

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC  
CSE**

**Saturday, 04 April, 2026**

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**Page 01 : GS II : International Relations / Prelims Exam**

The bilateral relationship between India and Russia, traditionally described as a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," has entered a new phase of economic pragmatism. As global energy markets reel from the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict and the subsequent blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, India is actively diversifying its procurement strategies. The Manturov-Modi meeting serves as a preparatory step for the upcoming India-Russia Annual Summit and the BRICS Summit 2026 (under India's Chairmanship), focusing on insulating bilateral trade from external geopolitical shocks.

## Russia expresses readiness to boost oil, LNG supplies to India

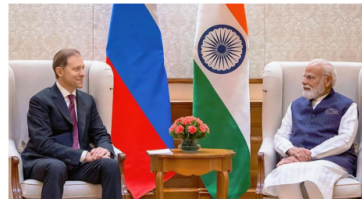
Russian Deputy PM Manturov discusses trade, fertilizers, connectivity, people-to-people ties with Modi; Russia cites 'particular attention' paid to cooperation in sectors like oil, gas; joint project for production of urea under development, says Manturov

**Kalol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Amid the oil shock and supply chain disruptions triggered by the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, Russia has assured that its energy companies have the capacity to "steadily increase" the supply of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India, and also "continue" to address India's fertilizer needs.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, on a two-day visit, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday and discussed the supply of fertilizers. "We discussed our mutually beneficial cooperation in trade, fertilizers, connectivity and people-to-people ties," said Mr. Modi, who "welcomed sustained efforts from both sides" to realise the agreements of the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit hosted here in December 2025.

The visit is being seen as part of the preparations by the two sides ahead of the



Narendra Modi interacts with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

upcoming BRICS summit to be hosted by India and the India-Russia annual summit scheduled in Russia this year.

According to the Russian embassy, Mr. Manturov said that Russia has increased supplies of "in-demand mineral fertilizers to India by 40% and is ready to continue meeting India's needs for this product".

He also mentioned that a joint project for the production of carbamide (urea) is "under development". "Particular attention was paid to cooperation in the oil and gas sector. Manturov con-

firmed that Russian companies have the capacity to steadily increase supplies of oil and liquefied natural gas to the Indian market," said the embassy readout. Mr. Manturov also met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and the leaders discussed continued energy supply to India.

In a press note, the External Affairs Ministry said Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Manturov "exchanged views on regional and global developments, including the conflict in West

### India-bound oil heads to China?

CHENNAI

Ping Shun, an Iranian crude oil carrier that had been showing it was heading to India, for three days after crossing the Strait of Hormuz, is heading to China, as per marine logistics and commodity markets analytics firm Kpler. » PAGE 11

Asia." Mr. Manturov said Russia will deepen nuclear cooperation with India. Other topics such as industrial cooperation, space and educational projects were discussed in the meetings.

Mr. Manturov's Delhi visit, which ended on Friday, took place days after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Mr. Jaishankar addressed a conference on bilateral relations through a video link on March 23, during which Mr. Lavrov indicated Russia's preparations for the annual summit.

Mr. Lavrov had expressed Russia's support

for the BRICS where India is the current Chair.

The group has attracted attention in recent weeks as it has not made a statement on the evolving situation in West Asia, though Russia, India and China, who form a trilateral subgroup called RIC, have indicated that they will work closely within BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UN on issues that affect common interests of the Global South.

This was followed by the March 30 Foreign Office Consultations between India and Russia led by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko.

This week, the Indian side hosted Vladimir Yakushev, First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council (Upper House) of the Federal Assembly of Russia. On Thursday, Mr. Yakushev met Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Harivansh Narayan Singh and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

### Key Pillars of the 2026 Discussions

#### 1. Energy Security: Beyond Crude Oil

Russia has moved from being a marginal player to India's top oil supplier over the last few years.

**Diversification into LNG:** While crude oil remains the bedrock, there is a strategic shift toward **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)**. With West Asian supplies threatened by regional instability, Russia has offered to "steadily increase" LNG exports to meet India's growing industrial demand.

**Strategic Resilience:** The assurance of steady supply helps India manage domestic inflation and maintain its energy-intensive economic growth trajectory.

## 2. Agriculture and Food Security

**Fertilizer Diplomacy:** Russia has increased fertilizer exports to India by **40%**, helping stabilize the Indian agrarian economy.

**Joint Urea Production:** A significant highlight is the development of a joint project for the production of **Carbamide (Urea)**. This aligns with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) initiative by reducing import dependency through Russian technology and raw material.

## 3. Strategic and Defense Cooperation

**S-400 Triumph:** Despite the threat of U.S. sanctions (CAATSA), India recently cleared the procurement of a fresh batch of **S-400 missile systems**, underscoring the "strategic autonomy" in India's defense policy.

**Civil Nuclear Energy:** Progress continues on the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (Units 3-6)**, showcasing long-term cooperation in carbon-neutral energy.

## 4. Multilateral Synergy: BRICS & RIC

**India as BRICS Chair (2026):** India is steering the expanded BRICS (BRICS+) to address Global South concerns.

**Global South Advocacy:** Through the **RIC (Russia-India-China)** framework, these nations are seeking to coordinate responses to the West Asia crisis, particularly focusing on maintaining open sea lanes and stable commodity prices.

## Challenges and Geopolitical Constraints

Despite the "time-tested" friendship, certain friction points remain:

**The "Shadow" Trade:** A significant portion of Russian oil is transported via "shadow tankers" to bypass Western sanctions. This creates logistical risks and potential secondary sanction threats for Indian entities.

**Payment Mechanisms:** Transitioning from the Dollar-dominated system to **Rupee-Ruble trade** remains a work in progress, with challenges in balancing trade deficits (India imports much more from Russia than it exports).

**West Asia Volatility:** The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz directly impacts the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, a project vital for India-Russia connectivity.

## Significance for UPSC

Aspect	Strategic Importance
<b>Strategic Autonomy</b>	India's ability to maintain ties with Russia while engaging with the Quad and the West.

## Daily News Analysis

Aspect	Strategic Importance
<b>Energy Transition</b>	Shifting from coal/crude to Russian LNG as a "bridge fuel."
<b>Connectivity</b>	The emphasis on the <b>Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor</b> as an alternative to the Suez Route.

### Conclusion

The visit of Deputy PM Manturov reaffirms that for India, Russia remains an **irreplaceable partner** in the domains of energy, defense, and food security. In an era of "polycrisis"—where war, trade barriers, and climate change converge—India is utilizing its "vocal but neutral" stance to secure its national interests. As India prepares to host the BRICS 2026 summit, its ability to bridge the gap between the West and the Eurasian powers will be the ultimate test of its "Vishwa Bandhu" (Friend of the World) foreign policy.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** The International North-South Transport Corridor connects India with:

- (a) Southeast Asia via South China Sea
- (b) Europe via Iran and Central Asia
- (c) Africa via Red Sea
- (d) Australia via Indian Ocean

Ans: b)

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Evaluate the role of Russia in ensuring India's energy security amid global supply disruptions. How does LNG diversification fit into India's long-term energy transition strategy?

**Page 01 : GS II : Governance / Prelims Exam**

The Great Nicobar Island (GNI) mega-infrastructure project, valued at ₹92,000 crore, is a strategic initiative aimed at transforming the island into a global maritime hub. However, a draft relocation plan for the Nicobarese and Shompen tribal communities has triggered a fresh wave of protests. The core of the conflict lies in the tension between national strategic interests—specifically maritime trade and defense—and the constitutional protections afforded to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and their ancestral lands.

**Plan to relocate Great Nicobar's tribal communities stirs fresh concern**

**Abhinav Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

A draft plan outlining the "relocation" of Nicobarese tribal communities affected by the Union government's Great Nicobar Island (GNI) mega-infrastructure project "to their ancestral lands" has created confusion and is exacerbating existing apprehensions among locals.

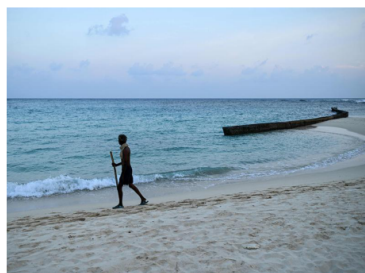
They have been, for four years, protesting the clearance for the ₹92,000-crore project after withdrawing their consent in 2022, alleging that their forest rights had not been settled.

This draft "Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan", prepared by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration and circulated on March 13 for consultation with line departments and the Tribal Council of

Great Nicobar, proposes a 42.52-crore outlay over 24 months for the "relocation of Nicobarese tribal communities from tsunami-affected or project-impacted areas", which involves housing, land development and basic infrastructure.

However, details of where the proposed relocation will take place and who will be relocated have left members of the Tribal Council of Great and Little Nicobar confused, according to Nicobarese community leaders who spoke to *The Hindu*.

They said they were handed a copy of the draft plan on March 28 and have since been called for two meetings by the district administration in Campbell Bay to sign off on it. This comes as the Union government told a Calcutta High Court Bench on March 30 that it needed 15



**Green concerns:** The draft was prepared by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration. AFP

days to "demonstrate that consent has been taken from the tribal people" for its project.

At a meeting on April 1, the Tribal Council submitted a letter pointing out that some aspects of the draft were unclear and requested a Hindi translation of it. They said they would need at least a month to re-

view the translated document.

Notably, while the draft plan states the GNI project "involves relocation", the Centre has repeatedly said the project would not "disturb or displace tribes".

**On ancestral lands**

According to a letter attached to the draft, the

plan was prepared after Tribal Council leaders demanded a return to ancestral villages on the west coast of GNI that were destroyed in the 2004 tsunami, after which communities were shifted to encampments in Rajiv Nagar and New Chingenh near Campbell Bay.

However, the draft plan states, "The project involves relocation to Rajiv Nagar (32 households, 101 persons) and New Chingenh (30 households, 117 persons)."

In a section, the plan proposes Pulobhabi for "community purposes" of residents in Rajiv Nagar, to "facilitate periodic visits to return to ancestral villages outside the project area. For New Chingenh residents, the plan records their desire to return to

Old Chingenh and Pulo Baha, but notes a final decision will be taken after assessing land availability and consultations, while their existing accommodations will be upgraded.

Further, the plan lists all enumerated families in Rajiv Nagar and New Chingenh (62 families in total) and then states: "Proposed relocation site: Pulobhabi, western coast of GNI".

The tables in the draft also add to the ambiguity: allocations are made for upgrading 62 homes and building only 30 new homes, while another section states permanent shelters "will be built for all 62 households" – neither part explicitly mentions where these homes would come up. District authorities have not yet responded to *The Hindu's* queries on what exactly the plan proposes.

A leader of the Tribal

Council said Pulobhabi is just one among several ancestral village sites, and the proposal lists only about 13 pre-tsunami Nicobarese villages when there are many more.

In New Delhi on March 20, Great and Little Nicobar Tribal Council chief Barnabas Manju had said the community has long demanded a return to all ancestral villages along the west coast since displacement in 2004.

Soon after the project was granted Stage-I clearance in 2022, the community withdrew their consent, fearing that it would encroach on their forest lands, including ancestral villages, preventing their return.

Council leaders say the apprehension has been exacerbated as the administration has not clearly explained project boundaries.

**Key Components of the GNI Project**

The project is a multi-sectoral development plan consisting of:

**International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT):** Aimed at capturing global shipping traffic currently handled by Singapore or Colombo.

**Greenfield International Airport:** To boost connectivity and tourism.

**Power Plant:** A gas and solar-based power station.

**Township Development:** To support the increased population and administrative needs.

**Core Issues & Conflicts**

## 1. The Relocation Paradox

The government maintains that the project will "not disturb or displace" tribes. However, the draft "Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan" explicitly mentions a **₹42.52-crore outlay** for the "relocation" of 62 households.

**Confusion over "Ancestral Lands":** The Nicobarese were moved to transit camps (Rajiv Nagar, New Chingenh) after the 2004 Tsunami. They want to return to their original villages on the West Coast. The new plan offers "Pulobhabi" as a relocation site, but leaders argue this is only one of many villages and the project boundaries may still block access to other ancestral sites.

## 2. Forest Rights and Informed Consent

Under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, the consent of the Gram Sabha (or Tribal Council) is mandatory before diverting forest land.

**Consent Withdrawal:** The Tribal Council withdrew its consent in 2022, alleging they were misled about the project's scale and the settlement of their forest rights.

**Legal Scrutiny:** The Calcutta High Court is currently monitoring whether genuine consent was obtained, placing the administration under pressure to demonstrate "meaningful consultation."

## 3. Ecological and Strategic Trade-offs

**Biodiversity:** GNI is a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**. The project requires felling nearly 10 lakh trees and affects the nesting grounds of the **Leatherback Sea Turtle**.

**The "Double Displacement":** The Nicobarese are facing a second displacement—the first was natural (2004 Tsunami), and the second is man-made (infrastructure project), leading to a crisis of cultural identity and traditional livelihoods.

### Analysis: The Governance Perspective (For UPSC)

Aspect	Challenge/Concern
<b>Constitutional Safeguards</b>	The islands are <b>Scheduled Areas</b> under the <b>Fifth/Sixth Schedule</b> logic; the GNI project tests the limits of "The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956."
<b>Strategic Importance</b>	Proximity to the <b>Malacca Strait</b> makes GNI vital for India's "Act East Policy" and surveillance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
<b>Environmental Ethics</b>	"Compensatory Afforestation" is being planned in Haryana for trees cut in GNI—an ecological mismatch often criticized by environmentalists.

## Conclusion

The situation in Great Nicobar highlights a classic "Development vs. Displacement" dilemma. While the economic and strategic arguments for the GNI project are robust, the lack of transparency in the "Tribal Welfare Plan" risks alienating the very communities it claims to protect. For the project to be sustainable and legally sound, the administration must move beyond "consultation by signatures" and ensure a Rights-Based Approach. Respecting the tribal demand for a return to ancestral lands, provided in a clear and translated format, is the only way to bridge the trust deficit and align regional development with social justice.

## UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 primarily aims to:**

- (a) Promote tourism in tribal areas
- (b) Protect indigenous tribes from external interference
- (c) Regulate shipping routes in the Andaman Sea
- (d) Provide land titles to private corporations

**Ans: ( b )**

## UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques: Critically examine the ecological implications of large-scale infrastructure projects in ecologically sensitive zones like Great Nicobar Island. How can sustainable development be ensured? (150 Words)**



**Page 03 : GS II : International Relations/ Prelims Exam**

The 6th round of Foreign Office Consultations in Baku represents a "thaw" in India-Azerbaijan relations after a turbulent year. Ties had plummeted following **Operation Sindoor** (India's 2025 military strikes on terror sites in Pakistan), which Azerbaijan condemned, and India's growing defense exports to **Armenia**. This reset signals that both nations are willing to prioritize "Realpolitik" and trade over divergent strategic alliances.

## India and Azerbaijan reset ties a year after Operation Sindoor row

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

After a year of tensions between India and Azerbaijan over Operation Sindoor, the governments decided to reset ties as senior officials met in Baku for the 6<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office consultations.

The talks, held between Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Secretary (West) Sibi George and Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov on Friday are the first such talks since 2022, and after major differences over Azerbaijan-Pakistan and India-Armenia relations.

In a statement, the MEA said the two sides "comprehensively reviewed" the state of bilateral relations. "The issues discussed included trade, technology, tourism, pharmaceuticals, energy, culture, people-to-people exchanges and fight against cross-border terrorism,"



MEA Secretary Sibi George and Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov during a discussion in Baku on Friday. ANI

the statement added.

Azerbaijan has recently resumed crude oil exports, which make up 98% of the country's exports to India, while ONGC Videsh has a stake in oil and gas fields and an energy pipeline in the country.

The reference to cross-border terrorism in the statement is significant as last year, New Delhi had been angered by Azerbaijan's protest of India's strikes on Pakistani sites during Operation Sindoor, and indicates that the two countries have smoothed

over some of their differences. In a statement on May 7 last year, the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry has "condemned military attacks against Pakistan that killed and injured several civilians," and called on all parties to "resolve the conflict through diplomatic means."

Azerbaijan and Pakistan have a close strategic partnership, given Islamabad's support to Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno Karabakh, while Azerbaijan accused India of arming Armenia in the conflict.

In September, during a meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev had also accused India of blocking Azerbaijan's ascension to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation membership.

"India has attempted to retaliate against Azerbaijan in international organisations, but stressed that this holds no significance for Azerbaijan, as brotherly relations take precedence above all," a statement from his office on September 1, 2025 said.

Sources said that during talks on Friday, the two sides had agreed to "resolve differences through open dialogue and discussion". Mr. George called on the Foreign Policy Adviser to President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov of Azerbaijan where they "reviewed the bilateral ties and exchanged views on matters of common interest".

### The Core Conflict: The "Two-Triads" Problem

To understand this reset, one must look at the opposing strategic blocks that emerged in the Eurasia region:

**The Baku-Islamabad-Ankara Axis:** Azerbaijan and Pakistan share a close military partnership. Pakistan supported Azerbaijan during the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict. In return, Azerbaijan has historically leaned toward Pakistan's narrative on the Kashmir issue and, more recently, condemned India's counter-terror operations (Operation Sindoor).

**The New Delhi-Yerevan Partnership:** To counter the above axis, India significantly increased its strategic footprint in **Armenia**, supplying indigenous weapon systems like the **Pinaka Multi-Barrel Rocket Launcher** and anti-drone systems. This led to accusations from Baku that India was fueling the conflict in the South Caucasus.

## Key Drivers for the "Reset"

### 1. Energy and Economic Pragmatism

**Crude Oil Supremacy:** Crude oil accounts for **98%** of Azerbaijan's exports to India. As India seeks to stabilize energy prices amidst global shocks, maintaining a steady supply from the Caspian Sea is vital.

**Indian Investments:** **ONGC Videsh** holds significant stakes in the **ACG (Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli)** oil field and the **Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC)** pipeline. Abandoning ties would jeopardize these multi-million dollar sovereign assets.

### 2. Addressing Cross-Border Terrorism

The inclusion of "cross-border terrorism" in the joint statement is a major diplomatic victory for India. It suggests that Azerbaijan may be softening its stance on India's right to defend itself, moving away from its May 2025 condemnation of Indian military actions.

### 3. SCO and Multilateralism

In 2025, Azerbaijan accused India of blocking its entry into the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**. By engaging in open dialogue, India is signaling that it is not inherently opposed to Azerbaijan's multilateral aspirations, provided bilateral sensitivities are respected.

### 4. International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

Azerbaijan is a critical "middle-node" for the INSTC, which connects Mumbai to Moscow. For India to bypass the volatile Suez Canal and reach Russian markets, cooperation with Baku on rail and road connectivity is non-negotiable.

## Significance for UPSC

Issue	Strategic Perspective
<b>Strategic Autonomy</b>	India is demonstrating its ability to engage with Azerbaijan while remaining Armenia's primary defense partner.
<b>Energy Security</b>	Diversification of energy sources beyond the troubled Persian Gulf.
<b>Counter-Terrorism</b>	Forcing a "Pakistan-ally" to acknowledge the threat of cross-border terrorism on paper.

## Conclusion

The India-Azerbaijan reset highlights the "**Issue-Based Diplomacy**" currently favored by New Delhi. While the two countries may never see eye-to-eye on the Nagorno-Karabakh or Kashmir issues due to their respective alliances with Armenia and Pakistan, the Baku meeting proves that economic interdependence and connectivity (INSTC) can provide a floor for the relationship. For India, the goal is to prevent Azerbaijan from becoming a permanent antagonist in the Eurasian heartland while safeguarding energy investments.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** With reference to the International North-South Transport Corridor, consider the following statements:

1. It connects India to Russia via Iran and the Caspian region.
2. Azerbaijan serves as a key transit country in this corridor.
3. It aims to replace maritime trade routes through the Pacific Ocean.

**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: a)**

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** India's simultaneous engagement with Armenia and Azerbaijan demonstrates its policy of multi-alignment. Critically analyze. (150 Words)

**Page 03 : GS III : Internal Security / Prelims Exam**

The Union Home Ministry has officially retired the term "Most Affected Districts," introducing a more nuanced, three-tier classification to reflect the near-total contraction of the "Red Corridor." This administrative shift follows Home Minister Amit Shah's declaration of a "Naxal-free" India, signaling a transition from active combat to long-term rehabilitation and "legacy" management.

## Home Ministry revises classification of districts affected by left-wing extremism

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has re-categorised the total number of districts affected by left-wing extremism (LWE) in the country replacing the earlier classification of "most affected" with "LWE affected," "districts of concern" and "legacy and thrust districts".

While the number of districts in the LWE category remains unchanged at 38 compared to 2024-25, the classification now reflects shifts in the severity of violence reported in these areas.

The red corridor has significantly contracted – from over 200 districts in 2005 to just two in 2026 – and its definition has also been revised.

On March 27, three days before Home Minister Amit



A skill and rehabilitation centre has been set up for former Maoists in Dantewada.

Shah declared in Lok Sabha that the country is now "Naxal-free," the Ministry reviewed the "categorisation of districts affected by LWE" and sent the fresh list to the Home Secretaries and Directors-General of Police (DGP) of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Od-

isha, Telangana, and West Bengal. While Bijapur in Chhattisgarh and West Singhbhum in Jharkhand are the only two districts that have been characterised as "LWE affected", Kanker in Chhattisgarh is a "district of concern", and there are 35 other "legacy and thrust districts" across nine States.

These districts are Alluri Sitaramraju in Andhra Pradesh; Aurangabad, Gaya, Jamui, Lakhisarai in Bihar; Bastar, Narayanpur, Kondagaon, Bijapur, Dhamtari, Kabirdham, Khairagarh-Chhuikhadan-Gandai, Mohla-Manpur-Ambagarh Chowki, Gariyaband, Sukma and Dantewada in Chattisgarh; Bokaro, Chatra and Latehar in Jharkhand; Balaghat and Mandla in Madhya Pradesh; Gadchiroli and Gondia in Maharashtra; Boudh, Sun-

dargarh, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Rayagada, Kandhamal in Odisha; Bhandradri-Kothagudem, Mulugu in Telangana and Jhargram in West Bengal.

Till November 2025, Bijapur, Sukma and Narayanpur, in Chhattisgarh were included in the category of "most affected".

"The categorisation of districts provides the basis for deployment of resources under various schemes. The evolving LWE situation necessitates a periodic review of the districts in order to ensure that the focus of anti-LWE efforts remains aligned to the ground realities," the Ministry said.

It added that the districts covered under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme have been comprehensively revised again.

### The New Classification System

The 2026 revision categorizes 38 districts across nine states into three specific functional groups:

#### 1. LWE Affected Districts (The Core)

**Definition:** Areas where active extremist presence and operational capability still persist, requiring high-intensity security deployment.

**Count:** Reduced to only **two** districts nationwide—**Bijapur** (Chhattisgarh) and **West Singhbhum** (Jharkhand).

**Significance:** This reflects a massive reduction from the dozens of "most affected" districts seen in the previous decade.

## 2. Districts of Concern

**Definition:** Districts where violence has dropped significantly, but the potential for revival or ideological resurgence remains.

**Focus:** Only **Kanker** (Chhattisgarh) currently falls under this category, acting as a buffer zone under close surveillance.

## 3. Legacy and Thrust Districts

**Definition:** Districts that have been cleared of active Maoist cadres but require continued state presence to prevent a vacuum.

**Count: 35 districts** (e.g., Gadchiroli, Bastar, Sukma, Malkangiri).

**Focus:** These are "Thrust" areas for the **SRE (Security Related Expenditure)** scheme, focusing on skill development, infrastructure (roads/towers), and rehabilitation of surrendered cadres.

## Evolution of the "Red Corridor"

The "Red Corridor," which once stretched from the Pashupati (Nepal) to Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), has seen an unprecedented shrinkage over the last two decades.

Year	Number of Districts Affected	Geographical Spread
2005	200+	Peak of the "Red Corridor" across 10+ states.
2015	106	Targeted operations like <i>Green Hunt</i> began showing results.
2021	70	Shrinkage to core pockets in Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
2026	38 (only 2 active)	Transition to "Legacy" management and rehabilitation.

## Strategic Significance

### 1. Shift from 'Kinetic' to 'Social' Operations

The new classification allows the MHA to divert funds from heavy weaponry and paramilitary deployment toward **rehabilitation centers** and **skill development** (as seen in the Dantewada model mentioned in the news).

### 2. Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Realignment

The SRE scheme provides 100% reimbursement to states for security-related costs. By re-categorizing districts as "Legacy," the government ensures that developmental funding continues even after violence stops, preventing the "Naxalite vacuum" where extremists return due to lack of governance.

### 3. The SAMADHAN Strategy

The success is attributed to the **SAMADHAN** doctrine (Smart leadership, Aggressive strategy, Motivation, Actionable intelligence, Dashboard-based KPIs, Harnessing technology, Action plan, and No access to financing). The 2026 re-classification is the ultimate "Action Plan" phase of this doctrine.

### Challenges Ahead

**Ideological Persistence:** Even if "Naxal-free" on paper, the underlying socio-economic grievances (Tribal land rights, forest produce) in "Legacy" districts must be addressed to prevent a 2.0 version of the movement.

**Inter-State Coordination:** As seen in Bijapur and West Singhbhum, the remnants are often located at the tri-junctions of states. Continued coordination between Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand DGPs remains vital.

### Conclusion

The 2026 re-classification represents a victory for the Indian state's internal security apparatus. By shifting the focus from "Most Affected" to "Legacy and Thrust," the government is acknowledging that while the war against LWE is largely won, the battle for **inclusive development** in these tribal heartlands has just entered its most critical phase.

### UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques :** The Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme is associated with:

- (a) Border infrastructure development
- (b) Reimbursement of anti-LWE operational costs
- (c) Urban policing reforms
- (d) Coastal security enhancement

**Ans: b)**

### UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Critically examine the effectiveness of the SAMADHAN strategy in combating Left-Wing Extremism in India. **(150 Words)**

Quality education

In March 2026, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) introduced key relaxations to the **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** framework. While the overarching goal remains the 100% collection and processing of plastic waste, the new rules allow "shortfall carry-forward" and "credit trading," signaling a shift toward **economic pragmatism** over strict environmental deadlines.

## Compliance eased for managing plastic waste

Companies that fail to meet their targets can carry forward the shortfall for up to three years; they can also meet their obligations by purchasing credits from others that exceed their targets

**Jacob Koshy**  
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India's latest amendment to its Plastic Waste Management Rules leaves headline recycling targets unchanged, but introduces a series of provisions that allows companies to shift their compliance deadlines.

These provisions include allowing companies that fail to meet their targets in 2025-26 to carry forward the shortfall for up to three years, provided they make up at least a third of the deficit annually. Prior to this, companies were bound to comply annually.

"The unfulfilled target for the year 2025-26 may be carried forward for three subsequent years starting 2026-27... provided that at least one-third of the unfulfilled target is met in each of those years, until the entire carried-forward target is achieved," says a gazette notification by the Environment Ministry dated March 31.

The rules also formalise a system of tradable certificates, enabling companies to meet their obligations by purchasing credits from others that exceed their targets. While this creates



The Rules require companies to collect and process the equivalent of 100% of the plastic they introduce into the market. K.V.S. GIRI

flexibility and may reduce compliance costs, it also means firms are not necessarily required to recycle their own plastic footprint.

Targets also do not apply where other regulations – for example, food safety standards – restrict the use of recycled plastic. This could exclude significant segments of packaging from the mandate, particularly in the food and beverage sector.

The 2026 amendment retains a phased set of targets for recycled content and reuse in plastic packaging, continuing the trajectory first introduced under the Extended Producer

Responsibility (EPR) framework in 2022, which for the first time specified collection targets for plastic waste producers and users of plastic packaging.

For 2025-26, producers and importers must ensure that rigid plastic packaging (Category I) contains at least 30% recycled material, rising to 60% by 2028-29. Flexible plastics (Category II) are subject to a 10% requirement in 2025-26, increasing to 20% thereafter, while multi-layered plastics (Category III) must meet a 5% threshold, rising to 10%. In parallel, the rules mandate reuse obligations for rigid packaging:

10% for smaller containers (0.9-4.9 litres), 70% for large water packaging, and 10% for large non-water packaging in 2025-26, with incremental increases over time.

Category 1 includes PET water or soft drink bottles or HDPE milk bottles/shampoo bottles. These are the easiest to collect. Category 2 includes Plastic carry bags/grocery bags, snack or chips packets (single-layer flexible film). Category 3 or multi-layered plastic, such as small cartons and foil snack wrappers, are the hardest to collect.

India's plastic waste rules require companies to collect and process the equivalent of 100% of the plastic they introduce into the market by 2024-25, marking the final phase of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rollout. However, there is no public evidence to suggest that this target has been fully achieved in practice. No comprehensive public dataset or official assessment demonstrates system-wide compliance, and much of the reporting continues to rely on self-declarations through a centralised portal.

### Key Changes in the 2026 Amendment

## 1. The "Three-Year Carry-Forward" Provision

Companies that fail to meet their 2025-26 recycling targets are no longer immediate defaulters.

**The Rule:** Shortfalls can be carried forward for up to **three years** (starting 2026-27).

**Condition:** Companies must fulfill at least **one-third (33%)** of the pending deficit each year.

**Impact:** This provides a "breathing space" for industries struggling with the infrastructure required for high-volume recycling.

## 2. Tradable Plastic Credits

The amendment formalizes a **market for EPR certificates**.

**Mechanism:** If Company A exceeds its recycling target, it can sell "credits" to Company B, which has a shortfall.

**Pros:** Incentivizes over-performance and creates a new revenue stream for efficient recyclers.

**Cons:** Critics argue this allows large polluters to "buy their way out" instead of reducing their own physical plastic footprint.

## 3. Food Safety Exemptions

The rules now explicitly state that recycling targets do not apply where other regulations—like **FSSAI food safety standards**—restrict the use of recycled plastic.

**Significance:** A large portion of Category I (Rigid) and Category II (Flexible) plastic used in the food and beverage industry may now be exempt from the "recycled content" mandate due to contamination concerns.

## Understanding the Categorization & Targets

The EPR framework divides plastic into three main categories with specific mandates for **Recycled Content** (using plastic waste to make new products) and **Reuse** (washing and refilling).

Category	Typical Examples	2025-26 Recycled Content Target	2028-29 Recycled Content Target
Category I (Rigid)	PET bottles, HDPE shampoo/milk bottles	30%	60%
Category II (Flexible)	Carry bags, snack packets (single-layer)	10%	20%
Category III (Multi-layered)	Foil snack wrappers, small cartons	5%	10%

## Strategic Analysis

### 1. Circular Economy vs. Ease of Doing Business

The amendment highlights the government's attempt to balance the **Circular Economy** (where waste is a resource) with the **Ease of Doing Business**. By easing compliance, the government aims to prevent industrial disruption while keeping the long-term 2029 targets intact.

### 2. The Data Gap and "Greenwashing"

A critical concern highlighted in the report is the lack of a **comprehensive public dataset**. Currently, compliance is based on **self-declarations** on a centralized portal. Without independent audits, the 100% collection target for 2024-25 remains a "paper target" rather than a proven reality on the ground.

### 3. The "Hierarchy of Waste" Challenge

By allowing credits for Category I (easiest to recycle), companies might ignore the harder-to-process Category III (Multi-layered) plastics, which are the primary cause of urban clogging and "everlasting" landfill waste.

## Conclusion

The 2026 Plastic Waste Management amendment moves India toward a cap-and-trade style system for plastic. While the flexibility is welcome for the post-pandemic industrial recovery, the "three-year window" and "food safety exemptions" risk diluting the urgency of the plastic crisis. For India to truly achieve its 100% processing goal, the transition from self-reporting to third-party verification will be the next crucial step in environmental governance.

## UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques: and Economy**The "shortfall carry-forward" provision introduced in 2026 implies that:

- (a) Companies must immediately pay penalties for non-compliance
- (b) Companies can defer their recycling targets indefinitely
- (c) Companies can carry forward unmet targets for a limited period with conditions
- (d) Companies are exempted from all recycling obligations

**Ans: c)**

## UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Evaluate the challenges in implementing plastic waste management rules in India. How can issues like data gaps and greenwashing be addressed? **(250 Words)**

## Page : 08 : Editorial Analysis

### GS Paper III: Disaster Management

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question:** Analyze the systemic and behavioral factors responsible for stampedes and suggest a multi-pronged strategy for ensuring safety at large public gatherings. **(150 Words)**

**Context :** Despite repeated "probes" and commissions, India continues to witness avoidable mass-casualty events during religious and celebratory gatherings. The Nalanda stampede (April 2026) serves as a grim reminder that crowd management in India remains reactive and experiential rather than proactive and scientific. Transitioning from "Crowd Control" (using force) to "Crowd Management" (using science) is now a national imperative.

### What is a Stampede?

**About:** A stampede is a sudden, uncontrolled rush of people or animals, usually triggered by panic, fear, or excitement, occurring in crowded areas and often causing chaos and casualties.

**Stampede Incidence:** The NCRB report 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India' states that from 2000 to 2022, 3,074 lives were lost in stampedes, with nearly 4,000 stampede incidents recorded over the past three decades.

**Cause of Death:** A major cause of stampede deaths is the "black hole effect." In dense crowds, physical forces create unpredictable "force chains" between bodies, so if one person falls, it creates a void, causing others to lose balance and fall.

### Lessons unlearned

Steps to manage crowds must be taught to organisers, police personnel

**A**nother stampede and another probe. India seems to have learned little about crowd management despite a series of stampedes in recent months. At the Sheela Mata temple in Bihar's Nalanda district on Tuesday, nine persons died, eight of them women, and a dozen were injured. On the occasion of the last Monday of the month of Chaitra, more than 10,000 people came to the temple, which typically sees only a few hundred devotees. Police say they had no forewarning of a large gathering, though many view their absence as a consequence of the bandobust requirements for the Nalanda University convocation, which was attended by the President of India that day. Priests had allegedly taken money for the special darshan and allowed the bribe givers through the exit, which became clogged. The entrance was practically blocked as people tried to get in. One death from a likely fall was enough to trigger panic. What happened was clearly avoidable, as are all stampedes that routinely occur in India. For instance, too many people trying to enter a packed stadium is a well-studied disaster scenario and lessons have been learned from it in many countries. However, the RCB victory celebration in Bengaluru, in June 2025, led to an avoidable buildup of the crowd in the city, which was then led into the already full stadium.

Crowd science and crowd management are well-defined subjects in academia in the developed world. While crowd science deals largely with planned gatherings, there is a whole body of literature on unplanned, spontaneous gatherings, which are often marked by emotionally charged crowds, such as celebrity sightings and religious events. The latter is typical in India and is driven by digital communities. Crowd management combines quantitative techniques with qualitative methods and theories. For instance, the science stipulates that if there are more than five people per square metre, movement will be constrained, requiring intervention. Qualitative methods, for example, include ruses such as installing mirrors to make people see themselves, reinforcing individual identity, which can be lost and lead to irrational, panic-stricken behaviour. Contrary to popular impression, expressive crowds gathering for religious reasons are open to leadership and guidance. In India, the police learn crowd control on the field and through experience shared by veterans, who discuss using mobile loudspeakers to calm crowds and maintain order through clear instructions. Crowd control and management must become subjects of serious academic study so that measures to prevent accidents are commonly known and implemented across India.

This domino effect leads to a pile-up, where people suffer compressive asphyxia under the weight of others.

During a stampede, crushing pressure on the chest prevents proper lung movement, causing hypoxia (low oxygen) and hypercapnia (high carbon dioxide), both life-threatening.

### The Anatomy of a Disaster: Nalanda Case Study

The Nalanda incident provides a textbook example of systemic failure:

**Intelligence Failure:** Police claimed no forewarning of a 10,000-strong crowd, despite the cultural significance of the "Last Monday of Chaitra."

**Resource Diversion:** VIP security (Presidential visit to Nalanda University) reportedly depleted the local bandobust, leaving the temple vulnerable.

**Administrative Malpractice:** Priests allegedly accepted bribes for "special darshan," allowing entry through exit points, which created a "deadly clog" (counter-flow).

**Trigger Event:** In a high-density environment, a single fall triggered a "force ripple," leading to mass panic and asphyxiation.

### Crowd Science vs. Crowd Control

#### 1. The Quantitative Threshold

**Critical Density:** Crowd science dictates that when density exceeds **5 persons per square metre**, individual control over movement is lost. At this point, the crowd behaves like a fluid; a push at one end creates a lethal wave at the other.

**The 2025 RCB Celebration Lesson:** Even in planned sporting events, allowing "spontaneous buildup" outside a full stadium creates a pressure cooker effect that traditional barricading cannot contain.

#### 2. The Qualitative Intervention

**Mirror Theory:** Installing mirrors in high-pressure queues helps individuals retain their **"individual identity."** In dense crowds, people often lose their sense of self and succumb to "herd behavior." Seeing one's reflection acts as a psychological brake on irrational panic.

**Communication:** Effective management uses "Information Bullets"—clear, calm instructions via loudspeakers—rather than aggressive whistling or lathi charges, which only escalate anxiety.

### What are the Key Causes and Impact of Stampedes in India?

Causes	Impacts
Immediate Triggers (rumors, sudden obstructions)	Stampedes result in sudden fatalities, severe injuries, and psychological trauma, while also generating grief and anger.

Systemic Failures (underestimating crowd size, poor crowd control, lack of preparedness)	These failures erode public trust in authorities, invite repeated scrutiny of safety protocols, and make it harder to implement sustainable reforms.
Behavioral Factors (panic spread, disregard for norms, star power, political influence)	Behavioral triggers cause uncontrolled crowd movement leading to trampling deaths, spark social unrest, and stigmatize mass gatherings or festivals.
Poor Infrastructure (narrow paths, blocked exits, slippery floors)	Increases the risk of falls and chain-reaction stampedes, causes critical injuries, and leads to economic losses as public participation in events declines.

### Fatal Stampede Incidence in India

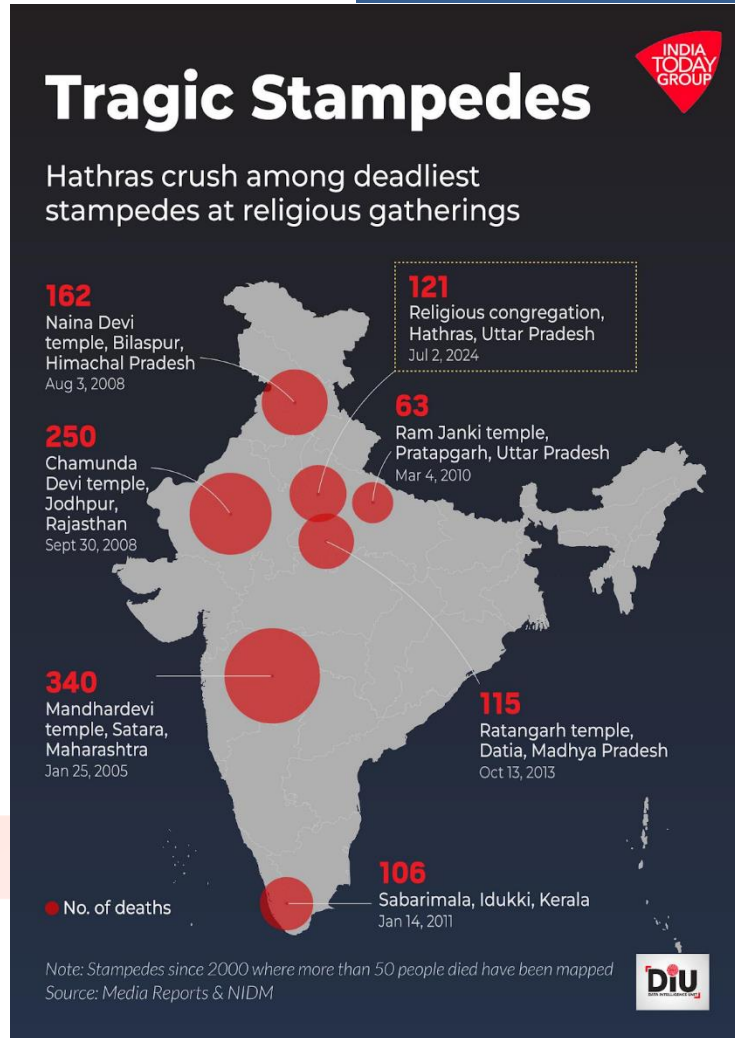
**Bengaluru (2025):** During the victory celebrations of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's, a massive crowd near M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru triggered a stampede, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries.

**Prayagraj (2025):** A deadly stampede broke out during the Mahakumbh Mela 2025, leaving several dead and injured as millions of devotees thronged for the ritual bath.

**Tirupati (2025):** A tragic stampede occurred at the token issuing counter in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, resulting in the multiple deaths and injuries.

**Hathras (2024):** At least 121 people, mostly women and children, died in a stampede during a religious event in Uttar Pradesh.

**Mumbai Pedestrian Bridge (2017):** 22 people were killed in a stampede during rush hour.



### Key Challenges in the Indian Context

Challenge	Impact
Digital Communities	Social media can mobilize thousands of people to a remote location (celebrity sightings/temples) in hours, outpacing police mobilization.
Experience-Based Learning	Indian police learn "on the job." While veteran wisdom is valuable, it lacks the technical precision of <b>spatial modeling</b> and <b>flow analysis</b> .
VIP Culture	Strategic assets are often diverted for dignitary protection, leaving public safety at religious sites under-resourced.

### Policy Recommendations (Way Forward)

**Pre-Event Planning:** Crowd estimation and capacity planning, safe site selection and layout design, and clear route planning with unobstructed entry, exit, and movement paths are essential to prevent stampedes.

**Structural Safety:** Install barriers and railings in zig-zag queues, provide for virtual queue and approximate waiting time, ensure safe entry and exit points with outward-opening wide exits, and maintain effective communication systems and mobile connectivity to manage crowds.

**On-Ground Management:** Implement crowd control and segregation with barricades, manage traffic and parking safely, use real-time crowd monitoring with CCTV and analytics.

**Building Awareness:** Promote public awareness of risks and safe behavior, conduct training and drills for all agencies, and provide clear detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for event management stakeholders.

**Emergency Response:** Provide on-site medical aid, deploy Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) for emergencies, and establish a clear Incident Command System for swift decision-making.

### Global Best Practices in Crowd Management

**Saudi Arabia:** After Hajj stampede, authorities used crowd simulations, restricted entry timings, and improved route planning.

**United Kingdom:** In the UK, Wembley Stadium, London has been designed with multiple exits and advanced evacuation systems to handle 90,000 people safely.

**South Korea:** In response to the Halloween stampede 2022, South Korea has deployed an advanced CCTV-based AI system to monitor crowd density in real time and provide timely warnings.

**Japan:** Japan has implemented timed tickets and staggered entry measures to prevent sudden crowding.

### How can Stampedes be Prevented in India?

**ICT Based Management:** Use AI-powered density analytics with CCTV, drone-based aerial surveillance, and mobile network & Wi-Fi heat mapping to monitor crowd size, flow, and bottlenecks in real-time for pre-emptive intervention.

**Managing Human Behavior:** Use visual and sound cues to calm crowds, train staff in crowd whispering to reduce tension, and provide safe spaces and pressure-release paths for emergencies.

**Build a Culture of Safety:** Launch public safe crowding campaigns with influential figures, enforce mandatory organizer certification on crowd management, and use crowd-sourced monitoring via hashtags or apps to report overcrowding.

**Strengthen Accountability Framework:** Enact a Crowd Safety Act defining organizer liability, require independent safety auditors for large events, and implement a national stampede database to learn from past incidents.

### Conclusion

Stampedes are not "acts of God"; they are organizational failures. The shift from seeing a crowd as a "threat to be controlled" to a "system to be managed" is the only way to break the cycle of tragedy. For a

country that hosts the world's largest gatherings (Kumbh Mela), India must lead the world in **Crowd Science**, ensuring that faith or celebration does not come at the cost of life.

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