

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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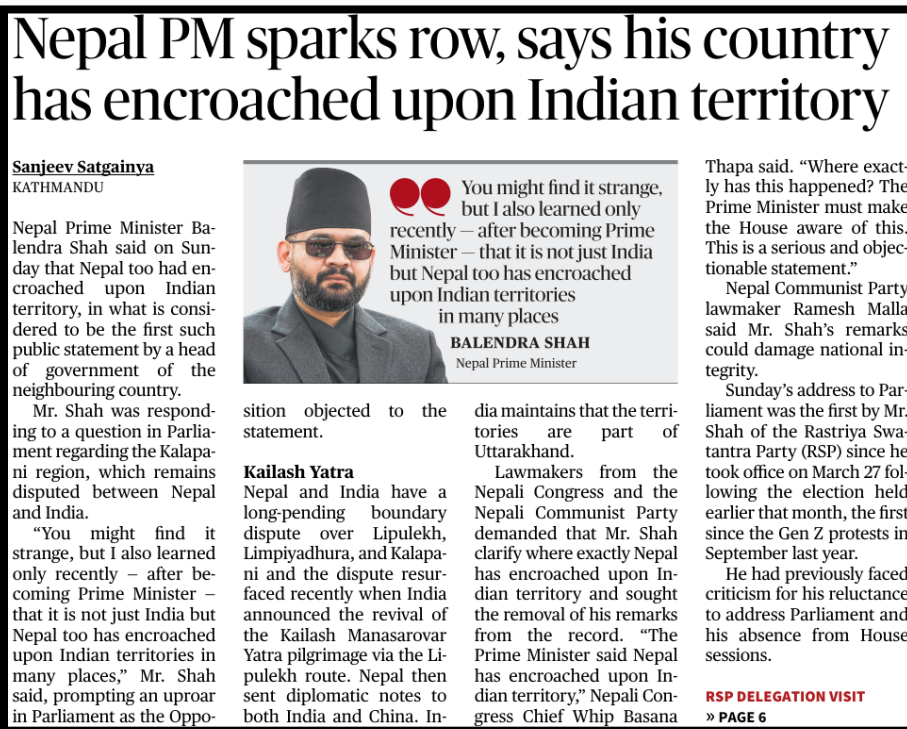
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Why in News?

- Nepal's newly elected Prime Minister Balendra Shah, while answering a question in Parliament on Sunday, publicly admitted that not only India, but Nepal has also encroached on Indian territories at many places.
- **Historical Context:** This is **the first such statement** made by a Nepalese head of state or head of government from a public forum, which has created a major storm in Nepal's political and diplomatic corridors.

Background and Political Context in Nepal

- **Uproar in Parliament:** Immediately after this statement, there was a huge uproar in the Parliament of Nepal. The main opposition parties—the **Nepali Congress** and **the Nepal Communist Party (NCP)**—have demanded an immediate clarification from the prime minister, calling the remarks "against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation".



Nepal PM sparks row, says his country has encroached upon Indian territory

Sanjeev Satgainya
KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah said on Sunday that Nepal too had encroached upon Indian territory, in what is considered to be the first such public statement by a head of government of the neighbouring country.

Mr. Shah was responding to a question in Parliament regarding the Kalapani region, which remains disputed between Nepal and India.

"You might find it strange, but I also learned only recently – after becoming Prime Minister – that it is not just India but Nepal too has encroached upon Indian territories in many places," Mr. Shah said, prompting an uproar in Parliament as the Opposition objected to the statement.

Kailash Yatra
Nepal and India have a long-pending boundary dispute over Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani and the dispute resurfaced recently when India announced the revival of the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra pilgrimage via the Lipulekh route. Nepal then sent diplomatic notes to both India and China. India maintains that the territories are part of Uttarakhand.

Lawmakers from the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party demanded that Mr. Shah clarify where exactly Nepal has encroached upon Indian territory and sought the removal of his remarks from the record. "The Prime Minister said Nepal has encroached upon Indian territory," Nepali Congress Chief Whip Basana Thapa said. "Where exactly has this happened? The Prime Minister must make the House aware of this. This is a serious and objectionable statement."

Nepal Communist Party lawmaker Ramesh Malla said Mr. Shah's remarks could damage national integrity.

Sunday's address to Parliament was the first by Mr. Shah of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) since he took office on March 27 following the election held earlier that month, the first since the Gen Z protests in September last year.

He had previously faced criticism for his reluctance to address Parliament and his absence from House sessions.

RSP DELEGATION VISIT
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- **Demand for deletion from parliamentary record:** Opposition leaders (such as Nepali Congress chief whip Basna Thapa and NCP MP Ramesh Malla) have demanded that the Prime Minister clarify where and which territory Nepal has encroached upon, otherwise this objectionable statement be removed from the official record of Parliament.
- **New Political Background:** Balendra Shah's party, **the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP)**, has come to power by winning the general elections held in March 2026 following the 'Gen Z' youth protests held in September 2025. It was his first address to Parliament as Prime Minister, which has put him on the defensive in domestic politics.

Key Points of India-Nepal Border Dispute

The entire dispute is mainly about the **Kalapaniregion** adjacent to Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, which includes three main parts:

Disputed Territories	Significance and Reason for Controversy
Kalapani	It is a strategic tri-junction between India, Nepal and China (Tibet). India has been in effective control here through the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) since the 1962 war.
Lipulekh	It is a mountain pass that connects Tibet to India. The controversy flared up again recently after the Indian government announced to revive the 'Kailash Mansarovar Yatra' from the Lipulekh route, on which Nepal sent diplomatic protest notes to both India and China.
Limpiyadhura	Nepal claims that the Mahakali river originates from Limpiyadhura, so according to the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816, this entire region should be part of Nepal.

Strategic Implications of this Statement

- **Softening of Nepal's stance or diplomatic blunder?:** So far, Nepal's official stand has been that Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura have been illegally occupied by India (especially after the K.P. Sharma Oli government included these areas in the new political map of Nepal in 2020). This statement of Prime Minister Shah weakens Nepal's traditional position.
- **Strategic Advantage for India:** India has always believed that these areas are part of Uttarakhand under the Sugauli Treaty. Nepal's Prime Minister's admission of encroachment in his own Parliament could strengthen India's stand in international forums and bilateral talks.
- **Pressure from domestic nationalism:** In Nepalese politics, 'anti-India' and border disputes have often been used as electoral gimmicks and to inflame a sense of nationalism. This statement of Balendra Shah has given a big weapon to the opposition to portray him as "weak or pro-India" domestically.

Way Forward

- **Meaningful Bilateral Diplomacy:** In order to defuse the dispute that has arisen after this unexpected statement and to de-escalate the actual demarcation of the border, the two countries should come to the negotiating table through established diplomatic channels and the 'Joint Boundary Working Group'.
- **Re-evaluation of historical evidence:** Joint technical study of the origin of the Mahakali River and the maps of the post-Sugauli Treaty should be carried out by both sides to find an amicable solution to this century-old dispute.

- **India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy:** India should maintain diplomatic restraint like a mature neighbour, away from Nepal's internal political turmoil, and ensure that the statement does not affect the cultural ties and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Conclusion

Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah's statement may be the result of his administrative immaturity or an unspoken diplomatic assessment, but it has opened a new chapter in the geopolitics of South Asia. For close friends like India and Nepal, the entanglement of border disputes gives an opportunity for external actors like China to make strategic inroads. Therefore, to protect the long-term interests of the two countries, it is imperative that they seek a lasting solution to the boundary through concrete, fact-based and peaceful dialogue beyond rhetoric.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: In the context of the Indo-Nepal border dispute, consider the following places:

1. Kalapani
2. Lipulekh
3. Limpiyadhura

Which of the above is/are related to the Indo-Nepal border dispute?

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

Answer: (d)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: The relations between India and Nepal are not only **diplomatic**, but also built on **historical**, cultural and social grounds. Test this statement in the context of recent border disputes. (150 words)

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court of India has issued notices to the Central Government, CBSE, and NCERT seeking **a comprehensive report on their logistical preparations to implement the three-language formula for Class 9 students** from July 1, 2026.
- **Court's Stand:** While hearing the petitioners' appeal on May 27, the court refused to immediately stay the policy (Immediate Stay), but acknowledged that the "inconvenience and hardship" it caused to the students needs to be reviewed. The next hearing will be on July 15-16.

CBSE's new circular and language rules

CBSE released a circular on May 15, 2026, which **is stated to be in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-SE) 2023:**

- **Compulsory Three Languages:** Class 9 students will now have to study three languages, out of **which at least two languages must be Native Indian Languages.**
- **Restrictions on Foreign Languages:** Foreign languages such as French or German can only be chosen as a 'third language' by students if the first two languages are Indian, otherwise they will have to take it as an optional 'Fourth Subject'.
- **Exemption from Board Exams:** To reduce the stress of students, the third language has been exempted from the Class 10 board exam. It will be evaluated through a school-level internal evaluation, although its marks will appear on the final certificate.

Key Challenges & Arguments against the Policy

The following are the main grounds behind the petitioners and academics challenging this policy in the court:

1. Constitutional and Legal Grounds

- **Violation of personal liberty:** The petitioners argue that the choice of language is a matter of personal choice and the state cannot impose it forcibly.
- **Lack of Parliamentary Law:** CBSE is an executive body. It does not have the legal authority to impose such a large and comprehensive educational mandate without a concrete statute of Parliament. NEP 2020 is only a policy intent, not a statutory law.

2. Administrative and Logistical Failures

Language decorum

School education should not be the site of a cultural battle

The Supreme Court of India has issued notices to the Union Government, the CBSE, and the NCERT, directing them to file a comprehensive report on their logistical preparedness to implement a three-language formula in all CBSE schools for Class 9 students from July 1, 2026. On May 27, while hearing petitioners challenging the CBSE move, the Court declined to grant an immediate stay on the policy but acknowledged that concerns over "hardship and inconvenience" warranted review. The Court will hear arguments on July 15 and 16. The casual manner in which the government is using the CBSE to enforce its contentious language policy once again shows complete disregard for students, teachers, and parents. On May 15, the CBSE had issued a circular mandating the study of three languages for Class 9 students from July 1, citing alignment with the NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023. At least two of the three must be native Indian languages. Foreign languages such as French or German could only be taken as a third language if the first two were Indian, or alternatively as an optional fourth subject. In a meagre effort to camouflage the hardship unleashed on the students, the CBSE exempted the third language from the Class 10 Board examination, which would instead be assessed through school-based internal evaluations, though the marks would still appear on the final certificate.

Barely weeks earlier, the CBSE had stated that the three-language requirement would be deferred until the 2029-30 academic year. The abrupt turnaround can only be explained as a political decision. The move is being challenged in the Court on multiple grounds, including constitutional ones. The petitioners argue that language is a matter of personal choice and cannot be imposed by the state. It is also being pointed out that the NEP 2020, in whose name the mandate is being enforced, promises flexibility and guarantees that no language shall be imposed on any student or State. The petitioners also argue that the CBSE, as an executive body, lacks the authority to impose such a sweeping educational mandate without backing from parliamentary legislation, regardless of what the NEP says, being an executive policy intent and not a statute. Parents and teachers are alarmed about the added pressure on students just before their Board examinations. School administrators have flagged a shortage of trained language teachers and the unavailability of appropriate textbooks. Turning school education into a cultural battleground is not helping India's ambition to become a global reservoir of advanced human resources. The Centre should course-correct before the Court takes up the case again.

- **A few** weeks ago, CBSE had said that this three-language requirement has been postponed to the academic year 2029-30. But all of a sudden, the decision to implement it from July 2026 without any prior preparation seems to be purely political.
- **Lack of Resources:** School administrations have made it clear that they suddenly have a severe shortage of qualified and trained teachers to teach the third language and the availability of appropriate textbooks is also not ensured.

3. Psychological Pressure on Students

- **Burden just before board exams: Students of** classes 9 and 10 are already under the stress of board exams. In such a situation, there is a lot of concern among students, teachers and parents due to the sudden burden of a third language.

Policy Contradiction

The article underscores that this move **is contrary to the original spirit of NEP 2020** itself:

- The National Education Policy 2020 explicitly promises flexibility in education and guarantees that no language shall be imposed on any student or state.
- But this decision of CBSE seems to be imposing a strict cultural agenda by ending that flexibility.

Conclusion & Way Forward

- **Education is not a cultural battleground:** Making schooling a cultural or political battleground will hurt India's global ambitions to make itself a global reservoir of advanced human resources.
- **Need for Course-Correction:** The central government itself should reconsider this policy before the final verdict is pronounced by the judiciary.
- **Suggestion:** Before any language policy is implemented, the infrastructure (recruitment of teachers, printing of books) should be strengthened and it should be carried out in a "gradual and voluntary" manner instead of "imposing", so that the future of the students is not exposed to politics.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: What is the basic purpose of the Three Language Formula?

- (a) Promoting only the English language
- (b) **Promoting** linguistic diversity, national integration and multilingual education
- (c) Implementing a uniform language in all states
- (d) Making the study of foreign languages compulsory

Answer: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Describe the key objectives of the three-language formula proposed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Discuss the challenges associated with its implementation. **(150 words)**

Why in News?

- Recently, a "Janjatiya Sanskritik Sammelan" was organized in Delhi by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated organizations—'Janjatiya Suraksha Manch' (JSM) and '**Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram**'. Union Home Minister Amit Shah was the chief guest at the event organized on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda.
- Central concern:** According to the author, this congregation is a well-planned attempt to change the original identity of the tribals, divide them on religious lines and divert attention from their actual water-forest-land crises.

The majoritarian shadow over Adivasi identity, faith

Last week, the Janjati Suraksha Manch (JSM) and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, both Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) progeny, held a conclave in Delhi – "Janjati Sanskritik Samagan" – attended by thousands of Adivasis from across the country. The stated occasion was the 150th anniversary of legendary hero Birsa Munda. In the vote of thanks, the organisers acknowledged the extensive official machinery behind the gathering – from the Railway Ministry to Union Ministers, Chief Ministers, and senior officials. With Union Home Minister Amit Shah as the chief guest, the event was effectively semi-official. This is precisely why the speeches, demands raised, and the Home Minister's response deserve far closer scrutiny than an ostensibly cultural gathering would normally invite.

The JSM's core agenda against Christian conversions is well known, its main demand being the delisting of all Adivasi communities that have converted to Christianity and the stripping of their constitutional and legal protections on the grounds that they no longer subscribe to Adivasi beliefs. The organisation has run violent campaigns in several States in central India, particularly Chhattisgarh, targeting Adivasi families who have converted to Christianity – campaigns that have gone so far as the forcible exhumation of bodies from graves on privately owned land belonging to Christian Adivasis in tribal villages. In February this year, in a case pending before the Supreme Court of India, the Court issued interim orders restraining such exhumations. Yet, these incidents continue under the patronage of Bharatiya Janata Party State governments.

A foundational distinction

At the conclave, the demand for delisting was framed with reference to the recent Court judgment upholding the Presidential Order of 1950, which holds that persons belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) who profess a religion "other than Hinduism" do not qualify for constitutional or legal benefits meant for SCs. The JSM's demand is that this principle be extended to Scheduled Tribes (ST) – a move that would require removing what one of its leaders described as "a weakness in the Constitution." What the JSM considers a weakness is, in fact, a foundational distinction: unlike in the case of SCs, neither the Constitution of India nor the law links the identity of STs to religion.

On the conclave stage, alongside portraits of Birsa Munda and a Hinduised image of "Bharat Mata", was a portrait of the late Karik Oraon – a Congress Member of Parliament who once filed a petition challenging the candidature of two members of the Oraon community from an ST-reserved seat on the grounds that they were Christians. The Patna High Court, in its ruling in



Brinda Karat
Senior leader
of the CPI(M)

1963, rejected his petition categorically, holding that "tribal identity is not religion-based," that it rests on ethnic and community kinship ties, and that "an Oraon remains an Oraon" regardless of whether he is Hindu, Christian, or Buddhist. The High Court further observed that, by and large, converted Adivasis continued to participate in community festivals and celebrations, and joined others in raising concerns common to all Adivasi communities. This judgment remains the governing legal precedent. The JSM seeks to overturn it, and its method for doing so is chillingly cruel: isolating converted families, forcibly preventing them from attending community festivals, and then using that coercively imposed exclusion as proof that converts have abandoned Adivasi culture, promoting their expulsion from traditional gram sabhas. Exclusion is engineered, then presented as evidence.

A campaign of cooption

Simultaneously, the JSM has been pushing the assertion that Adivasis belong to the broader "sanatan parivar". At the conclave, the organisation's national convenor declared: "They say Adivasis are not Hindus. What is this game? We are Ram's children – this is a conspiracy against us." Another leader proclaimed that "Adivasis exist in the shade of the great tree of Sanatan". The nature of the JSM's "ghar wapasi (homecoming)" for converts is unambiguous – functions marked not with Adivasi symbols but those of Hindutva. In the JSM's worldview, Adivasis are "vanasis" – forest dwellers defined by their service to Lord Ram, subordinate to upper-caste deities, and redeemable only through their blessings. The building of temples with Hindu idols in tribal villages, the rebranding of local deities as forms of Vishnu, Shiva or Durga, and the installation of Hanuman idols at village entry points are all part of this hegemonic cooption campaign.

Adivasis are fully entitled to choose their religion under Article 25 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience and religion. There are laws, some quite draconian, to deal with conversions which are "fraudulent". Adivasis may choose to be Hindu, Christian, or of any other faith. But whether an Adivasi worships Ram or Jesus has no bearing on their identity as an Adivasi; this is a fundamental constitutional principle. What cannot be accepted is the distortion of this principle to suggest that an Adivasi who worships Ram is expressing Adivasi culture, while one who worships Jesus is betraying it. Adivasis have long demanded formal recognition of the distinctiveness of their beliefs, of their worship of nature, their animist traditions and practices. The Jharkhand Legislative Assembly, for instance, adopted a resolution calling for a separate column in the Census

enumeration of religion for Adivasis to register their own beliefs, a demand reiterated by Adivasi intellectuals and numerous organisations across the country. But this has been unfairly ignored by the government, insulting Adivasi faith.

The urgent issues Adivasis face

It is this majoritarian agenda that Mr. Amit Shah endorsed going even further by describing the JSM's campaign as a contemporary "Ulgulan". Birsa Munda's Ulgulan was a revolt against colonial rule – and notably, he broke with Christian missionaries precisely because he saw them as instruments of that rule. Mr. Shah's political lineage, by contrast, never fought the British – it compromised with them. To invoke hero Birsa's name and the historic Ulgulan to legitimise a sectarian campaign against converted Adivasis is a grave betrayal of his legacy. Mr. Shah also declared that sanatanis too are nature worshippers, and that *jal, jangal, pahad* (water, forests, mountains) "is the centre of our beliefs".

His words ring hollow. Even as Mr. Shah spoke, tribal communities in Sijimali and Rayagada in Odisha were fighting to save their sacred mountain from bauxite mining operations approved by his own government. In the Hasdeo region of Chhattisgarh, thousands of Adivasis have spent years fighting against their forests being handed over to private mining companies – forests that were previously declared a "no-go zone," until the current regime decided otherwise. Lakhs of trees have been felled against the decisions of the gram sabhas, among them the *sal* and *karam*, the sacred trees around which Adivasi festivals and rituals are organised. The nature worshippers in Delhi have been remarkably efficient destroyers of nature.

The urgent issues before Adivasis are the sabotage of the Forest Rights Act, the virtual elimination of the rights of the gram sabha, the subversion of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas), or PESA, the huge backlog in employment in reserved posts, the pathetic condition of Adivasi student hostels and arrears in scholarship payments, and the continuing lack of civic and health facilities in Adivasi areas, to name a few. And through all of this – not once, not in a single instance – has the JSM raised its voice in defence of Adivasi rights against government-enabled corporate takeovers of *jal, jangal, and zameen*. On the contrary, by splitting Adivasi communities along religious lines, it has served the interests of the very companies that are dispossessing them. Dividing the dispossessed is, after all, the oldest trick in the book.

For those committed to the defence of Adivasi rights, the JSM gathering and the Home Minister's endorsement are indications of the challenges ahead, which can and must be met by the united will of Adivasi resistance and democratic forces in the spirit of the great Adivasi heroes.

Key Disputes: Demand for 'Delisting' and Constitutional Provisions

- Demand of JSM:** The main agenda of the Tribal Protection Forum (JSM) is to '**delisting**' the tribals who have converted to Christianity. The organization demands that the converted tribals be deprived of the constitutional and legal benefits (reservation etc.) available to the Scheduled Tribes (STs).

- **Constitutional Difference (SC vs. ST):** The JSM cites the 1950 Presidential Order in support of this demand, which states that if a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC) adopts a religion other than Hindu (or Sikh/Buddhist), he is not entitled to the benefits of the SC.
- **Basic Spirit of the Constitution:** The author clarifies that the identity of **STs (Scheduled Tribes) is not linked to any religion in the Indian Constitution**. Aboriginal identity depends on their ethnicity, culture, and community solidarity, not on their personal religion.

Diplomatic and Legal Precedent

- **Historic decision of Patna High Court (1963):** Congress MP Kartik Oraon had challenged the candidature of Oraon tribals who had converted to Christianity. The Patna High Court had rejected it and ruled that:

"Aboriginal identity is not religion-based. An Oraon person remains Oraon, whether he is a Hindu, Christian or Buddhist. "

- **Engineered Exclusion:** The author alleges that the JSM forcibly separates converted tribal families from community festivals and then uses this separation as evidence to claim that they have abandoned their culture. There have also been violent incidents like exhuming the bodies of Christian tribals from graves in states like Chhattisgarh, on which the Supreme Court has granted an interim stay.

Inclusion in 'Sanatan Parivar' vs Distinct Tribal Identity

- **'Vanvasis' vs 'Adivasi': Adivasis are addressed as 'Vanvasis'** (forest dwellers) by Hindutva organisations. According to the author, it is a cultural effort to show the tribals under the 'Sanatan Parivar' and to rebrand the local tribal gods and goddesses as forms of Vishnu, Shiva or Durga.
- **Right to Article 25: Article 25** of the Constitution gives freedom of conscience (including tribals) to profess, practice and propagate religion unhindered. Whether a tribal worships Ram or Jesus Christ, it does not end his tribal identity.
- **Demand for Sarna/Nature Worshipping Code:** Tribal intellectuals and organizations have long been demanding a separate 'religious column' (such as the **Sarna Code Resolution passed by the Jharkhand Assembly**) for their traditional nature-worshipping and animist beliefs in the Census, which is being consistently ignored by the Central Government.

The real crisis of water, forests, land and the government contradiction

The author has slammed the Home Minister's statement in which he had also described Sanatans as nature worshippers. He has outlined the real crises currently faced by the tribals:

- **Deforestation for Corporate Interests:**
 - **Odisha (Sijimali and Rayagada):** Here the tribals are fighting to protect their sacred hills from bauxite mining.
 - **Chhattisgarh (Hasdeo Aranya):** Despite opposition from gram sabhas, lakhs of sal and karam trees are being cut in the forests declared as 'no-go zones' for private mining companies, which are revered by tribals.

- **Weakening of laws:** The powers of Gram Sabhas under the Forest Rights Act and PESA Act (PESA - Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas) are being continuously weakened.
- **Administrative Neglect:** The backlog of jobs in reserved posts, the pathetic condition of tribal student hostels, non-availability of scholarships, and lack of basic health facilities are the main problems of the tribals, which organizations like JSM never raise their voice on.

Conclusion

The historical context of the word 'Ulgulan' refers to the revolt of Bhagwan Birsa Munda against British colonial rule. To use this term for a campaign to create division within a community on religious lines is an insult to the legacy of Birsa Munda.

Dividing tribals on religious lines actually serves the interests of big corporates and private companies that want to take over their lands and resources. To protect the rights of Adivasis, it is necessary to stop majoritarian cultural imposition politics and to enforce their constitutional rights—especially the sovereignty of the gram sabha and forest rights—with full sincerity.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**:

1. The identity of Scheduled Tribes is not linked to any particular religion in the Constitution.
2. **On** conversion of religion, the status of Scheduled Tribe is automatically terminated.
3. The list of Scheduled Tribes is notified by the President.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Tribal identity is not only a religious identity but also a cultural, linguistic and community identity. Explain this statement. **(150 words)**

Page :09 : GS II : Indian Polity & Governance / Preliminary Examination

Why in News?

The National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) recent report 'Prison Statistics India 2024' paints a worrying picture of India's prison system. Although the occupancy rate of prisoners in the country's jails has come down to the lowest level of the last decade at 112.7%, the problem still remains the same. The biggest reason why prisons are overcrowded is the high number of (who have not been convicted). the slow growth in prison infrastructure acute shortage of staff have made this severe.

Prisons in India continue to be overcrowded by undertrials

More than half of the States/UTs had an occupancy rate of over 100% in 2024 despite a modest increase in capacity

DATA POINT
Sambavi Parthasarathy

While the latest Prison Statistics report released by the National Crime Records Bureau shows that the occupancy rate in Indian jails fell to a decade-low of 112.7% in 2024, data shows that overcrowding remains a persisting problem in Indian prisons driven largely by a high share of undertrials. The report also highlighted other concerns such as insufficient capacity expansion and high levels of staff vacancies.

In more than half of the States/Union Territories (UTs) in India, prisons continue to operate beyond their sanctioned capacity. At the end of 2024, the country had about 1,333 jails with a capacity of 4.53 lakh inmates. However, with an inmate population of over 5.11 lakh, prisons continued to be overcrowded.

A Parliamentary Committee report, titled 'Prison Conditions, Infrastructure and Reforms', noted that overcrowding strains resources, compromises living standards, increases tensions among inmates and limits their access to healthcare and rehabilitation facilities. It also recommended various measures such as the constructions of new buildings, barracks and prisons, transfers to other jails and free legal aid.

While the total number of jails remained lower than the pre-pandemic period, prison capacity has increased by 24% between 2015 and 2024 largely due to renovations and expansions which were carried out across 2,368 prisons in this period (Chart 1). Over 120 prisons were newly constructed in these years.

Though overall capacity has improved modestly, several States are yet to catch up. A State-wise analysis shows that more than half of the States had an occupancy rate of over 100% in 2024. Delhi re-

corded the highest occupancy rate in the country at 194% in 2024, much like the previous year when its occupancy rate stood at 200% (Chart 2). Other major States/UTs which saw high occupancy rates include Jammu and Kashmir, where occupancy rates increased from a mere 78% in 2015 to over 148% in 2023 and 2024.

However, the levels have relatively reduced in States such as Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which had previously registered higher occupancy rates. For instance, Chhattisgarh registered an occupancy rate of 234% in 2015. As per the latest report, this figure has decreased to 127.6%.

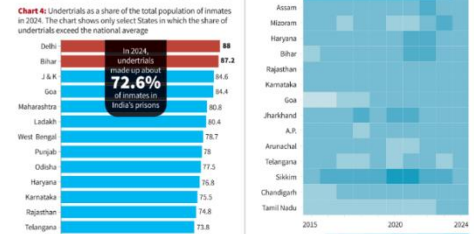
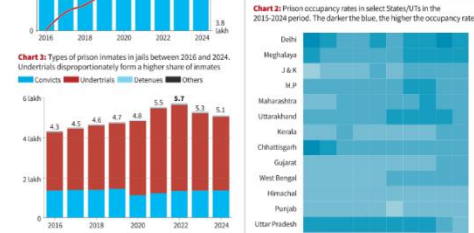
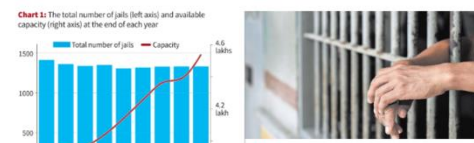
This problem of overcrowded prisons can be attributed to the disproportionately higher share of undertrials – who accounted for about 73% of the total inmate population in 2024 (Chart 3). While this is much lower than in 2021, when the undertrial population in prison peaked at about 77%, this is still higher than pre-COVID periods. On the other hand, the share of convicts in prisons reduced from about 32% in 2016 to 26.6% in 2024.

A State-wise analysis shows that in about 14 States/UTs, the share of undertrials is higher than the all India average (Chart 4). With over 87% of its inmates being undertrials, Delhi and Bihar were the two major States/UTs to have the highest share of undertrial population in its prisons.

Further, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs also expressed concern that the high levels of staff vacancies has become the most neglected part of prison administration.

States/UTs such as Delhi and Jammu which registered higher occupancy rates and a higher share of undertrials also had a higher share of staff vacancies. Almost half of the sanctioned posts remained vacant in about 8 States/UTs. At least 60% of its sanctioned prison staff remained vacant in Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir.

Arrested development | The data for the charts were sourced from the Prison Statistics India report, published by the National Crime Records Bureau



Key statistics of overcrowding in prisons

- **Capacity vs. Real Numbers:** By 2024, India had approximately 1,333 jails with a total capacity of 4.53 lakh inmates. However, more than 5.11 lakh inmates were lodged in these jails.
- **Status of States:** Prisons in more than half of the states and union territories are operating at much higher than their sanctioned capacity.
- **Top Affected Areas:**

- **Delhi:** It recorded the highest occupancy rate of 194% in 2024 (up from 200% in 2023).
- **Jammu and Kashmir:** The situation has deteriorated sharply. While the occupancy rate was only 78% in 2015, it increased to over 148% in 2023 and 2024.
- **Positive Improvement:** The situation has improved in some States. For example, the occupancy rate in Chhattisgarh has dropped from 234% in 2015 to 127.6% in 2024. Uttar Pradesh has also seen a decline.

The Crisis of Undertrials

- **Share in the Total Population:** Approximately 73% of the total prisoners incarcerated in prisons in 2024 were undertrials. While this is lower than the peak of 2021 (77%), it is still much higher than in the pre-COVID period.
- **Shortage of Convicted Prisoners:** In contrast, the number of convicts has decreased from 32% in 2016 to 26.6% in 2024. This shows that jails are more full of people than criminals whose cases are still being investigated or tried.
- **State-wise disparity:** About 14 States/UTs have a higher proportion of undertrials than the national average. Delhi and Bihar account for more than 87% of the total jail inmates, the highest in the country.

Severe shortage of staff in the jail administration (Staff Vacancies)

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs has expressed deep concern over the fact that the shortage of staff in prisons has been made the most neglected part of the administration.
- **Insecure ratio:** In states where overcrowding is high, staffing shortages are also the most severe. About 8 States/UTs have half (50%) of sanctioned posts lying vacant.
- **Crisis in Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir:** At least **60% of the sanctioned posts** of jail security and administrative staff are vacant in these two regions, which poses a major threat to the security of the jail and the human rights of the prisoners.

Impact of Overcrowding

According to the report of the parliamentary committee 'Prisons – Conditions, Infrastructure and Reforms', overcrowding in prisons gives rise to the following problems:

- **Pressure on Resources:** Water, food, sanitation, and living infrastructure are overburdened.
- **Mental Stress and Violence:** Lack of space among prisoners leads to increased interpersonal tensions and violent clashes.
- **Lack of health and rehabilitation:** Prisoners do not get timely health facilities and the main purpose of prisons (reform and rehabilitation of criminals) is completely disrupted.

Corrective Measures & Recommendations

The following suggestions have been made by the Committee and experts to deal with this crisis:

- **Expansion of infrastructure:** New prison buildings, modern barracks to be constructed (more than 120 new prisons have been built between 2015-2024, but this pace has to be increased).
- **Transfer of Prisoners:** Prisoners should be transferred from overcrowded jails to less crowded prisons.
- **Free Legal Aid:** Poor undertrial prisoners should get timely legal aid so that they can get bail and they do not rot in jail for years in petty clauses.
- **Strict adherence to Section 436A: Under** Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) (now the Indian Civil Defence Code - BNSS), if an undertrial prisoner has served half of his probable sentence in jail, he should be released on a personal bond.
- **Fast Track Courts:** Court proceedings should be expedited for speedy disposal of pending cases.

Conclusion

The sheer number of overcrowded prisoners, especially undertrials, in Indian jails shows a major failure of our criminal justice system. Despite the legal principle of "a person is innocent until proven guilty", 73% of the people in the country's jails are locked up without conviction, which is a violation of their human rights. In order to make prisons 'correctional homes' rather than mere 'punishment centres', it is imperative that prison capacity is increased, vacancies are filled immediately and speedy justice is provided to undertrial prisoners by expediting legal processes.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: What is the "a person is innocent until proven guilty" theory is related to?

- (a) Natural Justice
- (b) Federalism
- (c) Separation of powers
- (d) Judicial review

Answer: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Q: The increasing number of undertrials in Indian jails has become a major challenge to the criminal justice system. Discuss its causes and effects. **(150 words)**



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Why in News?

- Under the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court has been given wide powers to protect the rights of citizens and ensure justice. Under this, the court often takes cognizance of the matter on its own without any formal petition, on the basis of media reports or serious incidents, which is called 'suo motu cognizance'.
- Recently, the suo motu cognizance taken by the Supreme Court in the case of the suspicious death of a young woman 'Tvisha Sharma' in Madhya Pradesh has sparked a new debate on this jurisprudential tool. The author compares it to the 'chain of justice' of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir.
- While Jahangir's chain was a direct cry of the masses against the bureaucracy, today the Supreme Court's suo motu cognizance is becoming a system that is becoming a means of putting itself in the spotlight rather than on the ground. This analysis calls into question the balance between the "easy way" (publicity and immediate intervention) and the "hard way" (fundamental reforms in the lower courts) being pursued by the country's highest court.

Key Points

The author has raised the following important points while criticizing this style of functioning of the Supreme Court:

Unequal Distribution of Judicial Attention:

- Judicial time and attention is an extremely limited resource in India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 6,450 dowry deaths were recorded in India in 2022, of which only 11% to 17% resulted in conviction.
- The Supreme Court chooses only one case from these thousands of cases that makes excessive headlines in the media and social media. This selection is not based on any legal specificity, but on the basis of 'temporal attention'.

The apex court rings its own chain

The Supreme Court's reliance on suo motu cognizance has turned a once rare but highly visible jurisdiction into a recurring instrument shaped by primetime attention and media reports while it keeps 'ringing' its own chain through televised listings and supervision, the trial courts below it continue doing the work.

LETTER & SPIRIT

V. Venkatesan

In 1675, on his accession, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir fastened a chain outside his palace. Any subject denied justice by his administration could pull the chain and reach the emperor directly. The chain was, in conception, a remedy against the bureaucracy. The Indian Supreme Court is now, in its suo motu cognizance of individual criminal cases, the bureaucracy itself, ringing its own version of the chain. Each televised listing is the sound of the apex court calling attention to itself.

Media and motive

The latest instance is the court's suo motu cognizance of Twisha Sharma's death, registered under the title 'In the Alleged Involuntary Homicide and Proven Discrepancies in the Unnatural Death of a Young Girl in Madhya Pradesh'. The title prejudices its own inquiry. Institutional bias has not been judicially established at any level. The apex court's own office report, signed by the Assistant Registrar on May 23, records the date of registration. The case was registered, the document says, 'based on media reports and other attending circumstances'. Two days later, the same bench appealed to the media to refrain from recording statements of witnesses. A court that acts on press reports while admonishing the journalists who filed them is, at the same moment, both consumer and critic of the same source.

The ground on which the apex court arrived was not vacant. A magistrate in Bhopal had rounded the husband, a practising advocate, to seven days of police custody. The Madhya Pradesh High Court had directed a second autopsy by an AMHS (death room). The Bar Council of India had suspended the husband's licence. The State government had proposed transferring the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) before the apex listing. The institutions whose bias the apex title alleges had been moving against the accused for nearly a fortnight.

Mostan Khan and Vasujit Ram put the central question to this reflex with care. Their study appears in *A Qualified Hope* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Why does the response of the higher judiciary to executive or police failure take the form of these singular heroic interventions rather than promoting some institutional shake-up, some initiative to empower and equip courts lower in the judicial hierarchy? Their diagnosis was unsparring. The reflex carries, they write, an echo of the disdain with which higher courts in India frequently treat the efforts of the lower judiciary.

Easier path

Suo motu cognizance, in matters of this kind, is the easier of the two paths open to the apex court. The harder path is the slow, unexpectant work of reforming the judiciary it heads. The first requires only the bench's decision to fit the matter. The second requires sustained cooperation with the High Courts on case management and supervision under Article 225 (control over subordinate courts), with State governments on funding trial court infrastructure, with the executive on judicial appointments, and with the National Judicial Academy on training. The asymmetry between the

energies devoted to the two paths is what produces the diagnosis Galanter and Ram named.

Where the easier path is taken, the court chooses persuasion over compulsion. The apex bench has, in *Sahara India Real Estate Corporation v. ZEPL (2022)*, a five-judge Constitution Bench authority on media trial. Sahara permits a court to issue a postponement order against media publication. The text is a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the administration of justice. The order is available only where no less restrictive means will work. The doctrine is settled. In the Twisha matter, the bench had every occasion to invoke it. It chose instead to request the media not to record statements of potential witnesses. A request from the apex court carries moral weight, but it is not the legal instrument it has at hand for this very problem.

The post-2019 record is unkind to the pro suo motu case. In the R.G. Bar matter, the Supreme Court registered cognizance on August 18, 2024. Sanjay Roy had been arrested by the Kolkata Police eight days earlier. The Calcutta High Court had handed the probe to the CBI on August 13, 2024. The Seelbahi trial court convicted Roy in January 2025 and sentenced him to life imprisonment. The trial judge did the work. Apex monitoring of CBI status reports did not. Huhra is closer to the Bhopal facts and more instructive. The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court registered the case suo motu in October 2020. The Supreme Court, after entertaining transfer petitions, handed monitoring back to the High Court within weeks. That earlier bench saw the architectural point: the High Court was already in motion, and the apex role was supervisory. In July 2024, following the Huhra Sainag rampage that claimed 12 lives, the court declared a PIL. The bench said that the High Court was

equipped to deal with the case. The same principle applies in Bhopal too.

Scarce attention

Lakshmiur Kheri sharpens the matter. The apex court took cognizance in October 2021 and, in April 2022, set aside the High Court's bail order for the main accused, Adish Mishra. It then eased him back into liberty. Interim bail came in 2023. Regular bail followed in 2024. As of early 2025, the trial court had examined only 44 of 110 witnesses. In Manipur, the suo motu case over the viral video from July 2023 has yet to produce a conviction. Apex supervision has not been the route to faster justice.

A second observation runs alongside. In 2019, Galanter and Ram called suo motu 'rare but highly visible'. The first half of that description has lapsed. What was once a residual jurisdiction is now a recurring instrument. A trigger sequence has begun to repeat. Sustained primetime attention is followed by cognizance. The Solicitor General has now confirmed the sequence in open court. Appearing for the Union in the Twisha matter, he told the bench that it is also because of this media intervention that a lot of progress has happened.

The numbers since the chapter, authored by Galanter and Ram, went to press confirm the rule. The Supreme Court Observer, working from the apex court's own Case Status records, counts 35 suo motu matters in the five years from 2020 to 2024.

The preceding fifteen years had seen only 31 in total. The annual figures, excluding contempt, were 10 in 2020, eight in 2021, one in 2022, four in 2023, and 12 in 2024. The trend continues. In 2025, the court's numbering reached 10 civil suo motu writs and three criminal matters. Nine of the 10 civil matters are publicly listed. By May 25 this year, the court already stood at four civil and four

criminal matters. Both totals exclude suo motu transfer and contempt, which exercise distinct constitutional powers. The criminal count, in particular, has risen sharply. Four months and three weeks have already exceeded the criminal count for all of 2025.

Judicial attention is a scarce resource. The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 6,450 dowry deaths in 2022, with convictions in only 11 to 17 per cent of cases. The court has the capacity to list one. The criterion of selection is, on the present record, temporal rather than legal. Galanter and Ram closed their chapter with a question: They asked whether suo motu was 'an instance of effective use of the scarce resource of judicial attention'. The seven years since they wrote have not produced an easier answer.

None of this is to deny the seriousness of the Twisha Sharma matter. The accused's mother is a retired judge. The husband is a lawyer. The family of the deceased has reason to fear local proximity. The constitutional remedy to that fear is independent investigation under judicial supervision, conducted promptly. The court, however, disposed of the matter on the first day after taking note of the "surrealist" media that a fair investigation was being denied on account of the involvement of the judiciary.

The chain Jahangir hung was a remedy against an unaccountable bureaucracy. The apex court is now that bureaucracy. Each televised listing is the sound it makes to draw attention to a failure it has the power, and the constitutional duty, to repair. Until the harder of its two paths is walked with the energy now devoted to the easier one, the chain will keep ringing. The trial courts below it will keep doing the work. (V. Venkatesan is a journalist and legal researcher.)



THE GIST

The ground on which the apex court arrived was not vacant, with the magistrate, the High Court, the Bar Council of India and the State government already acting on the Twisha Sharma case.

The harder path before the apex court is the slow, unexpectant work of reforming the judiciary through better case management, trial court infrastructure, appointments and training.

Judicial attention is a scarce resource, but sustained primetime attention is increasingly followed by cognizance, raising questions about the use of that attention.

GETTY IMAGES

- **Contradictory Attitudes towards Media (Consumer and Critic):**
 - Courts often base suo motu cognizance on 'media reports'. But the irony is that during the hearing of the case, the same court advises the media to avoid publishing the statements of witnesses or conducting mediatrials.
 - Thus, the court becomes both a 'consumer' of media content and a 'critic' of it at the same time .
- **Distrust of Subordinate Judiciary:**
 - According to legal experts (Mark Galanter and Vasujit Ram), this attitude of the Supreme Court reflects a sense of distrust or disdain towards the lower courts and the High Courts.
 - When the Supreme Court intervenes directly, it ignores the work of judicial bodies (such as local magistrates, police, high courts) that are already taking legal action on that matter.
- **Choosing the Easy Route Instead of the Difficult Route:**
 - **The easy route:** To take suo motu cognizance of a major case and list it immediately, which makes headlines on television and in newspapers.
 - **The Hard Path: Reforming** the Judicial Architecture of the Entire Country. This includes improving case management in collaboration with the High Court, getting funding from state governments for the infrastructure of subordinate courts, and training judges through the National Judicial Academy (NJA). The Supreme Court is spending less energy on this difficult path.
- **Supervision vs. Ground Justice:**
 - History is witness that the Supreme Court's mere monitoring does not lead to speedy disposal of cases. For example:
 - **R.G. Tax Case (2024):** Despite the Supreme Court's cognizance, the groundwork was laid by the Trial Court in Kolkata, which sentenced the accused in January 2025.
 - **Lakhimpur Kheri case (2021):** Even after the intervention of the Supreme Court, only 44 out of 131 witnesses have been examined by the beginning of 2026 and the main accused has been granted bail.
 - **Manipur Viral Video Case (2023):** Despite the Supreme Court's monitoring, there has been no concrete conviction so far.
 - In contrast, the Supreme Court in the **Hathras case (2020/2024)** had referred the case to the concerned High Court, showing the correct constitutional understanding, as the High Courts are competent to handle such local cases.
- **Unexpected increase in cases of autocognition:**
 - Earlier self-cognition was considered 'rare but highly visible', but now it has become a regular tool.

- According to the data, between 2020 and 2024, the Supreme Court filed 35 suo motu cases, compared to only 31 cases in total in its previous 15 years. In 2025 and 2026, this trend has accelerated, especially in criminal cases.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Supreme Court should use the power of suo motu cognizance as a shield for public interest and speedy justice, not to selectively intervene in cases motivated by media and public outrage. In any sensitive case (such as the Tvisha Sharma case), a fair and speedy investigation is necessary, but it is not right to bypass the entire institutional system.

The Supreme Court has to understand that the responsibility of providing justice to the vast population of India lies with thousands of trial courts in the country. The Supreme Court should focus its energies and attention on empowering, resourceful and strengthening the courts sitting at the bottom of the hierarchy of the judiciary, rather than focusing on 'heroic' or singular heroic interventions. Unless the apex court follows this path of structural and drastic reform, this 'chain' of suo motu cognizance will only serve to make headlines, while the real battle for justice will continue to be fought by the lower courts alone.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding 'Suo Motu Cognizance':

1. It is the situation when the court initiates the hearing of a case on its own without any formal petition.
2. The Indian Constitution clearly mentions the term "Suo Motu".
3. It is often used to protect public interest and fundamental rights.

Choose the correct answer:

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

Answer: **b)**

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Q: What is Suo Motu Cognizance? Analyse its need and limitations in the Indian judiciary. (150 words)

Shaping the next chapter in India-Canada relations

India and Canada are turning the page together, opening a vibrant new chapter as two democratic, multicultural, and innovation-driven nations. Both governments are signalling a fresh resolve to deepen cooperation and pursue common goals. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's recent trip to India (February 27-March 2, 2026) and the just-concluded visit of India's Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal, to Canada highlight the importance both nations attach to their relationship in an evolving global order. These engagements reflect the growing strategic depth of the India-Canada bilateral partnership, built around four strategic pillars - economic cooperation, technological collaboration, energy security, and people-to-people connectivity.

The economic promise of a stronger India-Canada partnership has never been brighter. Mr. Carney's visit also reignited talks for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), and both nations' determination to finalise it by the end of 2026, along with the ambitious target of reaching \$50 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, signals a new era of economic confidence.

The view from Ottawa

For Canada, India represents not only a vast consumer market but also a cornerstone in its Indo-Pacific diversification ambitions. As shifting supply chains and global uncertainties reshape trade, India offers Canada a gateway to new opportunities and a chance to deepen ties with a vibrant economy. India's surging appetite for energy, infrastructure, technology, and advanced manufacturing dovetails with Canada's expertise in natural resources, clean energy, critical minerals, agriculture, and innovation. Moreover, India's rapid ascent as a global growth engine pairs strongly with Canada's wealth of resources, cutting-edge technologies, world-class universities, and robust investment capital. The



Chandrajit Banerjee

Director General,
Confederation of
Indian Industry

ongoing talks on uranium, critical minerals, clean energy, and resilient supply chains further highlight just how strategically vital this partnership has become.

To this end, Mr. Goyal's visit to Canada comes at a particularly significant juncture in the bilateral economic relationship. Accompanied by a delegation of over 100 Indian industry leaders, the visit signals a renewed intent on both sides to strengthen economic engagement and impart fresh momentum to the CEPA negotiations. Equally important, it seeks to deepen business-to-business linkages, enhance investor confidence, and encourage industry on both sides to translate strategic intent into tangible commercial partnerships and long-term economic collaboration.

India is fast becoming a driving force in Canada's future prosperity. Indian companies have invested significantly in Canada and created thousands of jobs across the country, in sectors ranging from technology and life sciences to manufacturing and mining, highlighting the depth and diversification of bilateral business relations. This two-way business presence is an important marker of trust and long-term commercial confidence.

The diaspora link

The Indian diaspora stands as a living bridge between the two nations. Indian-origin entrepreneurs, professionals, academics, students, and community leaders have left an incredible mark on Canada's economic and social landscape. Their achievements reflect the spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation, and multiculturalism that both countries hold dear. The diaspora should be recognised as a strategic asset, ready to drive trade, investment, innovation, talent exchange and cultural understanding.

Meanwhile, Canadian pension funds are supporting India's growth story, investing in

everything from infrastructure and logistics to clean energy, financial services, and digital ventures. This vibrant two-way investment proves that when these economies engage, both nations reap the rewards of growth, innovation, and opportunity.

Strengthening Indo-Pacific cooperation

The India-Canada partnership resonates far beyond their borders, carrying weight across the Indo-Pacific. Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy places India at its heart, recognising its economic potential, youthful population, and strategic clout. Both nations champion a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based region. By joining forces in maritime security, advanced technologies, artificial intelligence, clean energy, resilient supply chains, and climate action, they can drive prosperity at home and stability throughout the region.

The path ahead calls for steady engagement, trust, and a relentless focus on real-world outcomes. The most resilient economic partnerships are built on lasting commercial interests and vibrant people-to-people connections. The momentum from the recent high-level visits shows that both countries are eager to invest in a shared future. The partnership must also become more inclusive for small and medium enterprises on both sides. As the backbone of their respective economies, these enterprises hold immense untapped potential to drive bilateral trade and investment.

India and Canada are natural allies, innovation collaborators, and pivotal players in shaping the Indo-Pacific's future. India's drive for growth, energy transformation, and manufacturing expansion opens a wealth of opportunities for Canadian businesses and investors. This is the moment to transform goodwill into action and promise into partnership. With shared vision and determination, these two nations can forge one of the decade's most influential economic alliances.

Trade,
technology and
trust mark a
revitalised
partnership

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: The economies of India and Canada are called 'Complementary Economies'. Explain this statement. (250 words)

Reference

- The recent visit of new Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India (February-March 2026) and the historic visit of India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to Canada in May 2026 have re-elevated the diplomatic and economic dynamics between the two countries.
- **Motif:** Both democratic and multicultural countries are prioritizing 'strategic autonomy' and economic interests, leaving behind their old diplomatic tensions. This shift is part of a well-thought-out strategy by both sides to restructure global supply chains and ensure stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

4 Strategic Pillars of Bilateral Partnership

- **Economic Cooperation:** Both countries are committed to finalizing the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) by the end of 2026. Along with this, an ambitious target has been set to take bilateral trade to \$ 50 billion by 2030.
- **Technological Collaboration:** Emphasis is being laid on interconnecting the technological ecosystems of the two countries in the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Quantum Computing, Deep Tech, and Innovation.
- **Energy Security:** Strategic negotiations on Canada's natural resources, particularly uranium, clean energy, and critical minerals, have intensified to meet India's growing energy needs.
- **People-to-People Connectivity:** The large Indian diaspora in Canada and the Indian students studying there are serving as a living bridge between the two countries.

The View from Ottawa

- **Trade Diversification:** Canada is currently committed to reducing its economic dependence on the U.S. and diversifying its trade. Under this policy, India is the cornerstone for it.
- **Complementary Economies:** Canada has abundant natural resources, advanced manufacturing technology, and vast investment capital (such as pension funds), while India has a large consumer market, manufacturing capacity, and a young workforce. This engagement creates a 'win-win' situation for both countries.
- **Restoration of Strategic Trust:** The visit of a large delegation of over 100 Indian industrialists to Canada along with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal shows that there has been increased trust in each other in the corporate and business leadership of both sides.

The Diaspora and Investment Link

- **Strategic Asset:** Approximately 28 lakh Indian-origin entrepreneurs, academics, and professionals residing in Canada are strategic channels promoting trade, investment, and cultural understanding between the two countries.
- **Job Creation:** Indian companies have invested heavily in key sectors such as IT, life sciences, and mining in Canada, creating thousands of local jobs there.
- **Canadian Pension Funds:** Canada's large institutional and pension funds are making long-term investments in India's infrastructure, logistics, digital ventures, and renewable energy sectors, accelerating India's growth journey.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- **Shared Vision:** India has been given a central place in Canada's 'Indo-Pacific Strategy'. Both countries strongly support a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.
- **Regional Security:** The coming together of the two countries in maritime security, building resilient supply chains, and climate action will bring stability to global geopolitics.

Way Forward

- **Consistent Engagement and Institutional Trust:** Beyond the diplomatic ups and downs, both countries need to remain focused on long-term commercial interests and real-world outcomes.
- **Inclusion of SMEs:** This partnership has to be inclusive for the small, cottage and medium enterprises (SMEs) of both the countries and not just large corporates, as they are the backbone of both economies.
- **Timely Completion of the CEPA:** Successfully implementing the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement by the end of 2026 should be the primary goal to reduce trade barriers and tariffs.

Conclusion

In this era of geopolitical uncertainties, India and Canada are emerging as natural allies and innovation collaborators. The growing focus of the two countries on clean energy, critical minerals, and economic integration (CEPA) while maintaining their strategic autonomy is not limited to bilateral gains but also has the potential to become one of the most influential economic alliances of the upcoming decade and shape the stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

