

UPSC MONTHLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS

MAY 2025



**OPERATION
SINDOOR**

Operation Sindoor

Census to Include Data on Caste

India's New Security Doctrine

India's Air Defense System

Orange Economy in India

Highlights

Species, Places in News and Gaganyaan Mission Explained via Infographic

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Editor's Note



Dear Aspirants,

Welcome to the latest-May- edition of our current affairs magazine, a one-stop solution for all current affairs – designed to provide holistic coverage of domestic and international events.

As the UPSC examination continues to evolve with time, showing dynamism, it requires that we create comprehensive, in-depth, analytical, relevant, and appropriate content. This month, we have curated a mix of infographic-based content and textual descriptions spread across themes. Our feature articles are dedicated to covering the most significant events occurring on the domestic and global planes.

It is our objective to provide readers with structured and easy-to-comprehend content, which can be used by the aspirants to broaden their subject-specific worldview and utilize information and analysis to supplement their preparation. Our attempt is to cut the clutter generally found in subject-specific vocabulary and jargon, and instead present it in a simpler manner.

We are committed to providing essential support to aspirants and acting like a pole star, guiding students towards content rooted in the UPSC syllabus.

Wishing you the very best for your journey ahead!

Warm Regards,

Mr. Sriram
Chief Mentor
SRIRAM's IAS

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FEATURE ARTICLES

Operation Sindoor: India's Precision and Non Escalatory Strike on Terrorist Locations

Context

Recently, India launched a "precision and non-escalatory strike on terrorist locations" in Pakistan named "Operation Sindoor" in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

Background

- In April, terrorists attacked tourists holidaying in Pahalgam (Kashmir) killing 26 civilians.
- The responsibility of the attack was taken by The Resistance Front (TRF), a terror outfit with allegiance to Lashkar-e-Taiba.
- The Indian government had announced a series of steps like putting IWT in abeyance, halting all trade between India and Pakistan, among others in response to the attack, followed by calling off of Shimla Agreement by Pakistan, which further strained the relationship between the neighbours.

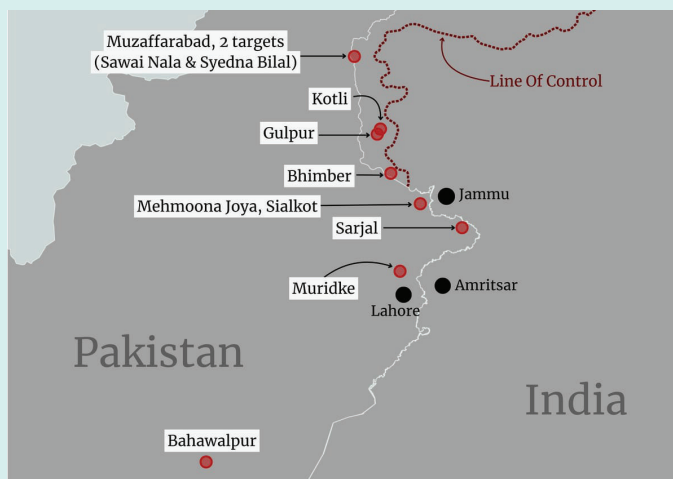
Precision and Non-escalatory Strike on Terrorist Locations

- Indian armed forces launched a coordinated attack targeting 9 locations in POK and Pakistan.
- The operation involved precision bombardment of selected terror hubs with a range of long range stand off weapons including air launched missiles and loitering ammunition.
- Indian government in its official communication termed the operation as a non escalatory strike which avoided any attack on military installments and civilian population of Pakistan.
- **Purpose**
 - Conceived to punish perpetrators and planners of terror.
 - Aimed to destroy terror infrastructure across the border.
- **Intelligence and Target Selection:**
 - Carried out a microscopic scan of the terror landscape.
 - Identified numerous terror camps and training sites.
- **Ethics and Restraint:**
 - Operated under self-imposed restraint to avoid collateral damage.
 - Only terrorist targets were to be neutralized, avoiding civilian harm.

Military Measures

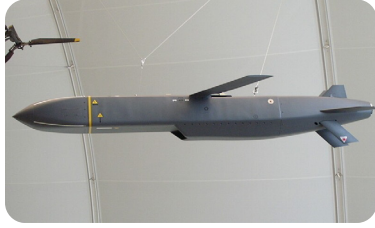


- ✦ India carried out several precise and well-planned military actions to achieve its objectives.
- ✦ The Indian Armed Forces launched coordinated and accurate missile strikes on 9 terrorist bases-4 located in Pakistan (including Bahawalpur and Muridke) and 5 in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (such as Muzaffarabad and Kotli). These locations were key command centers of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), responsible for major attacks like Pulwama (2019) and Mumbai (2008).
- ✦ In retaliation to Pakistani drone and missile attacks on Indian cities and military bases on May 7, 8, and 9, 2025, India deployed kamikaze drones with the objective of neutralizing Pakistan's air defense capabilities, including disabling Lahore's air defense system.
- ✦ India's air defense systems successfully intercepted all incoming threats, resulting in minimal loss of life or property. In contrast, Pakistan's HQ-9 air defense system was exposed as weak. On the night of May 9 and 10, 2025, India's counteroffensive became a historic milestone when, for the first time, a country successfully attacked the air bases of a nuclear-armed nation.
- ✦ Within just three hours, India targeted 11 military installations including Noor Khan, Rafiqui, Murid, Sukkur, Sialkot, Pasrur, Chunian, Sargodha, Skardu, Bholari, and Jacobabad.
- ✦ Satellite images before and after the strike on Shahbaz Airbase in Jacobabad clearly show the scale of destruction.
- ✦ The attack targeted major ammunition depots and airbases such as Sargodha and Bholari, where F-16 and JF-17 fighter jets were stationed. As a result, nearly 20% of Pakistan's air force infrastructure was destroyed.
- ✦ Over 50 individuals, including Squadron Leader Usman Yusuf and 4 airmen, were killed in the bombing of Bholari Airbase. Several Pakistani fighter jets were also destroyed.
- ✦ Under Operation Sindoor, India executed precise strikes on several terrorist hubs and military facilities in Pakistan.
- ✦ After Pakistani artillery and mortar attacks targeted civilian areas in the Poonch-Rajouri sector along the Line of Control, Indian forces retaliated, destroying terrorist bunkers and Pakistani army positions that were targeting civilians.
- ✦ A half-burnt photograph of Asif Ali Zardari recovered from the smoldering debris of Rahimyar Khan Airbase symbolized the destruction of Pakistan's international image.



Major Weapon System Used by India in Precision and Non-escalatory Strike

SCALP (Storm Shadow): The SCALP missile, also known as Storm Shadow, is an air-launched, long-range cruise missile with a range of over 250-560 km, specifically designed for deep-strike operations against high-value targets.

**Loitering Munitions:**

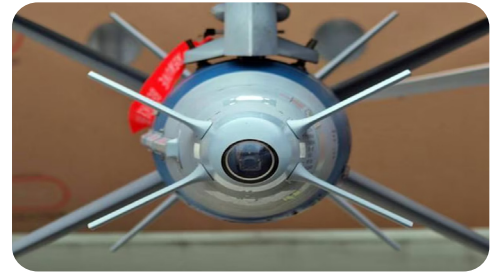
Often referred to as “kamikaze drones,” loitering munitions were employed for surveillance, target acquisition, and terminal strike missions. These drone systems hover over designated areas and, either autonomously or under remote control, identify and neutralise threats.

**HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range):**

The HAMMER smart bomb was deployed to target hardened structures, including reinforced bunkers and multi-storey buildings. A precision-guided, stand-off munition, the HAMMER is capable of hitting targets at distances of 50-70 kilometres, depending on the launch altitude.

**Spice-2000 (Smart, Precise Impact, Cost-Effective)**

Bomb: An Israeli-developed guidance kit, was used to precisely hit the target.



Rafale Jets: Armed with SCALP missiles, capable of hitting high-value targets up to 250 kilometres away with deep-strike precision.

These missiles were used to strike the most fortified targets in Pakistan's heartland.



Mirage 2000: Known for its versatility and high-altitude performance, the Mirage 2000s were reportedly used to deliver Spice-2000 bombs—an Israeli-developed precision-guided munition system.



Brahmos: known for its long-range capability in an initial range of 290 km. It can be launched from submarines, ships, fighter aircraft or TE. Indian Armed forces used it in retaliatory attacks.



Pakistan's Military Response

- Pakistan launched a counter offensive against India under its operation "Bunyan Marsoos" under which it targeted Indian civilian and military operations which however could not damage India given India's robust air defense system.
- Pakistani Rangers pounded Indian border territories with heavy shelling with firepower and mortar, resulting in destruction of properties and human lives across the LOC region such as Poonch.
- The Pakistan Air force retaliated against India by attacking several Indian territories including military installations and civilian locations such as Amritsar, Chandigarh, and Jaisalmer with drone swarms and missiles.
- Pakistan also came out of the Shimla agreement (1972) which concretised the idea of Line of Control between both rival nations.

The Ceasefire

- In the afternoon of May, 10, DGMOs of both countries struck a deal to impose a ceasefire. Although within hours it was violated by Pakistan which was reciprocated by India, but now normalcy has been restored with ceasefire coming into effect.

Achievements of Operation Sindoor

- **Nine Terror Camps Eliminated:** India successfully destroyed nine major terror launchpads in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), targeting Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen facilities. Over 100 terrorists were killed in action.
- **Cross-Border Precision Strikes:** India redefined the rules of engagement, striking deep into Pakistan's heartland, including Punjab province and Bahawalpur, once considered out of bounds even for U.S. drones. India made it clear: neither the LoC nor Pakistani territory will remain untouched if terror originates from there.
- **A New Strategic Red Line:** Operation SINDOOR drew a new red line—if terror is state policy, it will be met with a visible and forceful response.
- **Equal Punishment for Terrorists and Their Sponsors:** India rejected the artificial separation between terrorists and their backers, striking both simultaneously. This ended the impunity enjoyed by many Pakistan-based actors.

- **Exposure of Pakistan's Air Defense Weaknesses:** Indian Air Force bypassed and jammed Pakistan's Chinese-supplied air defense systems, completing the mission in just 23 minutes using Rafale jets, SCALP missiles, and HAMMER bombs, demonstrating India's technological edge.
- **India's Air Defense Superiority Displayed:** India's multi-layered air defense, including the indigenous Akashteer system, shot down hundreds of drones and missiles. This also showcased India's growing capabilities in exporting advanced defense systems.
- **Precision Without Escalation:** India avoided civilian or non-terror military targets, showcasing its zero-tolerance for terror while containing the situation from escalating into full-scale war.
- **Elimination of Key Terror Commanders:** Multiple high-profile terrorists on India's most wanted list were neutralized in a single night, crippling key operational modules. High-value targets eliminated include Yusuf Azhar, Abdul Malik Rauf, Mudassir Ahmad. These individuals were linked to the IC-814 hijack and Pulwama blast.
- **Airstrikes on Pakistani Military Installations:** On May 9–10, India became the first country to strike 11 air bases of a nuclear-armed nation in a single operation, destroying 20% of Pakistan's air force assets. High casualties were inflicted at Bhoolari Airbase, including the death of Squadron Leader Usman Yusuf and destruction of key fighter jets.
- **Coordinated Tri-Service Action :** The Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force worked in full coordination, demonstrating India's growing joint military prowess.

Significance of India's Precision and Non-escalatory Strike

- **New Doctrine:** Operation Sindoor solidified India's shift from its old strategy of strategic restraint under which India followed the "cold start" (a military strategy developed by the Indian Armed Forces, aimed at rapidly mobilizing and conducting limited, focused strikes against Pakistan without escalating to a nuclear conflict) to Strategic retaliation.
- **Paradigm Shift:** India would by default respond militarily to terrorism, that Pakistan's nuclear threats would not deter India, and that India would consider both terrorists and their military backers to be equivalent.

- **Punitive Strike as Response:** Operation Sindoor solidified Indian position to punitively strike Pakistan in response to terror attacks and establish deterrence. It shows that India is no longer afraid of being engulfed in a long war with Pakistan and cannot be blackmailed by the nuclear threat from Pakistan.
- **High Level Precision Strike:** It shows shift in India's response, earlier responses (Post Uri strike and Balakot strike) were characterised by low level obscure targeting, in contrast Operation Sindoor was declared, publicised and unambiguous response to Pakistan's terror challenge.
- **Strategic Clarity:** India feels that it is no longer keen to continue with the policy of presenting evidence to the international community about who is responsible for the attack, instead it will take action on its own merit. Thus, Operation Sindoor reduces space to Pakistan who often hides behind lack of evidence and denies its complacency.
- **Reestablishing Deterrence:** With operation Sindoor India once again established deterrence which was broken by Pakistan with Pahalgam attack. Hence, with Operation Sindoor, India has restored the status quo (post Balakot order) in the realm of deterrence viz-a-viz Pakistan's misadventure.
- **Hyphenation of Conventional and Sub Conventional warfare:** Operation Sindoor established the fact that India no longer differentiate between terror attacks launched by Pakistan's proxies and conventional attacks which involve sovereign powers. This doctrine set precedent for future misadventure by Pakistan's Jihadi-military complex.
- **Holding Pakistan Responsible for Escalation:** New Delhi has tripwired the situation with regards to escalation. Indian doctrine underlined that by carrying out a terror attack against India, it is actually Pakistan — its adversary — that is initiating a conventional military conflict.

Issues with India's Precision and Non-escalatory Strike

- **Uncertainty With Regard to Nuclear Threshold:** Operation Sindoor has raised the escalation ladder, thus increasing the risk of a wider and potentially destructive nuclear holocaust. The risk of miscalculation, lack of communication, and political incentive for escalation may lead both countries to the tipping point of N factor.

- **China-Pak Axis:** Integration of Chinese defence help has created a sustainable war economy for Pakistan who can wage long struggle against India and increase cost for India. Use of the Chinese air defense system(HQ-9), aircrafts (J-10 and J-17), and other military hardware by Pakistan pose a great challenge to India that is facing two front threats from both the nations.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Counter-Terror Intelligence and Surveillance:** In the wake of Pahalgam attack it is essential that India build its capacity in intelligence gathering and assessment and fill the gap in intelligence architecture. Effective use of Multi Agency Centre and armed forces intelligence network, along with IB inputs could strengthen India's counter terror operation and surveillance.
- **Diplomatic Engagement and Global Narrative:** India should nudge partners and international organizations towards Pakistan's "military-jihad" complex and unmask sub conventional warfare waged by the Pakistani army. It is very significant for long lasting deterrence that India isolates Pakistan at international stage and puts spotlight on its terror economy.
- **Strengthen Civil Defense:** Re-activating and building capacity of civil defence force is crucial for effective response to future conventional attack against India. Training volunteers dedicated to Civil defence is desirable in the front of the Pakistan challenge.
- **Promote National Unity:** India should promote unity among various groups as Pakistan is keen to sow the seed of disunity and fuel communal conflict as manifested in calculated faith based killing in Pahalgam. India must prepare its population against Pak's policy of "bleeding India by thousand cuts".
- **Continue Ceasefire and Dialogue:** New Delhi-Islamabad should engage diplomatically and iron out differences, and implement ceasefire in letter and spirit.

India's response to Pakistan's sub-conventional warfare is precise, strategic, non-escalatory, and pragmatic. New Delhi's strategic patience and abiding by time to give complete autonomy to defence personnel proved fruitful with once against re-establishment deterrence against Pakistan. Change in India's doctrine to tackle the Pakistan challenge is rooted in realism and serves India's national interest. Hence, New Delhi's approach is commendable and praiseworthy.



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

President of India Asks 14 Questions to Supreme Court

Context

Recently, the President of India has asked 14 questions to the Supreme Court (SC) over its verdict on fixed timelines for the Governor and the President to act on State Bills passed by State Assemblies.

Presidential Reference

- Presidential Reference, a rarely used mechanism, is enumerated under Article 143(1) of the Indian Constitution, which empowers the President of India to refer questions of law or fact of public importance to the Supreme Court for its advisory.
- Supreme Court's response to such a reference is not binding but carries significant persuasive value and often guides the executive and legislature in future actions.

Key Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 143:** Empowers the President to seek the Supreme Court's advice on legal or public matters. The Court is not bound to give advice except on matters related to pre-constitutional treaties. The opinion is non-binding
- **Article 142:** Enables the Supreme Court to pass any order necessary to ensure complete justice.
- **Article 200:** Governor may assent, withhold, return, or reserve a Bill for the President.
- **Article 201:** President may assent or withhold assent to reserved Bills.
- **Article 145(3):** Requires that cases involving substantial questions of constitutional interpretation be heard by a bench of at least five judges
- **Article 74(1):** The President must act on the advice of the Council of Ministers.
- **Article 361:** Grants immunity to the President and Governors from court proceedings for acts done in their professional capacity.

President's 14 Questions to Supreme Court

- What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200?
- Is Governor bound by the aid & advice of the Council of Ministers while exercising the options available with him when a Bill is presented before him?
- Is Governor's constitutional discretion under Article 200 justiciable?
- Is Article 361 an absolute bar to the judicial review in relation to the actions of a Governor under Article 200?
- In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed time limit, and the manner of exercise of powers by the Governor, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders?
- Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by President under Article 201 justiciable?
- In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed timeline and the manner of exercise of powers by the President, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders?
- Is the President required to seek advice of the Supreme Court by way of a reference under Article 143 and take the opinion of the Supreme Court when the Governor reserves a Bill for the President's assent or otherwise?
- Are the decisions of the Governor and the President under Article 200 and Article 201, respectively, justiciable at a stage anterior into the law coming into force? Is it permissible for the Courts to undertake judicial adjudication over the contents of a Bill, in any manner, before it becomes law?
- Can the exercise of constitutional powers and the orders of/by the President/Governor be substituted in any manner under Article 142?
- Is a law made by the State legislature a law in force without the assent of the Governor granted under Article 200?
- In view of the proviso to Article 145(3), is it not mandatory for any bench of Supreme Court to first decide whether the question before it involves substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of Constitution and to refer it to a bench of minimum five Judges?
- Are the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 limited to matters of procedural law or Article 142 extends to issuing directions which are contrary to or inconsistent with existing substantive or procedural provisions of the Constitution or law in force?
- Does the Constitution bar any other jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to resolve disputes between the Union Government and the State Governments except by way of a suit under Article 131 of the Constitution of India?

Current Reference

- Current reference is related to the SC's judgment on the Tamil Nadu Governor's delay in acting on 10 re-passed State Bills.
- The SC found the Tamil Nadu Governor's prolonged inaction and subsequent reservation of the Bills for Presidential assent to be 'illegal' and 'erroneous'
- The SC, using Article 142, deemed all 10 Bills to have received assent, thereby bypassing the executive's delay.
- It also prescribed timelines:
 - For the Governor to give the assent in 3 months, a month when it is present.
 - Laid down a 3 month deadline for the President as well.
- The reference to seeks clarity on Judiciary's power to:
 - Impose timelines and prescribe the manner in which Governors and the President should act on State Bills under Articles 200 and 201.
 - Direct or substitute constitutional powers of the President and Governors through judicial orders (particularly by using Article 142).
 - Introduce concept of 'deemed assent', which government argues is not part of the constitutional scheme.

Since Independence, the President has invoked Article 143 at least 14 times

ARTICLE 143: It empowers the President to seek the Supreme Court's opinion on questions of law or fact of public importance

PAST INSTANCES

Delhi Laws Act (1951): Laid down foundational principles on legislative delegation

Berubari Union (1960): Territorial cession to another country required a constitutional amendment under Article 368, not just a parliamentary law

Ramjanmabhoomi case (1993): The only reference declined by the Court. It refused to answer whether a temple existed beneath the Babri Masjid, citing judicial propriety and ongoing litigation —a rare assertion of the Court's discretionary boundary under Article 143.

**Broader Constitutional Debate**

The Presidential Reference has reignited debate on:

- **Federalism:** Balance of power between the Centre and States, especially the role of Governors (appointed by the Centre) in State legislation.
- **Judicial Review:** The extent to which courts can intervene in the legislative process and executive discretion.
- **Separation of Powers:** Whether the judiciary can direct the manner and timelines of executive action in constitutional matters.
- **Legislative Efficiency:** The impact of executive delays on the will of elected legislatures and the legislative process.

Supreme Court Declares Licensed Stamp Vendors as "Public Servants"

Context

The Supreme Court recently held that licensed stamp vendors come within the definition of 'public servant' under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA).

Licensed Stamp Vendors

- They are government-authorized individuals or businesses to sell stamp duty papers.
- They are appointed by the government after consultation with the concerned District Collector and Taluka Prant Officer.
- Each stamp vendor must renew their license annually on April 1st, as the stamp vending license is valid only for that specific year.

Background

- The judgment of the Supreme Court was based on an appeal filed by a licensed stamp vendor for corruption. He was convicted under the Prevention of Corruption Act, which held that licensed stamp vendors are public servants.
- The Supreme Court agreed with the High Court and overturned the conviction, citing a lack of proof of bribery, and clarified that
 - A person would be a public servant under Section 2(c)(i) of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act if he were in the government service or in the pay of the government or was remunerated by fees or commission for the performance of any public duty.
 - The term 'public servant' must be given a purposive and wide interpretation to advance the object underlying the Act.
- Licensed stamp vendors were eligible to receive a discount on the purchase of stamp papers owing to the license that they held.

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

- The act seeks to combat corruption and promote integrity in public administration.
- It defines corruption and its various forms, including bribery, abuse of power, and illicit enrichment, and covers public servants, both in the government and public sector undertakings, who engage in corrupt practices.
- It was amended in 2018 to address emerging challenges and strengthen the fight against corruption, introduced several crucial changes, including



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India's sporting culture a key component of its soft power

Context

During the inauguration of the 7th Khelo India Youth Games, the Prime Minister of India emphasized on the importance of India's sporting culture as a key component of its soft power.

7th Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG)

- **Background**
 - KIYG is a national multi-sport event for students in school (under 17) and college (under 21).
 - Launched in 2018 as the Khelo India School Games and renamed in 2019.
 - Part of the Government of India's Khelo India initiative, it promotes grassroots sports and talent.
- **Highlights of the 7th KIYG**
 - It was held across five districts in Bihar, Patna, Rajgir, Begusarai, Gaya, and Bhagalpur, and New Delhi.
 - The 12-day event featured 27 sports and 285 gold medals. Gajasimha was the official mascot.
 - **Top States:** Maharashtra with 158 medals (58 gold), followed by Haryana (39 gold), and Rajasthan (24 gold).

Soft Power

- A country can influence other countries without resorting to coercive pressure, which entails countries projecting their values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships.
- Political scientist Joseph Nye Jr. coined the concept in the 1980s.
- Soft power originates outside government in places like schools, religious institutions, and charitable groups.
- There are three types of Soft Power
 - **Political Values:** It is how much others are inspired by one's political values.
 - **Culture:** It is based on others' respect for one's culture.
 - **Foreign Policy:** Its influence comes from the legitimacy and morality of one's dealings with other countries.

Difference between Hard Power and Soft Power

Soft Power	Hard Power
It refers to a nation's ability to attract and persuade others through culture, political values, and foreign policies, fostering a sense of admiration and shared objectives.	It involves coercive tactics, using military force or economic incentives and sanctions to compel compliance from other nations.
Soft power can cultivate long-term relationships and shared values.	While hard power can achieve immediate results, it may also lead to backlash or resentment.

India and Its Soft Power

- India's soft power originates from its rich cultural heritage, which includes ancient traditions such as Ayurveda, yoga, and classical Indian dance and music.
- It is internationally recognised that one of India's significant global contributions has been the exercise of its soft power.
- 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' reflects an early idea of global citizenship—shared responsibility for a common future. It underpins UNESCO's intercultural dialogue.
- Today, India's soft power reflects values like secularism, inclusiveness, and tolerance, crucial in today's uncertain world.

Sports in India is Emerging as Soft Power

- Historically, India's soft power has been associated with its rich cultural heritage: yoga, Bollywood, cuisine, and philosophy. However, a significant shift is underway, sports are playing a pivotal role in shaping India's international image and fostering diplomatic goodwill.
- **Cricket Diplomacy**
 - The pre-eminent driver of India's sporting soft power narrative is unequivocally cricket. The game's unparalleled cultural embeddedness within India translates into a formidable global resonance.
 - The Indian Premier League (IPL) stands as a quintessential case study, having transcended its initial domestic T20 league format to become a globally recognized and economically potent



sporting entity. Its multi-faceted impact underscores its soft power utility:

- **Cultural Congruence and Talent Integration:** The IPL acts as a magnet for international cricketing talent, fostering a unique ecosystem of cross-cultural interaction. Players from diverse national backgrounds not only compete but also train, strategize, and bond within a common framework, cultivating relationships that transcend professional engagements and contribute to enhanced bilateral understanding.
- **Economic Vibrancy and Brand India:** The substantial revenues generated by the IPL through global sponsorships, media rights, and advertising signify a robust and dynamic Indian economy. This commercial success indirectly burnishes India's image as an attractive investment destination and a key player in the global sports economy.
- **Facilitating People-to-People Connections:** The IPL season witnesses a significant influx of international spectators, drawn by the electrifying atmosphere of Indian stadiums. This augments tourism receipts and showcases India's hospitality, contributing to tangible people-to-people connections and dispelling preconceived notions.
- **Amplified Media Visibility and Organizational Acumen:** Extensive global media coverage of the IPL consistently places India in the international spotlight, showcasing its organizational capabilities, infrastructure development, and profound passion for sports. This visibility often serves as a positive counter-narrative to traditional geopolitical perceptions.
- Beyond the IPL, the consistent high performance of the Indian national cricket team and landmark victories, such as the recent T20 World Cup, generate immense national pride and command international respect. The symbolic presence of heads of state at bilateral cricketing series, such as the engagements between Indian and Australian Prime Ministers, underscores how sports can effectively serve as a conduit for high-level diplomatic signaling and relationship building.
- **Beyond the Pitch: Diversifying Sporting Soft Power**
 - While cricket retains its dominant position, India's concerted efforts to diversify its sporting portfolio

are yielding significant soft power dividends across various domains:

- **Revitalization of Indigenous Sports:** The success of leagues such as the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) represents a strategic move towards showcasing India's rich indigenous sporting heritage to a global audience. The PKL's substantial viewership underscores the trans-national appeal of traditional Indian games like Kabaddi, now played in over 55 countries. This initiative not only celebrates cultural uniqueness but also positions India as a custodian and promoter of diverse sporting traditions.
- **Emergence in Niche and Global Disciplines:** The increasing success of Indian athletes in diverse international sporting arenas significantly enhances India's global standing. Recent triumphs, such as Rohan Bopanna's Grand Slam victory in tennis, Anmol Kharb's impactful performances in badminton, and Neeraj Chopra's Olympic gold in athletics, transcend individual accolades. They collectively project an image of a competitive, resilient, and globally aspiring India.
- **Strategic Event Hosting:** India's successful track record in hosting major international sporting events, including the FIFA U-17 World Cup, Commonwealth Games, and numerous Cricket World Cups, demonstrates its logistical capabilities, infrastructure development, and commitment to global sporting engagement. India's ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games is a clear articulation of its intent to solidify its position as a major global sporting hub, capable of orchestrating events of immense scale and complexity.

Statecraft and Sports: A Symbiotic Relationship

- The Indian state, recognizing the strategic utility of sports in its foreign policy matrix, has instituted various initiatives to bolster this aspect of soft power.
- Schemes such as Khelo India and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) are indicative of a concerted national effort to nurture grassroots talent, provide world-class training infrastructure, and foster a robust sporting ecosystem.

- Prime Minister's explicit pronouncements regarding the intrinsic link between the growth of a sports culture and the augmentation of India's soft power underscore this strategic imperative.
- Furthermore, sports diplomacy is increasingly being integrated into India's external relations. Bilateral and multilateral sports exchange programs, involving training stints for Indian athletes abroad and hosting international teams in India, are pivotal.
- These initiatives foster intercultural understanding, build goodwill, and open new avenues for engagement that transcend traditional diplomatic channels, exemplified by growing sports partnerships with nations such as China, Japan, and Australia.

Conclusion: Sports as a Pillar of India's Comprehensive National Power

The emergence of Indian sports as a significant component of its soft power projection is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. It represents a subtle yet potent instrument in India's diplomatic toolkit. From the global resonance of the IPL to the deliberate promotion of indigenous games and the consistent rise of individual athletic excellence, India is adeptly leveraging the universal language of sports. This strategic deployment serves to build bridges, foster mutual understanding, and subtly, yet effectively, enhance India's global reputation as a vibrant, diverse, and collaboratively engaged nation. As India continues its trajectory towards becoming a leading global power, the domain of sports will undoubtedly remain a crucial, and increasingly sophisticated, pillar of its comprehensive national power.

Self Defense Clause in Global Law

Context

India's recent strikes against terrorist camps located in Pakistan have reignited discussions around the legality of unilateral self-defence actions under international law, particularly in light of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Background

- India has justified its military operation on the basis of the "unwilling or unable" doctrine and established legal principles such as necessity and proportionality.
- The action was presented as a targeted counter-terror response rather than an act of aggression.

Article 51 of the UN Charter

- Article 51 recognizes a state's inherent right to self-defence if an armed attack occurs.
- It serves as a narrow exception to Article 2(4), which bans the use of force against another country's sovereignty or political independence.
- To be lawful, actions under Article 51 must fulfill two major criteria:
- **Necessity:** Self-defence is justified only when no other means are available.
- **Proportionality:** The military response must be commensurate with the scale and nature of the threat.
- The Article requires states to promptly inform the UN Security Council (UNSC) of any self-defensive measures undertaken.
 - The UNSC then retains the ultimate responsibility to act to maintain or restore peace.

Self-defence Clause Against Terror Groups or NSAs (Non-State Actors)

- **Changing Global Realities:** While the UN Charter originally envisioned interactions between sovereign states, post-9/11 global realities have seen the growing use of self-defence against non-state actors (NSAs), such as terrorist organisations.
 - The United States, among others, has argued that Article 51 permits defensive action even if the threat emanates from NSAs operating from foreign soil.
- **State Attribution Crucial:** ICJ's *Nicaragua v. United States* decision established that acts by NSAs must be attributable to a state for self-defence under Article 51 to be invoked. Hence, state attribution became crucial.
- **The "Unwilling or Unable" Doctrine:** This controversial doctrine has gained prominence in recent years. It allows a state to act in self-defence against NSAs when the host state is either unwilling or incapable of addressing the threat. For instance, the US invoked this reasoning for:
 - The 2011 operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.
 - Airstrikes in Syria beginning in 2014 against the Islamic State (IS).
 - Despite its growing use, the doctrine remains highly contested, with countries like Russia, China, and Mexico voicing concerns about the erosion of state sovereignty and misuse of unilateral force.



GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

Punjab opposes decision of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)

Context

Punjab has recently opposed the decision of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) to release an extra 4,500 cusecs of river water to Haryana.

Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB)

- Bhakra Management Board was established after the Indus Water Treaty (1960) by the erstwhile states of Punjab and Rajasthan to harness the potential of the Sutlej, the Beas, and the Ravi rivers.
- After the reorganisation of Punjab and Haryana, the Bhakra Management Board, renamed as BBMB, was created to manage water distribution among Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi.

Background

- After Haryana was formed in 1966, 3.5 million acre-feet (MAF) of the Ravi-Beas water was allocated to Haryana.
- In 1976, a government order divided Punjab's 7.2 MAF share equally between Punjab and Haryana.
- However, in 1981, an agreement facilitated by the BBMB revised the distribution, reducing Haryana's share to 45.33% and increasing Punjab's portion.
- To provide the allocated river water to states, the SYL Canal was proposed. However, Punjab was not satisfied with this and launched a protest.
- In 1985, Punjab signed an accord to constitute a new tribunal to reassess the water. Accordingly, the Eradi Tribunal was constituted and recommended increasing Punjab's share to 5 MAF and Haryana's to 3.83 MAF.
- Punjab halted canal construction in 1982 under political pressure, and in 2004, it passed legislation terminating all earlier water agreements.
- The Supreme Court declared this termination unconstitutional, but implementation remains stalled.
- Recently, Haryana sought 8500 cusec of water from the Bhakra-Nangal project, citing a severe drinking water shortage in its western districts, 4500 cusec more than the usual share.

- The Punjab government rejected the request, after which the matter was taken by the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB). BBMB approved Haryana's request.
- Despite the order, Punjab refused to open additional sluice gates at the Nangal dam and termed the BBMB decision 'unprecedented' and 'forcible'.
- Reacting to the stoppage of water, the Haryana government has threatened to go to the Supreme Court to enforce its allocation.

Bhakra-Nangal Project

- It is located over the Sutlej River in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.
- It comprises two concrete gravity dams: Bhakra Dam and Nangal Dam.
- The project is significant for irrigation purposes in the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab, and hydroelectricity generation through the Bhakra Power Houses I and II.

Sutlej River

- Located at:** The north of the Vindhya Range, east of the Pakistani Central Makran Range, and south of the Hindu Kush region.
- Rises on:** North slope of the Himalayas in Lake Rakshastal in southwestern Tibet.
- Flows through:** Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.
- Tributaries:** Baspa, Spiti, Nogli Khad, and Soan River.
- Major Hydroelectric Projects:**
 - Bhakra Dam
 - Karcham Wangtoo Hydroelectric Plant
 - Nathpa Jhakri Dam



Under the BBMB's current water allocation

- Punjab receives 5.512 million acre-feet (MAF)
- Haryana gets 2.987 MAF
- Rajasthan is allotted 3.318 MAF

Reasons for the Water Dispute

- **Punjab's Water Crisis**
 - **Skewed Water Allocation:** Punjab receives only 17.95 BCM of the 42.4 billion cubic metres (BCM) flowing through its rivers. The rest is shared with Haryana, Rajasthan, and even Pakistan.
 - **Excessive groundwater use:** Punjab's annual water demand is 66.12 BCM, but only 52.85 BCM is available, creating a water deficit. With 62.58 BCM used for farming, about 47% of the needs are met by overusing aquifers.
 - **Falling Water Levels:** Dams like Bhakra, Pong, and Ranjit Sagar are reporting significantly lower water levels. Experts attribute this to reduced snowfall in the Himalayas, which feeds these rivers.
 - **Waste Management:** Despite annual floods, Punjab lacks an effective strategy to harness excess water.
- **Haryana's Water Crisis**
 - **Incompletion of SYL Canal:** The main challenge of Haryana is the incompletion of the SYL Canal, preventing it from receiving its full share of river water.
 - **Poor Management of Main Water Canals:** The State relies on the Bhakra Main Line and Narwana Canal, and both are outdated and suffering from siltation and wear and tear.
 - **Orders not enforced:** The Supreme Court directives and tribunal rulings have not been enforced. As a result, Haryana receives only 1.62 MAF of its 3.5 MAF entitlement, losing 1.88 MAF annually, which hits the State's southern districts hard, leaving over 3 lakh hectares of farmland uncultivated and impacting agricultural output.

Implications of the Dispute

- Farmers of Haryana face severe irrigation shortage, whereas Punjab fears further losses may worsen its groundwater crisis.
- Politically, the issue has polarised both States and escalated public tensions. Environmentally, poor coordination leads to unutilised monsoon water flowing into Pakistan and excessive groundwater extraction on both sides.
- Governance suffers from institutional gaps, including the BBMB vacancies and outdated tribunal assessments.

Proposed Solutions

- Completion of the SYL Canal is essential.
- Alternative water transport systems, irrigation efficiency upgrades, crop diversification, water conservation, and groundwater monitoring must be prioritised.
- The Centre must facilitate sustained inter-State dialogue and promote confidence-building measures.
- A long-term political consensus should replace short-term electoral interests.

Conclusion

The dispute between the states highlights deeper problems that are plaguing water governance. Plummeting water table, surface water under pressure, inefficient irrigation, etc., are major fueling factors of the dispute.

Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II

Context

The Chief Minister of Karnataka has recently held a high-level meeting to finalise the State's stand on the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II award and ensure the protection of the State's share of water.

Krishna River

- The Krishna is an east-flowing river that originates at Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra and merges with the Bay of Bengal.
- It is the third longest in India after the Godavari and the Ganges.
- It flows through Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh.
- The main tributaries are the Malaprabha, the Tungabhadra, the Ghataprabha, and the Musi.
- Together with its tributaries, it forms a vast basin that covers 33% of the total area of the four states.



Increased Outward FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) By Indian Companies

Context

Recently released Monthly Economic Review by the Finance Ministry rings the bell about increased FDI outflow from the country.

Background

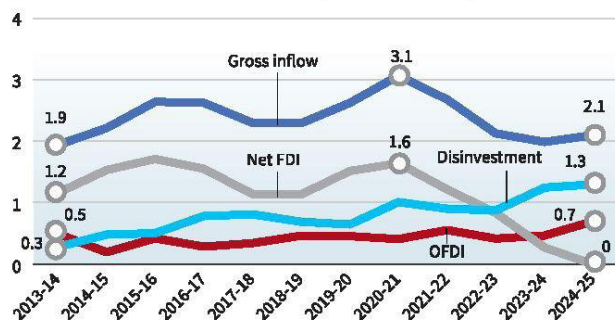
- The Department of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance noted in its Monthly Economic Review that increased outward FDI by Indian companies warrants attention.
- Reserve Bank of India reports on increase in outside investment by Indian companies—Indian companies invested a total \$29.3 billion in other countries, a 75% jump compared to previous year.
- Total gross FDI stood at \$81 billion for financial year 2024-25, however net FDI—the difference between direct investment to and that by India, fell to just \$353 million, down from \$10.1 billion in the previous year.
- Forward-Looking Survey on Private Sector Capex Investment by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) shows that Indian corporates are planning fewer investments in this financial year as compared to last year
- Indian corporates expected to invest .6.6 lakh crore in 2024-25,

- *Foreign direct investment (FDI) refers to an ownership stake in a foreign company or project made by an investor, company, or government from another country*
- *ODI occurs when a resident company invests in a non-resident country as part of a strategy to expand their business.*

Why This a Matter of Concern

- **Low Net FDI:** India's net FDI has fallen by 96% to just \$0.4 billion. This steep fall may impact India's development needs as continuous flow of capital is needed. FDI inflow is crucial for India's manufacturing dream and creates employment for raising the workforce.

Chart 1: The trends in FDI as a % of GDP (2013-14 to 2024-25)



- **Reduced Domestic Investment:** There is increased outside investment from India—as per RBI, there has been a 75% jump in investment in other countries in FY-24 compared to previous year. Flight of domestic capital may squeeze available capital for investment and may also stress interest rates for domestic capacity expansion in the economy. E.g. During FY 2024-25, Indian companies invested a total of \$29.2 billion in other countries
- **Losing On Comparative Advantage:** Compared to India, the ASEAN-6 region (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) have robust FDI dynamics and even saw higher FDI in the fourth quarter, McKinsey report. This reduces India's comparative advantage as all these countries are competitors for attracting investment out of China+1 plank.
- **High Cancellation of Project by Private Sector:** CMIE data shows that the ratio of dropped to new project announcements by the Indian private sector has risen steadily, indicating growing caution: from 21.8% in 2022–23 to 30.8% in 2023–24, and 36% in 2024–25. This data reflects declining investor confidence in the Indian market.
- **Heightened Crisis :** High FDI outflow and low domestic project investment at times of subdued domestic private investments and when the country is trying to win over investment from China+1 opportunity, is a matter of concern.
- **Profit Repatriation:** Outward FDI is used to transfer profits back to the home country as a means of tax avoidance. Thereby, MNCs use outward FDI as capital tax arbitrage to save tax. Often MNCs headquarters located in low tax jurisdictions such as Singapore use this tool.
- **Tax Evasion:** It is also used as a tool in the hands of domestic investors to invest in outside tax heavens such as Singapore and Mauritius, which are also the top sources of India's inward FDI. Hence outward FDI can serve as a tool to launder black money which comes to India as a white money in the form of FDI.

Positive Externalities

- **Expand Market:** Indian firms invest in the outside economy as a mechanism to acquire new markets. It can happen through green field or brownfield investment. E.g. HCL Technologies and Infosys have set up new delivery centers in Eastern Europe and the US.



- **Acquire Technologies:** Outward investment is also used as a strategic tool to access sophisticated technology via purchase of brownfield projects. For e.g. Tata acquired Jaguar and Land Rover.

India is on the cusp of a take off which may catapult India into a global manufacturing hub and economic growth engine, helping India to become a developed India by 2047. However, taking a “cautious” approach is needed to oversee domestic investment status and inflow or outflow of capital in the country. Although capital should be free to come and exist, but a smooth movement of these variables are essential to support robust growth in the economy.

India Improves in Human Development Index (HDI)

Context

In the recently released Human Development Report, India ranked at 130 out of 193 countries in 2023 marking a 3 point improvement from 133 in the previous year.

Human Development Index (HDI)

- It is released annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Measured in 3 Key Dimensions

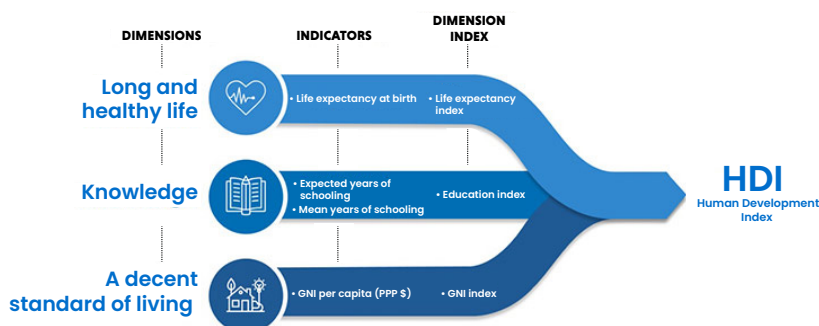
- **Long and Healthy Life:** Assessed by life expectancy at birth.
- **Knowledge:** Measured by means of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more, and expected years of schooling for children of school-entering age.
- **Decent Standard of Living:** Measured by gross national income (GNI) per capita.

Measuring Procedure

- The 3 indicators are standardized on the same scale, ranging from 0 to 1. A country at or below the minimum value scores 0, and a maximum value scores 1.
- All 3 indicators are then combined by calculating the arithmetic mean of the knowledge indicators and then calculating the geometric mean across the 3 dimensions.
- The resulting HDI scores each country on a spectrum from 0 to 1.

- **Countries under the index:** It covers almost all countries since 1990.

HDI Dimensions and Indicators



Key Highlights of the Report

2025 HDR Title: A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI

The title highlights the critical role of artificial intelligence in shaping the future of human development, particularly in fast-growing economies, including India.

Global Status	Countries with High Human Development	Iceland - 1st - Value 0.972 Norway - 2nd - Value 0.97 Switzerland - 3rd - Value 0.97
	Countries with Low Human Development	South Sudan - 193rd - Value 0.388 Somalia - 192nd - Value 0.404 Central African Republic - 191st - Value 0.414
	Slowdown in Human Development	The report reveals that there is a broader global slowdown in human development, and the current pace of progress is the slowest since 1990, including India.
	Inequality between countries increased	The inequality between low and very high HDI countries had increased for the 4th consecutive year, reversing long-standing progress.

Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft

Context

India has approved the AMCA, its first indigenously-built fifth-generation stealth fighter jet which is designed to counter modern aerial threats and regional rival advancements.

The AMCA is a 25-tonne twin-engine stealth multi-role fighter, featuring cutting-edge stealth design, sensor fusion, and advanced avionics.

It is engineered for both deep penetration strike missions and air dominance roles.

Stealth Technology

Internal weapons bay and low radar cross-section help reduce detectability.

AI-Enabled Systems

An Electronic Pilot uses Artificial Intelligence for real-time decision-making support.

Sensor Fusion

The cockpit integrates inputs from multiple onboard sensors for unified situational awareness.

Netcentric Warfare

Secure and real-time data links allow the AMCA to operate seamlessly with other manned and unmanned platforms.

Supercruise Capability

Enables sustained supersonic speeds without afterburners, reducing fuel usage and thermal visibility.

Integrated Vehicle Health Monitoring (IVHM)

Monitors structural and system health to enable predictive maintenance and reduce downtime.

The jet can carry up to four long-range air-to-air missiles and several precision-guided munitions internally, with a total payload of 1,500 kg.

Other Prominent Fifth Generation Fighter Jets

F-35 Lightning II (USA)



- Developed by Lockheed Martin.
- Considered the most widely deployed fifth-gen fighter.
- Features advanced stealth, an internal fuel capacity of 18,498 pounds, and a payload of 18,000 pounds.
- Powered by a 43,000 lb thrust engine and features the Multifunction Advanced Data Link (MADL) for secure battlefield communication.

Jet can reach Mach 1.8 and carry up to 7.4 tonnes of munitions.

A combat range of 1,864 miles.

Operating altitude of over 54,000 feet.

A multi-role platform with Russia looking to export it to India and the UAE.

Sukhoi Su-57 (Russia)



Chengdu J-20 (China)



China's stealth fighter is already in service.

It is equipped with long-range missiles and radar-evading technologies.

STRIDE

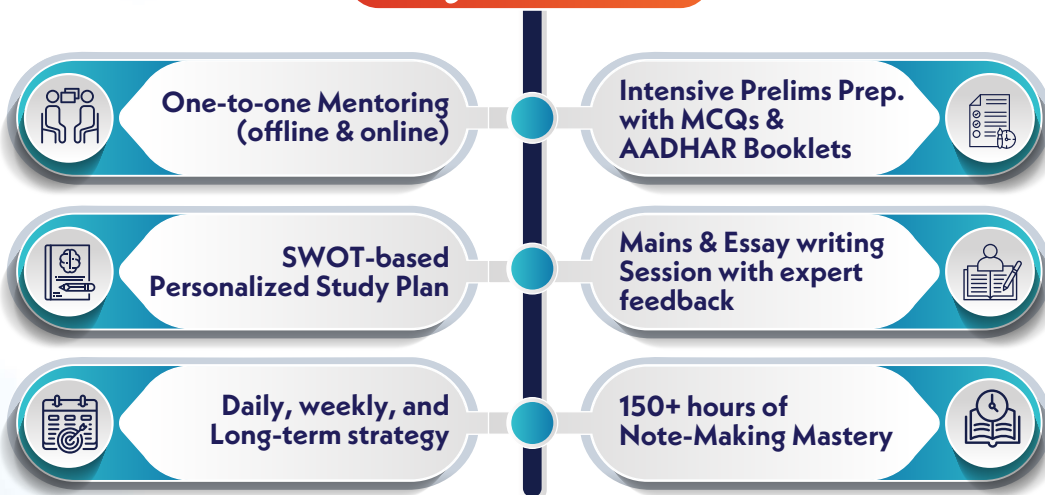


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