments
- (d) Introduce a single BRICS currency

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques : Discuss how linking CBDCs among BRICS countries can transform cross-border payment systems. What are the key challenges in implementing such a framework? **(150 Words)**

Page 04 : GS II : International Relations

India and the United Arab Emirates have signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) for a Bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership, marking a significant step in deepening their strategic cooperation amid rising geopolitical and military tensions in the Gulf region. The agreement was signed during the visit of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to New Delhi, reflecting the growing convergence of interests between the two countries.

India signs Letter of Intent to elevate defence ties with UAE

The signing of the pact comes amid increasing Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen; the two sides also ink energy deal during UAE President's visit

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of growing military tension in the Gulf region, the United Arab Emirates and India signed a "Letter of Intent for a Bilateral Strategic Defence Partnership" on Monday. The Letter of Intent was sealed during the three-hour visit by the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, when the two sides set a goal of doubling bilateral trade to \$200 billion by 2032.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the UAE leader at the Palam airport and the two leaders discussed, among other issues, the situation in Gaza where U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan will be tested in the coming weeks as well as the protests in Iran. In a press briefing after the departure of the dignitaries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said



PM Narendra Modi with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan during a meeting, at the PM's residence in New Delhi. PTI

the two leaders also discussed the situation in Yemen over which Saudi Arabia's relation with the UAE has nosedived.

In response to a question on whether the India-UAE strategic defence partnership could drag India into a future conflict scenario in the Gulf region, Mr. Misri said the Letter of Intent was aimed at the "work on concluding a framework agreement for Strategic Defence Partner-

ship". "So I would really characterise it as a natural evolution from the already considerable defence cooperation between the two countries and not necessarily a response to any specific event that may have taken place in the region or of any intent to get involved in a hypothetical future scenario in the region," said Mr. Misri.

There has been greater involvement of Pakistani military in safeguarding

Saudi defence and security interests in the Arabian peninsula and especially in Yemen. The Saudi-Pakistan defence cooperation has intensified since the two countries signed a mutual defence agreement on September 17, 2025.

The Saudi-Pakistan military alliance has been active in the Yemen theatre and that has increased pressure on the UAE.

During the brief visit, the two sides also signed an energy deal involving the Hindustan Petroleum Company Ltd (HPCL) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Gas (ADNOC) that will allow purchase of 0.5 Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMPA) LNG by the HPCL from ADNOC over 10 years starting from 2028.

Another Letter of Intent was signed between the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre and the Space Agency of the UAE for the development of space industry in the UAE.

Key Dimensions and Analysis

Strategic Context and Regional Security

The LoI comes against the backdrop of increasing instability in West Asia, including conflicts in Gaza, Yemen, and internal unrest in Iran.

Intensifying Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence cooperation, particularly after their 2025 mutual defence agreement and involvement in Yemen, has altered the regional balance, indirectly affecting UAE's security calculus.

Daily News Analysis

In this context, closer India–UAE defence ties provide Abu Dhabi with strategic diversification while enhancing India's footprint in the Gulf.

Nature of the Defence Partnership

According to India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, the Lol is not a military alliance but a step towards a framework agreement for structured defence cooperation.

It represents continuity and institutionalisation of existing cooperation in areas such as military exercises, defence industry collaboration, maritime security, and information sharing.

Importantly, India has clarified that the partnership does not imply automatic involvement in regional conflicts, aligning with its policy of strategic autonomy.

Economic and Energy Dimensions

Alongside defence cooperation, both countries set an ambitious target of doubling bilateral trade to \$200 billion by 2032, underlining the comprehensive nature of the partnership.

An energy deal between Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company will enable India to import 0.5 MMTPA of LNG for 10 years from 2028, strengthening India's long-term energy security.

Strategic Cooperation Beyond Defence

A separate Lol between India's space regulatory body and the UAE Space Agency highlights expanding cooperation in space and high-technology sectors.

This reflects India's broader West Asia policy that integrates defence, energy, technology, and diaspora interests rather than focusing solely on security.

Implications for India's Foreign Policy

The agreement reinforces India's image as a reliable and non-aligned strategic partner in the Gulf, distinct from bloc-based military alliances.

It also supports India's "Act West" policy, balancing relations with competing regional powers while safeguarding its economic and strategic interests.

Conclusion

The India–UAE Letter of Intent on strategic defence partnership signifies a measured yet meaningful elevation of bilateral ties in a volatile regional environment. By combining defence cooperation with energy security, trade expansion, and space collaboration, India is pursuing a multi-dimensional and autonomous engagement strategy in West Asia.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India and the United Arab Emirates have signed a Letter of Intent to elevate their defence cooperation to a Strategic Defence Partnership. (150 words)

Page 06 : GS II : Polity & Governance / Prelims Exam

India is set to host the inaugural India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM), 2026, positioning itself as a global hub for dialogue on democratic governance and electoral integrity. Organised by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management under the aegis of the Election Commission of India, the conference reflects India's intent to share its electoral experience and institutional best practices with the world.

EC to host international conference on election management, democracy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Around a 100 delegates from over 70 countries will take part in the inaugural India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM), 2026 that will be held in the national capital this week.

The three-day conference, being organised by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), a body under the Election Commission of India (EC), is expected to be the largest global conference of its kind hosted by India in the field of democracy and election management.

It is being held at Bharat Mandapam from January 21 to 23. Nearly 100 international delegates, representing over 70 countries from across the world, are



Nearly 100 international delegates, representing over 70 countries from across the world, are expected to participate. FILE PHOTO

expected, along with representatives of international organisations, foreign missions in India, and academic and practising experts in the electoral domain, the EC said in a statement.

The Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, will receive the

delegates and inaugurate the session on January 21.

The three-day programme includes general and plenary sessions for election management bodies (EMBs), besides thematic sessions focusing on global electoral issues, model international electoral standards, and innovations and best practices in electoral processes. A total of 36 thematic groups, led by

the CEOs of States and Union Territories and supported by national and international academic experts, will contribute to in-depth deliberations during the conference.

40 bilateral meetings

The EC will hold over 40 bilateral meetings with the EMBs for further discussions and cooperation on various challenges confronting them around the world. The commission will formally launch ECINET, the EC's one-stop digital platform for all election-related information and services.

An exhibition showcasing the magnitude and complexity of conducting elections in India, along with the recent initiatives taken by the EC to strengthen the two pillars of elections, preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections, will also be held.

Key Features and Significance

Scale and Global Participation

Nearly 100 international delegates from over 70 countries will participate, making it one of the largest global conferences on election management hosted by India.

Daily News Analysis

The event will be held at Bharat Mandapam from January 21–23, 2026, underscoring India's growing convening power in global democratic forums.

Institutional Leadership

The conference will be inaugurated by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi.

This highlights the proactive role of the ECI not only as a constitutional authority but also as a knowledge institution in electoral governance.

Substantive Agenda

The programme includes plenary and thematic sessions for Election Management Bodies (EMBs) on global electoral challenges, international electoral standards, and innovations in election processes.

36 thematic groups, led by State and Union Territory CEOs with academic support, will enable granular discussions on voter registration, election conduct, technology use, and trust-building measures.

Bilateral and Digital Initiatives

The ECI will hold over 40 bilateral meetings with EMBs, strengthening international cooperation and institutional learning.

The formal launch of ECINET, a one-stop digital platform for election-related information and services, reflects India's emphasis on digital governance and transparency in elections.

Soft Power and Democratic Diplomacy

An exhibition showcasing the scale and complexity of Indian elections and recent reforms in electoral rolls and election conduct will reinforce India's democratic soft power.

By sharing best practices, India positions itself as a norm-setter rather than merely a participant in global democratic discourse.

Conclusion

The hosting of IICDEM 2026 marks a significant step in India's democratic diplomacy. It reinforces the credibility of the Election Commission of India as a global leader in election management and showcases India's capacity to conduct large-scale, credible elections

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : The India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM), 2026 is being organised by:

- (a) Ministry of External Affairs
- (b) Election Commission of India
- (c) NITI Aayog
- (d) Inter-Parliamentary Union

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's hosting of the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) reflects its evolving role in global democratic governance. Discuss. **(150 Words)**



Scientists from Ulm University and University of Nottingham have reported the discovery of a new state of matter that behaves as a solid-liquid hybrid at the nanoscale. Published in ACS Nano, the study challenges the classical understanding of phase boundaries by showing that a single nanoparticle can simultaneously exhibit solid-like and liquid-like properties.

Core Findings and Scientific Significance

Nature of the New State of Matter

Unlike macroscopic slushes or gels, this hybrid state exists at the atomic level within a nanoparticle.

Certain atoms remain stationary (solid-like) while others remain mobile (liquid-like) at the same time, within the same particle.

This coexistence produces emergent properties that are not seen in conventional solids or liquids.

Mechanism: Atomic Corraling at the Nanoscale

Using high-resolution transmission electron (HRTE) microscopy, researchers studied nanoparticles of platinum, palladium, and gold placed on graphene.

Some metal atoms became trapped in the gaps of graphene's carbon lattice, remaining immobile even when the particle as a whole was in a liquid state.

When these stationary atoms aligned along the nanoparticle's boundary, they formed a "corral", enclosing a liquid core.

Departure from Conventional Phase Behaviour

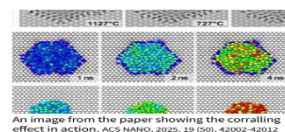
Due to this corraling effect, nanoparticles remained liquid at 200–300°C, far below the usual crystallisation temperature (~500°C).

On cooling, instead of forming an ordered crystal lattice, the particle solidified into a disordered (amorphous) solid, chemically identical but structurally distinct from normal metals.

This demonstrates that at the nanoscale, the solid-liquid boundary is diffuse rather than sharp.

Technological and Industrial Relevance

The findings are highly relevant for heterogeneous catalysis, especially platinum-on-carbon catalysts.



An image from the paper showing the corraling effect in action. ACS NANO, 2025, 19 (50), 42002-42012

New state of matter is a solid-liquid hybrid

Yasudevan Mukunth
CHENNAI

A new state of matter appears to be a solid liquid hybrid, scientists from Ulm University in Germany and the University of Nottingham in the U.K. have reported in the journal *ACS Nano*.

The newfound material is not a slush or a gel in the microscopic sense but refers to a specific atomic structure where different parts of a single nanoparticle exist in different states at the same time.

As a result, the nanoparticle displays the properties of solids and liquids both, but also unique behaviours that neither a pure liquid nor a pure solid would display on its own.

Conventionally, physicists assume the atoms in a solid are stationary while those in a liquid are moving fast and in random ways. The researchers sought to investigate the boundary between these phases at the nanoscale, specifically looking at how the presence of stationary atoms within a liquid nanoparticle influences the solidification process.

The most significant novel property the nanoparticle exhibited was the ability to remain liquid at temperatures far below the normal freezing point

The team used a technique called high-resolution transmission electron (HRTE) microscopy to observe nanoparticles of platinum, palladium, and gold deposited on graphene, and complemented what they observed with mathematical calculations.

This way the team found that even when nanoparticles are in a liquid state, they contain individual metal atoms that remain stationary because they are confined to gaps in the graphene's network of carbon atoms. When a large number of stationary atoms aligned along the perimeter of a nanodroplet, they would effectively corral the liquid core.

Under the HRTE microscope, the stationary atoms appeared as distinct and clearly demarcating features while the liquid core appeared transparent or blurry, since the atoms here were moving faster than the image capture time.

As a result, the nanodroplet could remain liquid at temperatures of 200–300°C, significantly lower than unconfined particles that crystallised only at around 500°C. The physical constraints also caused the supercooled liquid to not form a standard crystal lattice when it cooled. Instead it formed a disordered solid.

The findings suggest that the boundary between solid and liquid phases at the nanoscale is not as distinct as scientists have thought it to be.

The most significant novel property the nanoparticle exhibited was the ability to remain liquid at temperatures far below the normal freezing point. And when it did freeze, it formed a disordered solid that was chemically identical to the metal but structurally distinct from its natural crystal form.

This is relevant for scientists designing heterogeneous catalysts such as platinum on carbon. In fact, platinum on carbon is the primary catalyst in proton exchange membrane fuel cells and direct methanol fuel cells, which are used to power hydrogen electric vehicles and stationary power generators. In all these applications, platinum particles normally clump together or get poisoned and lose their effectiveness.

In a future catalyst, the researchers expect the corraling could pin the nanoparticles to prevent clumping while maintaining the active liquid or amorphous states, allowing catalysts to continue being effective rather than

Daily News Analysis

Such catalysts are central to proton exchange membrane fuel cells and direct methanol fuel cells, used in hydrogen vehicles and stationary power systems.

Normally, platinum nanoparticles lose efficiency due to clumping (sintering) or poisoning.

Corralling could pin nanoparticles in place, prevent aggregation, and maintain them in active liquid or amorphous states for longer durations.

Broader Implications

The study opens new avenues in materials science, nanotechnology, and condensed matter physics.

It may influence the design of next-generation catalysts, sensors, and energy materials where phase stability and surface activity are critical.

Conclusion

The discovery of a solid–liquid hybrid state of matter fundamentally reshapes our understanding of phase transitions at the nanoscale. By revealing that atoms within a single nanoparticle can simultaneously occupy different physical states, the study bridges a critical gap in condensed matter physics.



Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : With reference to the recently reported solid–liquid hybrid state of matter at the nanoscale, consider the following statements:

1. In this state, different parts of a single nanoparticle can simultaneously exhibit solid-like and liquid-like behaviour.
2. The phenomenon has been observed in macroscopic materials such as gels and slurries.
3. Atomic confinement on graphene can enable nanoparticles to remain liquid at temperatures lower than their normal crystallisation point.
4. When such nanoparticles solidify, they always form a regular crystal lattice identical to bulk metals.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans : a)



In a changing world, it is 'small tables, big dividends'

On January 26, 2026, Kartavya Path will send a signal that goes beyond ceremony. The chief guests at the Republic Day parade will be the European Union (EU)'s institutional leadership, representing a 27-member bloc rather than a single capital.

That break with tradition points to a wider truth about 2026. Bilateral diplomacy will remain demanding. The neighbourhood will require constant attention, and ties with Washington and Beijing will keep producing friction, from trade disputes to sharper strategic competition.

India's best openings may, therefore, lie in diplomatic white spaces. Think of them as gaps in global leadership. Problems need coordination, but no major power can credibly take charge. They are crowded rooms without a convenor. In such spaces, India can work through coalitions to shape rules and deliver global public goods, provided it chooses priorities that it can sustain.

Working with Europe

Europe is the first test. The presence of Ursula von der Leyen and António Luís Santos da Costa on January 26 signals the intent to push forward the long-pending India-EU Free Trade Agreement. While ties with Berlin, Paris or Rome matter, India's decisive engagement will be with the EU's collective trade, competition and climate policy. This is not only about customs duties. It is about market access rules, data standards and sustainability requirements. If India treats the agreement as a de-risking compact, the payoff is threefold. It strengthens access to Europe, positions India in reworked value chains, and offers some insurance against United States trade pressure. But it will raise compliance burdens for firms.

The European window is open because the EU wants to reduce exposure to China and hedge against U.S. unpredictability by deepening



Syed Akbaruddin

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With bilateral diplomacy remaining demanding, India's best chances lie in diplomatic white spaces

partnerships with India. Delhi needs to move quickly. Windows close.

The next is BRICS and the Quad

Europe is the technocratic test of India's white space diplomacy. BRICS is the political one. BRICS in 2026 is not what it was. Expansion has widened its reach but blurred its focus because members do not want the same things at the same speed. That raises the key question: what is BRICS actually for, and can India help define it?

The demands BRICS represents are real. Many members want a stronger voice for the Global South, fairer representation and credible alternatives in development finance. Yet, the group's direction is contested.

As chair and host in 2026, India can steer BRICS toward delivery through better use of New Development Bank guarantees and practical toolkits that turn communiqués into action.

External risks also matter. Washington's tariff threats against countries seen as aligning with BRICS raise the cost of careless signalling. India gains little by letting the group drift into anti-West rhetoric or a de-dollarisation crusade, which would undercut its effort to attract western capital and technology. India's task is to hold the balance. Reform is not the same as rejection.

The third white space is the Quad. If India hosts a Quad leaders' summit, it could be hosting U.S. President Donald Trump. That would add political weight and raise the stakes for delivery.

The Quad's agenda on maritime domain awareness and resilient ports matters to Indian Ocean littoral states that want capacity without being drawn into great power rivalries. India can make the Quad useful by turning capabilities into services that others can access.

India's Operation Sagar Bandhu following Cyclone Ditwah in Sri Lanka showed the value of having assets that can be retasked quickly without

diplomatic drama. Success, however, will depend on Washington managing trade differences with partners without disrupting broader cooperation.

All this underlines a hard truth about large forums. The United Nations remains essential for legitimacy and norm-setting, but it is a weak instrument for delivery when major powers are at odds. Outcomes are shifting to coalitions that can move even when the centre cannot.

The G-20 shows the same strain. In theory, it is the premier table for economic coordination. In practice, it is increasingly exposed to domestic politics and agenda fights. The U.S. boycott of the Johannesburg G-20 summit in 2025 and the push to narrow the agenda under the U.S. presidency in 2026 could sideline Global South priorities and make the forum feel less inclusive.

Amid global volatility, India's momentum in 2026 will come from turning white spaces into working arrangements. Europe is about standards, BRICS is about functionality, and the Quad is about public goods.

The message for India

The AI Impact Summit in Delhi (February 2026) is India's chance to get governments, companies and researchers together to bridge differences where interests overlap. As Washington experiments with new forums, including Mr. Trump's proposed 'Board of Peace' that is focused on peace building, Delhi will need to choose carefully. An invitation for India to join Pax Silica, a U.S.-led capability club for Artificial Intelligence and semiconductor supply chains, is reportedly in the works and shows how fast these new tables are multiplying.

In a divided world, it is rarely the biggest table that shapes the future. It is the smaller tables where things actually get done. In 2026, India's advantage will lie in making the tables that it chooses work.

GS Paper II : International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: How can India leverage its chairmanship and hosting roles in forums such as BRICS and the Quad to balance strategic autonomy with global partnerships? (250 Words)

Context :

In his opinion piece, former Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Syed Akbaruddin argues that India's diplomatic effectiveness in 2026 will depend less on grand multilateral forums and more on small, flexible coalitions where outcomes are achievable. The presence of the European Union's institutional leadership as chief guests at the 2026 Republic Day parade symbolises this strategic shift in India's foreign policy thinking.

Core Argument and Analysis

1. From Big Forums to 'White Spaces' in Diplomacy

Traditional multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the G20 are increasingly constrained by great power rivalries and domestic politics.

Akbaruddin introduces the idea of "diplomatic white spaces"—areas where global problems exist, coordination is needed, but no single power can credibly lead.

These spaces allow India to act as a convenor, bridge-builder, and rule-shaper, provided it chooses realistic priorities.

2. Europe as a Technocratic Opportunity

Engagement with the European Union is framed as India's first major test.

Progress on the long-pending India-EU Free Trade Agreement is less about tariffs and more about standards, data governance, climate regulations, and supply chains.

For India, such an agreement can:

- Improve market access,

- Embed India into reconfigured global value chains,

- Offer insurance against potential U.S. trade pressure.

However, higher compliance costs for Indian firms remain a challenge, underlining the trade-off between access and regulation.

3. BRICS: Political Balancing Act

Daily News Analysis

BRICS has expanded but lost coherence, as members differ in priorities and pace.

As host and chair in 2026, India has the opportunity to redefine BRICS as a functional platform rather than an ideological bloc.

The focus could be on:

Practical use of the New Development Bank,

Development finance tools that deliver tangible outcomes.

Crucially, India must avoid allowing BRICS to drift into anti-West rhetoric or overt de-dollarisation, which could harm its access to Western capital and technology.

4. The Quad and Delivery of Public Goods

The Quad represents another diplomatic white space.

Its value lies not in military posturing but in maritime domain awareness, resilient ports, and disaster response.

India's leadership during Operation Sagar Bandhu after a cyclone in Sri Lanka is cited as an example of how capabilities can be converted into regional public goods without escalating rivalries.

5. Technology and New Minilateral Tables

Emerging forums such as the AI Impact Summit (Delhi, February 2026) and proposed U.S.-led initiatives on AI and semiconductors highlight how issue-based coalitions are multiplying.

India must be selective, ensuring participation aligns with its strategic autonomy and development priorities.

Conclusion

The article underscores a critical shift in global diplomacy: effectiveness now lies in smaller, purpose-driven coalitions rather than large, consensus-bound forums. For India, 2026 offers an opportunity to convert diplomatic white spaces into platforms for rule-making, delivery of global public goods, and strategic balancing.